

Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance's 3rd Annual Beat Retreat

Campfires, canoeing, climbing wall and craziness – participants of the 3rd Annual Beat Retreat had it all. A record number of adult CHD patients – aged 19 to 61 – turned out for this year's three-day camp retreat.

"Once again, the retreat was a great experience for all involved," says Camp Co-ordinator Toby Cox. "It just keeps on getting bigger and better each year."

The retreat, a Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance program, was held at Camp Quin-Mo-Lac, a traditional summer camp setting located on the shores of Moira Lake, north of Belleville in Ontario.



Over the course of the three-day weekend, campers had the opportunity to try – at their own pace – a full range of camp activities. "Archery, canoeing, crafts, scavenger hunt, climbing wall, initiatives course, campfires, kangaroo court – you name it, we offered it," says Cox. "We even had a handful of campers who braved early morning temperatures of 4 degrees C to do a polar bear dip."

Through it all, there was no shortage of smiles as campers made new friends, took on new challenges, and got caught up in the camp spirit.

"Too often, a lack of public understanding, opportunity or confidence prevents CHD patients from enjoying many of the life experiences enjoyed by their peers," says CCHA Board Member and veteran retreator Ted Thaler. "The Beat Retreat works to change that by giving these individuals an opportunity

to try new things and challenge themselves in a controlled setting."

"I've seen campers with tears welling up in their eyes because they've never even met another CHD patient before let alone had the chance to share experiences with someone who has faced similar challenges," he says. "It can be a cathartic experience."

Although it takes a whole team of volunteers months to organize and prepare for the annual retreat, Thaler has no doubt it's all worth it. "Especially when you see a smile cut across the face of a camper who has tried something they never in their wildest dreams thought they'd ever get to try because of their medical history. All of a sudden they have a new-found sense of accomplishment and confidence."

This year, two nurse practitioners who specialize in congenital heart disease joined the roster of attendees. They provided campers with tips and suggestions for living with CHD; in return, they had an opportunity to hear first-hand about the many challenges adult CHD patients face.

Organizers are already bandying around ideas for an even bigger and better Beat Retreat 2012. Says Cox. "I can't wait. It's going to be great."

For more information about the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance and/or the Beat Retreat camp please visit www.cchaforlife.org or send an email to communications@cchaforlife.org.

We are looking for volunteers to help build up the Alberta Chapter of CCHA. If you are an adult with CHD of the parent of a child with CHD and would like to get involved, please contact Shelagh Ross at communications@cchaforlife.org.

Summer Camps for Kids with CHD

Did you know that there are summer camps available which are specifically tailored for children and teens with CHD? If your child is between the ages of 7 and 17 and has a heart condition, they may qualify to attend one of these amazing camps!

• Camp del Corazon, California

Camp del Corazon is held at Catalina Island Camps located at Howland's Landing, a private cove on beautiful Catalina Island. All of the activities are led by trained Activity Counsellors and supervised by onsite nurses and physicians. Activities include hiking, adventure games, court games, boom ball, arts & crafts and a variety of beachfront activities. Older campers also have the option of snorkelling and participating in powerboat fun, including tubing. Trained lifeguards oversee each activity in addition to one or two counsellors at all times. The only cost for campers is for their transportation to and from the camp. For more information, please visit their website at www.campdelcorazon.org

• Zajac Ranch For Children, British Columbia

Located in Mission, B.C., Zajac Ranch hosts hundreds of children per year with serious and chronic illnesses and disabilities who might not otherwise have a chance to enjoy a summer camp experience. While this camp is not exclusive to heart kids, it does include one week in the summer that is only for children and teens with CHD. Activities include swimming, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, volleyball, archery, rope courses, climbing wall, baseball, basketball, bocce ball, horseback riding and much more. There is a fee for this camp of approximately \$545 in addition to travel expenses. For more information visit their website at www.zajacranch.com.

Heart Beats is pleased to offer financial assistance to children and teens within the community who would like to attend one of these camps. If you are interested, feel free to contact us at info@heartbeats.ca or speak with one of the nurses at the Cardiology Clinic.