

SUMMER 2024



Autism Society
of North Carolina

CAMP CHRONICLE

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CAMP CHRONICLE

The **Camp Chronicle** is published by the Autism Society of North Carolina for campers, parents, supporters, and the counselors and professionals who work with Camp Royall.

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Letter from the Director

Summer 2024 marked the 28th installment of summer camp at Camp Royall and more than fifty years of summer camp for the Autism Society of North Carolina. This year, we served 263 summer campers, ranging in age from five years old to 67 and hailing from 48 counties across North Carolina. Over the years, we have served thousands of individuals with autism, providing them with a place where they can be their most authentic selves.

I am proud to say, I have been at Camp Royall since it opened its doors in 1997. I well recall that first summer building playground equipment, setting up the dining hall, and imagining all that would be possible for our campers. It has been a long and inspiring journey since then. Thanks to the success of our program and the generosity of our donors, Camp Royall has grown and expanded, but never lost sight of its mission to provide a safe place for campers to grow, build connections, and thrive.

I have so many amazing memories from my time at camp—memories of campers, their families, our staff. From my first day here, Camp Royall changed my life, and I know Camp Royall is equally memorable and transformative for our campers and their families, and our staff. New campers may arrive at Camp Royall unsure of what to expect, but when they leave, they leave knowing so much more about themselves and what is possible for them. Returning campers come back full of energy and bursting with joy at the prospect of another week at Camp Royall. Whether making new friends, having new experiences, or just being themselves in a place where they are accepted and valued, our campers are transformed by their time at camp.

The experience is much the same for our camp volunteers and staff who are inspired by and proud of the many accomplishments of our campers. It is always a joy for me to welcome a new group of camp staff. They come from all over the country and in some cases, the world! This summer, it was rewarding to see six former Camp Royall campers giving back as counselors and activity directors while encouraging another generation of campers to see what is possible.

We remain extremely fortunate to have so many generous donors who make the transformational Camp Royall experience a reality for so many of our campers each summer. I want to thank all of you for your support and for helping to make a real difference in the lives of our campers and their families.

With much camp love and “enthuuuuusiasm,”



Sara Gage, *Camp Royall Director*



A young woman with dark hair, wearing a pink t-shirt, is being groomed by a counselor with short grey hair wearing a plaid shirt. They are outdoors in a grassy field with trees in the background. A green banner with white text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

CAMPER HIGHLIGHT: Aria

Making friends, trying new things, dancing and singing. That is what Camp Royall is all about for 12-year-old Aria. This summer was the second year Aria came to Camp Royall and, like her first summer at camp, it was a joyful week of learning and growing.

Camp Royall was a dream Aria's mom, Nadiah, never thought she could make a reality for her daughter. Thanks to the generosity of donors who make camp scholarships available, Aria and her family have benefited from all Camp Royall has to offer. "I am so grateful to receive a scholarship to send Aria to Camp Royall," says Nadiah, "Without that support, Aria would not be able to go to camp."

Being at Camp Royall is so important to Aria and her mother. It gives her a place where she can be herself while connecting with others who, like her, are accepted and valued for being who they are. "Aria's smile and sweet energy light up a room," says Camp Royall Director Sara Gage. "She has really gained confidence at camp and we're so glad to get a chance to support her and her family." Camp also gives Nadiah, a single parent, some much needed time to reset while Aria is away. "They work so hard at Camp Royall to get it right for the campers," Nadiah says. "The level of preparation done before Aria goes to camp is incredible and it means I feel completely confident that Aria is

well-cared for and having fun. That means I can take some time for myself."

The camp experience challenges Aria to move beyond her comfort zones. This summer, she pushed past her fear of animals and got acquainted with a pony that came to camp for the day. It was a big step for Aria when she not only got close to the pony, but ultimately petted it. Nadiah appreciates how hard the counselors work to encourage Aria without pushing her too hard, and says, "They are so good about understanding and celebrating the campers for who they are and giving them the space they need to celebrate themselves."

