

Out-of-School Time Stories

BOOST Grantee Spotlight: **Camp Twin Lakes**

Camp Twin Lakes offers year-round adaptive camp experiences to children and young adults, with programs designed to help campers overcome obstacles and learn new skills to manage life challenges more independently. The summer camp program serves nearly 3,000 youth each year at three campuses, two in Morgan County and one in Barrow County. Youth participate for a week in the overnight summer camp program. Most summer campers are 4-17 years old. About 40% of campers live in the Atlanta area, half come from greater Georgia, and 10% live in other states or countries.

Meeting Individual Needs

Camp Twin Lakes serves youth with a range of diagnoses, adverse childhood experiences, and physical or developmental challenges. As noted by Anna Hutchins, Director of Grants and Outcomes Measurement, this range includes cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, hemophilia, asthma, sickle cell anemia, autism, muscular dystrophy, mental health illnesses, foster youth, kids who have experienced domestic violence, abuse, and neglect, or children who have an incarcerated parent.



Youth Served:

2,857



Ages Served:

Pre-K-12th grade

Counties Served:

105 counties across all regions of Georgia

Programming Offered:

Year-round

BOOST Grant Purpose:

Expand access, reduce barriers, and increase quality

OST Government Funding Sources:

BOOST grant

Website:

www.camptwinlakes.org



CampTwin Lakes
Where Challenges Become Triumphs

Each week, the camp serves a population with a different diagnosis or life challenge to allow campers to be part of a community with other kids with similar circumstances. Fully adaptive activities include zip lines, rock walls, and horseback riding, as well as nature trails, a wheelchair-accessible treehouse, stargazing, and participating at the camp's 120-acre farm. Camp Twin Lakes also offers weekend camps, programs for military family, and a portable "camp to go" that travels to and engages children in hospitals and clinics across Georgia.

Expanding Access

Camp Twin Lakes applied for and received a Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grant to expand its summer camp participation and programming. Hutchins says their goal is to make it possible for all youth to be able to participate regardless of ability to pay. BOOST and other program funds were used to subsidize 70% of the camp cost last year. The program fundraised with nonprofit partners to secure the remaining 30%. **In 2022, BOOST funds**

allowed over 400 youth to participate in camp at no cost. There are now waiting lists for the summer camp, and Hutchins projects that by the final year of their BOOST grant funding they will be able to "ramp up to about 13,000 campers a year"—a significant expansion.

Building Partnerships

Collaboration is an integral element of Camp Twin Lakes, which was founded as a partnership model. Besides providing funding for nearly a third of camp operations, partners—many of whom are in the medical field—help recruit campers from their patients and their families. Partners also provide medical specialty volunteers at the camp itself to work with youth as part of the camp experience. In fact, notes Hutchins, partnerships have grown as a result of the BOOST funding, which has given the program more recognition, validity, and exposure in the community: "We've gotten new donors, we have gotten increased donors. More people want to support us because we are part of the BOOST program . . . I've seen a lot of interest and more desire to get involved on the financial or support level."

Hutchins emphasizes that fun and learning go hand in hand at Camp Twin Lakes. The outdoor setting is used for hands-on environmental and STEM educational experiences.

The farm at the camp is a platform to learn about plant and animal lifecycles, composting, stewardship, and community engagement. Campers work on team projects, developing teamwork, career, and leadership skills. Returning participants are encouraged to become counselors in training. Several former campers have become camp counselors.



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*– Anna Hutchins
Director of Grants and Outcomes
Measurement*

Youth Engagement and Impact

Camp Twin Lakes helps campers develop important life skills, which are vitally important to these often-excluded populations and as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns. The camp experience serves as a core environment for learning how to be on a team, how to manage conflict, how to identify emotions, as well as how to build community and healthy and meaningful relationships. Surveys of participants indicate that, hands down, the best part of camp is building relationships—making and strengthening friendships. Hutchins says “the number one reason kids come back to camp . . . is the people, people, people, people.”

Program data indicate the camp is having a substantial impact. 82% of summer campers felt they belonged to a supportive community at camp, 84% reported increased independence after camp, and 87% said they learned something new through camp programs. For volunteers, 93% said they would return, and 91% would recommend the experience to a friend. As one volunteer noted, the camp allows “children to have the opportunity to do things that would not be possible otherwise.”

For campers, Camp Twin Lakes means access to new experiences and a sense of belonging. “The loving and welcoming community and being able to meet new people and try new things,” said one 13 year-old camper.

For parents, camp is a place where their children make friends, fit in, and feel happy and accepted. As one mother said, her favorite thing about camp is “being able to exhale and knowing my kids are in an inclusive environment with other parents in the same boat.”

Hutchins notes that camp isn't just about fun and learning:

“It actually changes lives for these youth who are often shut out of full engagement in society. And it opens up. Staff understand who the campers are and what they're capable of. And they give the campers confidence and a belief in themselves, in society, and in others that they didn't have before. If that's not access, I don't know what is. It's access to things they didn't have. And I strongly believe in that.”





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Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) is a competitive grant program administered by the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) and operated in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). BOOST offers \$85 million via three-year grants, renewed annually, with funding made available through the American Rescue Plan. The grants program is aimed at promoting evidence-based practices and whole child supports in afterschool and summer learning programs. BOOST is designed to expand access, reduce barriers to enrollment, and increase programmatic quality to improve outcomes for students and families throughout the state. GSAN provides recommendations for grant awards based on rigorous application criteria and offers technical assistance and training to grantees to ensure successful implementation. All grants are approved by GaDOE, ensuring alignment with statewide priorities and goals.