

Camp Barnabas Cabin Built with KATA Funding
By Jeanne Atkinson, September 2008

DENVER - Camp Barnabas exists to provide life-changing opportunities to kids with special needs. A new Camp Barnabas cabin funded by KATA was dedicated in June, 2008.

The cabin is handicap equipped and much larger than the old camp cabins. The additional space allows for more camper bunks and provides for easy maneuvering of wheelchairs while also allowing room for necessary equipment such as ventilators, oxygen concentrators, suction machines, and dehumidifiers. There are toilets and showers inside the cabin and electrical wiring to support medical equipment and wheelchair chargers. Air conditioning allows medically fragile kids to attend camp and keep their health at optimum.

Ken and I were privileged to spend a week working at Camp Barnabas prior to the dedication of the cabin. It is difficult to put my experience into words. I spent my week there as a Cabin Mom. My job was to be a help and support to the counselors and campers and to tackle the daily cabin laundry. I spent much of the week racing to keep up with the physical energy and enthusiasm of the camp staff and youth volunteers.

Every week at Camp has a different special needs focus. The week we were there, most of the campers had significant physical and mental limitations. Each camper is assigned a one-on-one high school age counselor (CIA) who is devoted to their needs 24/7. This takes self sacrifice. For most, it means being taken out of their comfort zone. I have always thought of Camp Barnabas in relationship to its tremendous ministry to kids with special needs, but I was inspired, touched, and personally challenged as I observed the volunteer CIAs throughout the camp.

All the campers in my cabin were in wheelchairs and most were unable to control their bodies enough to help with being moved and lifted. Ninety percent of the campers in my cabin were nonverbal. All of these variables made for an exhausting yet, in the end, rewarding job for the CIA's. They were up at 6:15A.M. to get themselves and their campers dressed and groomed, some needing to get to the health clinic in time for meds and tube feedings. One counselor had to get up at 2:00A.M every night to turn off a feeding. Throughout the day, there are sometimes seemingly endless diapers to be changed.

Despite being in wheelchairs and having little control over their bodies as a result of cerebral palsy, with the help of the CIAs, our cabin campers participated in swimming, riflery, archery, canoeing, horseback riding, etc. At 5:00p.m.. every day the CIAs gave their campers a bath or shower before dinner and the nightly party.

Though physically challenging for these young people, it wasn't that aspect that was so moving and inspiring for me. It was seeing a big, strong, whole and handsome high school boy tenderly wipe the mouth of a drooling teenager in a wheelchair. Or talking to a CIA about the daunting task of caring for a 12 year old who was totally dependent on this high school girl to meet all of her needs; of how hard it would be for the camper's parents to do this every single day without a break. This CIA wondered if she could return home and find a family who might welcome a babysitter for their special needs child. She commented that before coming to Camp Barnabas she never would have imagined being able to do what she did that week. As she put it, "Now I'm all over it now. I've definitely got it covered!"

So by the time the cabin was dedicated at the end of the week, I was certain of the impact that this new handicap equipped cabin would have on the many who would pass through it over the years- campers, counselors and parents-- and certain that the KATA Board of Directors had made the right decision to raise the funding for a second handicap equipped cabin.

While the primary mission of KATA is to fund research of Fanconi anemia, we are also committed to using a smaller percent of the money raised to improve the lives of children who live with adversity. For all who have donated to KATA and to those who have provided the sweat equity needed to raise the money, thank you!