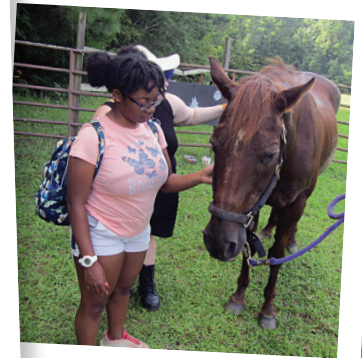
As someone who likes to be social, one of Aria's favorite things about Camp Royall is Shady Circle time when a small group of campers sit together in a shady grove to sing songs, do activities, and have a snack together. And it wouldn't be

camp without time in the pool, another favorite activity for Aria. But perhaps one of the things that most excites her about camp is the end-of-the-week talent show. "Aria loves to sing and dance" shares Nadiah, "and to be in the spotlight." So, this year, when Aria's counselor took the stage to introduce her, Aria simply could not contain herself. She took the microphone and took charge, singing her heart out as a wonderful finale to another amazing week at Camp Royall. ■





“ I love Camp Royall
because I make
lots of friends. ”





COUNSELOR HIGHLIGHT: Tyler Gass



You don't need to speak with first-time Camp Royall counselor Tyler Gass for very long to know how much her camp experience has meant to her. "My heart is full," says Tyler, "I am so grateful for the opportunities I have had at Camp Royall this summer."

Tyler, a kindergarten teacher from Greensboro, has long had an interest in working with and learning more about how best to support people with special needs, like those on the autism spectrum. This summer, she had the chance to do just that as she took on different roles at Camp Royall. Whether working one-to-one with "her" camper, acting as a "floating" day counselor, or taking on the responsibilities of an activity director, Tyler embraced every part of her experience—and she learned a lot in the process. She saw firsthand how important it is to give individuals with

autism the space to be themselves, and how Camp Royall puts systems and structures in place to ensure every camper has what they need to feel safe. She also saw the joy that comes when campers know they are accepted and valued for who they truly are. "It is a real safe haven for its campers," Tyler notes, "and it was a blessing to see campers feel like they could be themselves."

Tyler found her work at Camp Royall deeply rewarding. Watching the progress "her" campers, and all the campers, made during their weeks at camp reminded her of why she was there and why Camp Royall was so important in the lives of the campers and their families. For Tyler, it was clear that campers got so much out of their time at camp, whether that be greater confidence and independence, better self-regulation and self-awareness, or making new friends. "It was a beautiful experience," says Tyler, "with many moments of joy."

The impact of Camp Royall on Tyler was as transformative for her as it was for the campers and their families. It solidified her intention to pursue a degree in special education and left her excited about sharing what she learned with her own students. She hopes to return to camp again to work with the wonderful campers who bring such unique gifts and perspectives to camp. Camp Royall Director Sara Gage shared that Tyler was a true leader who "took on challenges with grace and found a way to learn from every opportunity presented to her. Her campers and her colleagues benefited from her presence."

Tyler highly recommends the Camp Royall experience to others who are interested in working with individuals on the spectrum. "I've never had an experience like Camp Royall," noting how respected and valued she felt as a professional and how supported and cared for she felt as a newcomer to camp. "The experience allowed me to grow personally and professionally, and I learned so much about how to support people who are so often undervalued and are in fact invaluable."

And Tyler is keeping her memories of Camp Royall close because "my heart is so full." ■



“ I like the cafeteria
and the music.
What month do I
get to go back?
”



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: Stuart Nicholson

You might ask what do swords, armor, shields, and medieval knights have in common with Camp Royall? More than you think! The Knightly Order of the Fiat Lux is a group of medieval enthusiasts seeking to “do good.” They combine their interest in centuries-old armor, combat, and culture with a mission to support local charities, primarily for children, around the state. The knights’ performances are educational in nature, and they share their expertise with schools, camps, libraries and other venues while raising money for their chosen charities.

More than a decade ago, the Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) answered the call when the Knightly Order of the Fiat Lux (KOFL) was looking for organizations to support through their fundraising efforts. Soon after, KOFL heard about Camp Royall, and they have been volunteering at camp ever since. Huzzah!

