

## **Camp Chi. From the perspective of an International Staff**

What can be said about an experience held at Camp Chi? How can anyone put into words the power of the “Chi Flame and Spirit?” How do you explain the amount of difference in your life that one summer can make (and has made)?

Situated in the Wisconsin Dells, Camp Chi is a 3-hour bus ride from Chicago airport, after a 3-6 hour flight connection from New York or Los Angeles, after a 6-15 hour flight from wherever you are in this wide wide world. You travel with weird looking people with weirder accents in a whole new vast country owning the weirdest accents of all. You start up conversations and small talk: “where did you come from?”; “how long was your flight?”; “what are you doing at camp?”; “why on earth did we come here?”. The yellow school bus pulls into the camp entrance and a sense of being over-whelmed, along with a strange sense of “being home,” hits you all at once. You don’t know anyone at this place (apart from the peculiar people you just spent the last 3 hours with) and yet there’s warmth and welcome as soon as you step off the bus.

The next week is an incredible collection of finding your feet, understanding the reasons and the roles expected of you throughout the summer, and building deep friendships with the rest of your colleagues. You have no idea in the beginning that these friendships become some of the most important friendships of your life. More staff arrive during the week, and they also find their place in the “Best Staff Ever”.

Staff week finishes as quickly as it started, and then the real fun begins. So does the work.

The campsite buzzes with excitement as bus after bus pulls in with this year’s campers. You see children running around in places that you didn’t even know existed. The first-time staff look at each other in bewilderment and anticipation. “What have we got ourselves into?”

The 8 weeks following the day of arrival of the kids are a blur. Some days you wake up thinking “I still can’t believe I’m here!” Some days you wake up thinking “I might skip breakfast today for an extra hour sleep”. Some days you wake up thinking “Skipping breakfast AND a shower this morning”. Yet, you get up and start the day with a great group of kids.

From day one, you learn to love these kids. You become their big brother or sister. You become their teacher. You become their Hero. What an amazing responsibility. What an incredible honour. The kids watch you. Mimic you. Try to talk with your accent. It is such a privilege.

By the time the kids have to go, you stand there again looking at each other saying “But they just got here.”

The memories come flooding back of the summer that just flew by. There are so many events that saturate your mind – all of which took place in such a

short amount of time. Recollections of helping a child break through the barriers of fear to conquer a demanding pursuit; assisting a child in learning and developing a new skill, and watching their eyes sparkle when they understand that they CAN accomplish what they put their mind to; seeing their face contort into all sorts of different expressions when you watch them creating something, finishing with the expression of pride when reassured of their beautiful work a job well done; finding the funny side of things when you wake up to a water balloon in your face, or when the seat of your bike has been pinched, or when your favourite article of clothing is used for a tie-dye activity, and many, many more. Then there's having your stomach turn upside down and your eyes well up when a child calls you their "best friend" or their "favourite".

Camp Chi isn't all about the facilities and the activities. They're great, and really well run by dedicated staff, and a whole lot of fun for the children... AND they only touch the surface of what Camp Chi is all about:

It's the indescribable feeling that is present at camp – as soon as you step off the bus – in the staff, in the children, even in the golf carts. If you've been to Chi before, and you're reading or listening to this, you know what I'm talking about. You know that feeling, and you also cannot describe it in words. Because mere words are not enough. Camp Chi needs to be experienced.

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