

Special is one way to describe every day at Camp Twin Lakes outside Atlanta for campers facing physical and emotional challenges — just another ordinary, spectacularly amazing, packed day is another way — a camp where kids get to be kids first, and challenges? Well, we'll get to that later. In important ways that count, Twin Lakes is a regular camp — full of other kids, counselors, activities, friends, but one thing parents really want to know is what happens when they are not there. The campers and counselors at Twin Lakes want you to know — a lot of fun happens for starters.

How about coming inside? Twin Lakes Director Dan Matthews is your guide.

A Camp With an

Supporting Children Facing Challenges



Rise and Shine — Morning Checkup

Those doctors and nurses are waiting as Kara and her friends make their way to the Med Lodge — only these doctors and nurses don't look like doctors and nurses — today they look like they've stepped out of a jungle safari with their grass skirts and pith helmets. You've just got to laugh, and young Kara is tickled that Janet, the nurse, keeps stepping on the tail she's attached to her spotted costume.

"When children's worlds often revolve around medical checks and procedures, then our staff really knows how to change the tempo of events — and particularly they are not above the silly or downright ridiculous to make things go more smoothly. The kids actually look forward to seeing what's up at the Med Lodge," says Matthews.

This time flashes by, with seamless attention to the medical needs. Once everyone checks out, Kara and her fellow campers are set for activities.

Catch of the Day

Lake Selig, one of the Twin Lakes, is still and inviting as Kara, Jess, and Tim make their way to the day's first activity. The

fishing dock has been adapted to accommodate Kara's wheelchair so she rolls up, removes one of the fishing poles aside the dock, and picks the perfect spot. Casting her line out before the others, within minutes she feels that slight tug. Jess and Tim are urging her on with "You've got it!" and "Just hold on!" and Kara with an artful pull raises a small, shimmering bass right up to her face. At Twin Lakes, they have a special twist on Catch and Release, here it is Kiss and Release — so Kara squinches her eyes, puckers her lips, and plants a big one on her lucky catch; her friends are squealing with pleasure. With the help of a counselor, Kara unhooks her slippery catch and they gently toss the fish back into the water. Now Kara is ready to try again, but she's just as eager for Tim or Jess to get their turn at kissing a fish, too.

An "I Can" Attitude

"One of our goals is for every child to find a certain level of success at every activity," says Matthews. And Twin Lakes, as well as at so many camps serving special needs children, has gone the extra mile and then some to make sure that adaptive equipment and accessibility let campers participate in new and challenging activities throughout the day.

Kara and Jess are ready to ride, and this time their transportation eats hay and definitely isn't motorized. Horseback riding, anyone? The campers are pretty excited to take a late morning ride. The therapeutic riding staff is there to help Kara up on the back of Blue Dream, a buckskin horse, who stands patiently while Kara is lifted aboard and secured on the saddle. "Our horses are astounding, and you see the special bond that exists in the face of each child. Horses and children are on their best behavior for these moments of real fun," according to Matthews. With the therapeutic riding counselors walking on each side, Blue Dream begins a slow walk with Kara aboard. Her smile couldn't be

the warm water, to exercise muscles, and to gain the independence of movement that water allows. Even the staff loves to get splashed when legs and arms get moving in the water — it's just a perfect place to combine the health benefits with the fun," says Matthews.

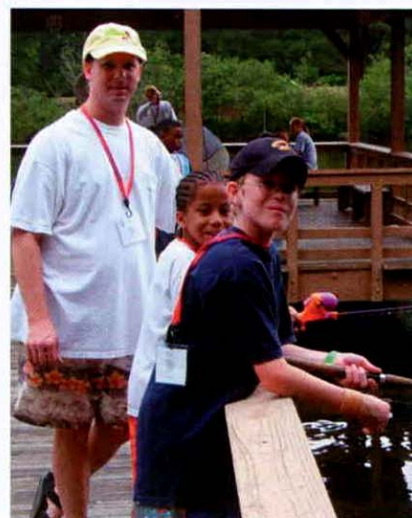
For Kara, this is the first time that she has been able to enter a pool on her own, and for an eleven-year-old girl that is a very big moment.

Nature Inside — Nature Outside

In the shaded, screened Nature Hut, Kara, Jess, and Tim investigate some of the bird nests that campers have collected

"I Can"

Attitude



wider; and Blue Dream's gentle swaying keeps a rhythm that responds to Kara's coaxing.

Lunch — Ever So Sweet — Then Rest Time

After a rousing chorus of "Love Is" in the dining hall, what Dan Matthews calls the "heart of camp," the children are off to a rest time in their cabins, a library book in hand, or a quiet activity to share — of course, everyone is appreciative of the time to wind down and share their accomplishments. Matthews says, "For some children, this is the first time that they have the sustained companionship of other children experiencing some of the same challenges, as well as having a chance to share in the pure fun of trying new activities."

Getting Wet

The afternoon is warming up, the Georgia sun is high in the sky — the perfect time for a water activity to cool off. There's a wheelchair ramp into the pool, and Kara is thrilled for the first time under the close supervision of the aquatic staff to guide her chair down the ramp into the warm water. "It's so helpful for children with certain conditions to benefit from

before they begin their late afternoon excursion down the nature trail. From this outpost at the edge of the woods, they can watch the grey squirrels and brown thrushes congregate right outside the windows. It's hard not to talk and laugh when they start out, but the quieter they are the more they will see — animal tracks, beavers at their dams. "It's a chance for campers to look at animals in nature, their habitats, and get a chance to learn as we follow the nature trail through the pines and hardwood forest areas," says Matthews. Kara spots some nuts and ferns she can add to the collection in the Nature Hut.

Lights Out

What's a "good tired"? Ask Kara or any Twin Lakes' camper — it's the sense that you tried something you wanted to, talked with a friend, played a trick on your favorite nurse and got her to really, really laugh, and most of all the feeling that you can't wait to wake up and begin all over again the next day.

For additional resources surrounding special needs camps, visit ACA's www.CampParents.org