“Whenever we come to Camp Royall,” says “Sir” Stuart Nicholson of KOFL, “we are amazed by the level of excitement the campers have about the armor and combat.” He has been impressed by the campers’ attention to detail, their insightful questions, and their overall enthusiasm for the knights and their performances. Campers get an engaging interactive and sensory experience as they watch and hear the knights sparring, try on

the armor, hold a sword, and get a photo taken with a knight. The experience clearly has a lasting effect as Stuart recounts that campers who have seen KOFL at Camp Royall in past years, remember them well and remember what they learned about medieval armor, combat, and more. “Having people remember you and what you do in the kind of detail these campers do, is impressive,” says Stuart. “They often ask questions about how the armor fits, how we fight, what the armor feels like to wear. They are very curious.”

“The Knightly Order of the Fiat Lux has been a true gift to camp,” says Camp Royall Director Sara Gage. “Our campers and staff look forward to their annual visits and we know it will be such an engaging and positive experience for all. We are grateful for their continued relationship with Camp Royall.”

After being at camp, KOFL will often receive letters from the campers. Those letters make it clear the campers were excited to see the knights and learn about medieval times—and that makes it all worthwhile for the knights who give so generously of their time and talents. “Our mission is to do good, and in helping the camp with a free event for campers who are so energetic and appreciative, is not only fun for the campers, but fulfilling for us.” ■

Find out more about the Knightly Order of the Fiat Lux by visiting www.tkofl.com.



“ I give camp two thumbs up! ”





SPONSOR HIGHLIGHT: Trillium Health Resources

Thanks to their generous support of the Camp Royall Scholarship Fund, Trillium Health Resources made it possible for 18 campers to spend a transformative week with us at camp this summer. Together with the seven campers they supported with scholarships last year, Trillium has made it possible for 25 North Carolina campers with autism to experience their best summers ever. We are so grateful to Trillium for their generosity.



The Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) expanded its partnership with Trillium in 2016, when Trillium provided foundational funding for ASNC to open our Social Recreation centers. Today, Social

Recreation provides opportunities for children and adults with autism in Wilmington, Newport, and Winterville to improve and develop social and communication skills, confidence and independence, and health and wellbeing through after-school programs, adult programming, and summer day camp.

Trillium continues to provide support for our Social Recreation program. For the last two years, Trillium has expanded its support to include the Camp Royall Scholarship Fund. Without Trillium's support, these families receiving camp scholarships, both this summer and last, would have been unable to send their children to Camp Royall. Their children would

have missed the opportunity to make new friends, have new experiences, and feel accepted and valued for who they are—in short, they would have missed a life-changing experience.

The mother of a 12-year-old Camp Royall first-time camper shared: "Our son has watched his older brother go to camps and on trips that he could not attend. Over the past year, he has asked questions about his autism, not understanding why he is different than his peers. Camp Royall gave him an opportunity to experience some independence in a safe and secure atmosphere."

Another parent wrote of her 13-year-old daughter's week at Camp Royall, "Her favorite thing about camp is just being accepted for being herself... Hearing that my girl was happy is the best feeling ever. I hope after attending camp she can see that there are people out there who will accept her and that there are so many opportunities for her as she gets older."

We cannot thank Trillium Health Resources enough for the unforgettable experiences they have made possible for so many campers. We are proud to partner with Trillium and look forward to working together to continue supporting our autism community. ■

Trillium Health Resources is a Tailored Plan and Managed Care Organization serving the needs of individuals with behavioral health disorders, intellectual/developmental disability services, and traumatic brain injury for people living in North Carolina. The Trillium Tailored Plan also covers pharmacy and physical health services for members in the Trillium Tailored Plan.





