



Every youngster deserves a normal childhood, but the lives of certain children, by virtue of illness, are anything but normal. Sadly, these youngsters suffer physically and emotionally not only from coping with the treatments necessary to sustain their life, but also from coping with the loss of their childhood. At **Dragonfly Forest, Inc.**, the staff works tirelessly to create a safe haven for seriously ill children—where kids can simply be kids.

Founded in 2002, Dragonfly Forest provides seriously ill children the opportunity to enjoy a traditional overnight summer camp. At first glance, Dragonfly Forest looks like any other summer camp. There is swimming, boating, fishing, archery, arts and crafts, ropes courses, and nature activities. Yet, look more closely and you will find that Dragonfly Forest's campers have chronic or life threatening illnesses such as Autism, Hemophilia, Sickle Cell, Cerebral Palsy, and other neuro-muscular disorders. Dragonfly Forest allows the children to *safely* enjoy traditional camp activities.

Nestled among hundreds of rolling acres in rural, Chester County, PA, Dragonfly Forest provides for the special medical need of the children with a robust Clinic and impressive 2:1 ratio of staff to campers, so the children are safe to enjoy camp. Between early morning crafts and evening carnivals, children whose lives have been a series of medical procedures and hospital stays are transformed into just "kids" having fun. Being with other children coping with similar illnesses or conditions helps them realize that they are not alone.

Dragonfly Forest creates an environment for seriously ill children whereby they learn they are *not*

their illness and *their* choices control their ability to enjoy a positive and meaningful life. This dramatic change in thinking contributes to improved physical and mental health over the long term.

Dragonfly Forest is free of any charge to children and their families. Dragonfly Forest, Inc. accepts campers into their program based solely on the child's disease, not the financial health of his or her family. However, a significant number of the campers served come from low to moderate socio-economic backgrounds. The children served have Autism, Hemophilia, Sickle Cell, Cerebral Palsy, and other neuro-muscular disorders.

Since inception, Dragonfly Forest has developed a large referral network of hospitals and organizations to make sure that children with serious illnesses know that Dragonfly Forest is available to them. Currently in their network are: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and the CHOP Specialty Treatment Centers, The National Hemophilia Foundation - Delaware Valley Chapter, the Juvenile Arthritis Association, Temple University Children's Hospital, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, Hershey Medical Center, and Shriner's Hospital of Philadelphia.

In 2005 *Dragonfly Away* was launched, which allowed over eighty local kids to attend camp at two "sister" Hole in the Wall Camps while Dragonfly Forest continued efforts to lease an appropriate facility in the local area. In 2006, Dragonfly Forest began leasing space and began operating here in the Delaware Valley.

The Dragonfly Forest camp program is now a reality. While the capacity and ability to meet the special needs of *every* potential camper is not yet available they have a strategy for moving from the 150 campers serviced in 2006 to 300 in 2008 to 1,300+ annually within a five year period.

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