“

*Camp Royall is my home
away from home.*

”





2024 Summer Staff

Camp Director: Sara Gage [28]

Assistant Director: MaKia Aikens [7]

Assistant Director: Maddy Webber [7]

Administrative Assistant: Ashton Anderson

[] indicates how many summers spent working or volunteering

Camp Royall Facility Manager: Em Helm [3]

Camp Royall Maintenance Lead: Bill Stahura [2]

Camp Royall Maintenance Generalist: Tristan Wolfram [9]

ASNC Property Manager: David Yell [33]

Property Management Executive: Ann Kastner [5]

ASNC Operations Accounting Coordinator: Angela Mattison [9]

ASNC Director of Services: Kari Johnston [2]

Facility Staff:

Ricky Sampson [19]

Mike Carter [5]

Julia Jett [4]

Anna Thomson [3]

Dave Hopp [3]

Juliet Bellion [2]

Shelli Wagoner [2]

Harry Bulbrook [2]

Archie Meskhidze

Mirella Leerburg

Adam Murphy

Mark D'Alesandro

Colby Daniel

Bailey Kaufman

Anna Peeler

Miles Bellion

Savannah Barnes [2]

Mike Jean [2]

Caroline Waller

Liv Carle

Lissy Koffi

Lily Jones

Counselors:

Treasure Aikens [3]

Kaw Tatataw [2]

Taya Williams [2]

Amanda Zrubek [2]

Colin Lalone [2]

Riley Burton [2]

Soledad Muhammed [2]

Claire Hensley [2]

Aiya Vaughn

Alex Jones

Alo Quinones-Najera

Ariana Meatchem

Breshai Sessions

Catherine Copeland

Ellie Wollam

Genesis Steward

Hannah Oh

Hannah Whitmer

Imalay Ruiz

Jadyn Sposto

Jenna Aukerman

Joy Miller

Kali Bate

Kamarie Goodman

Kisha Patterson

Lala Anderson

Laura Blanco

Leslie Hughbanks

Luna Gurnee

Monica Patino

Sebastian Spadavecchio

Seth Jiles

ShaMiracle Thomas

Shuniele Davidson

Syed Sudman Zaman

Tammy Edwards

Tatiana Sierra

Taya Williams

T'Mya Belk-Gainey

TQ Evans

Tyler Gass

Charlene Rinell

Harrison Bruch

Ines Melin

Isaiah Gorham

Jessica Rivera

Kyong Saunders

Lily Castillo

Mackenzie Kaplan

Margaret Sternberg

Max Lee

Maya Chambers

Phoebe Cookson

Sophia Veraon

Program Leaders:

Pieter Westerbeek [7]

Cassidy Montgomery [4]

Ally Coker [3]

Emily Manning [3]

Sarah Hayes [2]

Activity Directors:

Gabby Lardizabal [3]

Patrick Dunbar [3]

Jan Howland [3]

Louis Davidson [3]

Chloe Andrews [3]

Nicole Bova [2]



Nurses:

Tina Harris [13]
Katie Zimmerman [7]
Shara Laccone [2]
Edd Shope
Caroline Montgomery

Extraordinary Volunteers

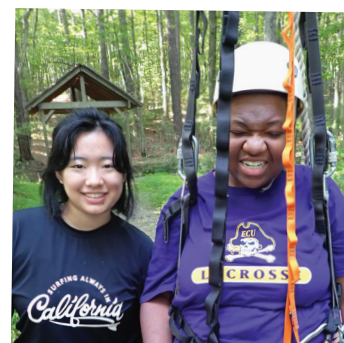
We want to recognize those who so generously gave their time to tirelessly support us through many hours of volunteer work. Your dedication and support were inspirational and very much appreciated!

George Martin [3]
Sofia Picon
Henry Lee
Gabriel Sprouse
Sophie Johnson
Oliver Garvy
Knighly Order of the Fiat Lux [15]
Marilyn and Bill Hanson [9]
Heather Hankinson
Melissa Ripper

Trainers and Consultants

We are extremely grateful to our Camp Royall friends coming to us from various parts of the autism community who gave their time and expertise to educate and guide us throughout the summer so that we might serve our campers with the highest level of care possible.

Laura Bailliard
Erin Donohue
Wykia Macon
Marian Easler
Laura Belmar-Ramos
Jay Jarrett-Morales
Rowan LaForce
Amaris Smith
Pieter Westerbeek
Nicole Bova
Cassidy Montgomery



“

I liked calling my parents
from camp to tell them all
the fun things I did that day.

”



What's your
favorite part
about camp?

The counselors!





Camp Royall Wish List

If you want to support Camp Royall through material donations, we would be grateful to receive the items below. For your convenience, we have also created an Amazon list: <https://a.co/6nqcAge>

Arts & Crafts Wishes:

- Glue/glue sticks
- Scissors (of all sizes)
- Paint (fabric paint, tempera paint, face paint, watercolors, finger paint)
- Painting supplies (brushes, small paint containers, watercolor paper, canvas)
- Pipe cleaners
- Glitter
- Air dry modeling clay
- Beads (not too small) and plastic string for beading
- Noise-canceling headphones
- Sensory toys
- Chewie tubes
- Construction paper
- Laminating pouches
- Googly eyes
- Plain white T-shirts of all sizes (youth S-adult 4XL)
- Tie-dye Supplies
- Dry-erase markers (thin)
- Sharpie markers
- Markers
- Blue painter's tape
- Cardstock (any size or color)
- Ziploc baggies (sandwich-size and gallon-size)
- Bubble solution
- Toilet paper
- Liquid hand soap
- Shaving foam
- Hand sanitizer
- Baby wipes
- Clorox wipes
- Laundry detergent
- Powder-free Nitrile disposable gloves
- Shower curtain liners
- Paper cups (3 oz.)
- Power strips
- Digital timers
- Charging cords (old Apple chargers, lightning chargers, Android, USB plugins)
- Velcro dots
- Flashlights
- Night lights (and bulbs)
- Batteries (AA and AAA and D)
- Puzzles (new or like new)
- Digital timers
- Laminating sheets (to be used in a hot laminator)
- Fishing gear (cane poles, rod and reel, bobbers, hooks, etc.)
- Paddle boats
- Golf carts
- Four-wheel drive pickup truck

General Program Wishes:

- Musical instruments
- Magnetic tiles
- Pool toys
- Gym equipment (yoga balls, tumbling mats, balls)
- Board games (new or like-new)
- Books (new or like-new)
- Coloring books (new or like-new)
- DVDs (new or like-new)
- Dry erase board



Year-round Camp Opportunities

Family Fun Days & Family Camping gives families a chance to join us for a Family Fun Day from 12 noon to 5 p.m. on Saturday or stay overnight for Family Camping. Both options are a great way for families new to Camp Royall to see what we are all about and for returning families to enjoy camp together. Explore all that Camp Royall has to offer including a cookout and, during May and September, a dip in the pool! No family will be turned away if the fee is a hardship, and as always, additional donations are always welcome.

Overnight Camps are available during fall, winter, and spring school breaks for campers (ages 4 to 94). Campers receive close supervision day and night from trained volunteers and staff and enjoy a counselor-to-camper ratio of 1:1 or 1:2, depending on the campers' levels of need. Camps run from Sunday at 4 p.m. to Friday at 1 p.m. on Friday.

Mini Camps allow campers (ages 4 to 94) to enjoy a miniature version of the Camp Royall summer experience while families benefit from respite time. The Mini Camp weekend begins Friday at 5 p.m. and ends at noon on Sunday. Preference is given to campers living at home. Supervision is provided at a ratio of 1:1 or 1:2 during these weekends.

Adult Retreats are a chance for independent adults, 18 years and older, to enjoy time with friends at Camp Royall. Retreats kick off Friday evening with dinner and activities, Saturday includes leisure and recreational activities, and Sunday offers more hangout time before a noon checkout. Compared to other Camp Royall programs, the supervision level during Adult Retreats is low. There is limited supervision in the cabins, and participants administer their own medications. New participants are screened by camp staff to make sure they are a good fit for the program.

Adult Social Group offers independent adults (ages 18+) the opportunity to work on building friendships and working on social interactions in a group setting. The group meets one Tuesday a month, September to May, from 5 - 7:30 p.m. Dinner is included.

Teen Retreats are a chance for independent teens, 13 to 22 years of age, to enjoy time with friends at Camp Royall. Retreats kick off Friday evening with dinner and activities, Saturday includes leisure and recreational activities, and Sunday offers more hangout time before a noon checkout. Compared to other Camp Royall programs, the supervision level during Teen Retreats is low. There is limited supervision in the cabins, and participants administer their own medications. New participants are screened by camp staff to make sure they are a good fit for the program.

Teen Tuesday offers independent teens (ages 13 to 22) the opportunity to work on building friendships and working on social interactions in a group setting. The group meets one Tuesday a month, from September to May, from 5 - 7:30 p.m. Dinner is included.



Adult Immersion Week-long Camp is a new program allowing participants to have fun at camp with recreation and leisure activities, but also immerse themselves in independent living exercising skills such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and house care. Participants are responsible for helping with vital processes around camp for the week including preparing meals, cleaning up after meals, maintaining their living space, etc.

Registration for 2025 Programs

Online registration for the Camp Royall Summer Camp lottery is available November 1, 2024, through January 15, 2025. Registration for all spring 2025 programs also opens on November 1, with registration closing on December 15, 2024, allowing for notification about placements in early January. After the registration period ends, families are still able to apply for our waitlists.

Thanks to generous support, we offer financial assistance so that children and adults of all income levels can participate in camp. If you are unable to pay the full cost, please complete the Scholarship Assistance Application on our registration website at camproyall.org or call the Camp Royall office for more details at 919-542-1033. ■



You Can Help

How Does ASNC's Camp Royall Change Lives?

Camp Royall is the oldest and largest camp program for individuals of all ages with autism in the world, serving more than 3,000 individuals with autism and their families a year. Camp experiences provide an opportunity for exploration, for making friends, for trying new and exciting activities, and a time for personal growth in independence and confidence. As a result, campers return home with skills once thought unattainable by their families and the ability to make a friend and be a friend.

What Are Camp Royall's Needs?

Camp Scholarships: Providing summer camp scholarships to campers each summer is the most critical need. Due to the additional financial demands of caring for a child with autism, most families are unable to afford the \$2,600 cost per week for their child to attend camp and receive the benefits of a week with specialized staff. Fundraising for camp scholarships is a year-round focus. Each year more than \$450,000 is needed to make summer camp possible for families in need.

Program/Facility Donations: Providing program supplies and maintaining a 133-acre facility is expensive. In-kind and financial donations help offset these costs. Current needs include arts and crafts supplies, sensory toys, and technology items.

Planning for Our Future: As we look to the future and the growing number of children and families who depend on our services, we must expand the number of campers we are able to serve each week by providing additional sleeping facilities. We are currently assessing the costs and looking at fundraising opportunities to meet these needs.

How Can You Help?

More than 86 cents of every dollar we raise is used for services that directly affect people with autism, and every dollar raised stays within North Carolina, helping people who live and work in our local communities. Contact Kristy White to discuss partnership opportunities that include individual gifts, named scholarships, planned giving, connections to corporations or foundations, and other opportunities to get involved.

Our Camp Royall families say it best, "After five days at Camp Royall, I was able to see my daughter's self-confidence blossom... I was blown away by her personal growth and how much positive energy she exuded during camp. This camp not only provided her with an incredible life experience, it also provided me with much needed respite. We are beyond thankful for this program and grateful that Autism Society of North Carolina offers such wonderful opportunities for families like ours!"

"Camp Royall is an amazing space for both families and people with autism. I am very thankful to have found it and will continue to support it in any way I can."

We are excited about what is happening today as a result of our efforts. We are even more excited about what can happen with your help. ■

Contact Information

Kristy White
Chief Development Officer
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Raleigh, NC 27607 | 919-865-5086
kwhite@autismsociety-nc.org



Camper DJ Collins penned this poem about Camp Royall and shared it with his fellow campers during the end-of-week camper celebration. We think it says it all . . .

A second home is hard to achieve. Especially in the everchanging nature of the world.

But to find an oasis through the rough wilderness — it's a dream.
No, it's a blessing.

A blessing to count, could be one of the only things we count on while we're here.

Camp Royall. Comfort zone, to breath in air that welcomes one.
The times I've been here. It was like a aged tree greeted me back home.

All the counselors, Amanda this summer, Patrick summers ago.
The campers, the good friends I made along the way.

This is among the rare occurrences. Where I feel as if I belong,
here I fit in. Camp Royall, I say with utmost enthusiasm.

~ DJ Collins