

## Southampton Fresh Air Home Case Statement

### **Mission Statement**

Southampton Fresh Air Home (SFAH) is a not-for-profit residential camp offering summer sessions and year-round programs and opportunities for youth with physical disabilities. Our mission is to provide an enriching, recreational camping experience. We are committed to helping our campers develop physically, emotionally, and educationally, with the goal of fostering self-esteem, maturity and independence through a broadly balanced program, while providing families with a well-deserved respite.

We are dedicated to improving and expanding programs and facilities as new opportunities, technology and financial support become available.

### **History**

In 1901, a group of women who wanted to share the benefits of sun and ocean air with youth who had physical disabilities established a special camp. Since the first summer of 10 children, the camp has grown exponentially to accommodate 150 plus youth each summer.

In 2008 with the addition of four climate-controlled dormitories, SFAH began offering several off-season weekends during the school year for smaller groups of children to maintain the friendships made during the summer and enjoy seasonal activities. These weekend programs were offered free of charge and transportation was provided.

In 2013, a modernization of our campus was deemed necessary to better serve our campers. Projects completed include an administrative building that serves as the formal entrance to the camp and increases security on campus. We upgraded our transportation fleet with three new wheelchair accessible vans that allow us to expand our off-site field trips and offer safer, more comfortable transportation for campers to and from New York City. We also upgraded our pools, pool house and pool filtration systems. The sports court was rebuilt and features a fully adapted custom design that allows the children to participate in relays, track & field, tennis, football, baseball, soccer, basketball, hockey, dodge ball, targets and more. A shade awning was added to protect the children from the direct heat of the sun. A solar energy system was installed in 2018 so that the Home can benefit from sustainable energy sources. A full renovation of the Main Building was completed in the spring of 2018. This project includes the dining hall, camp kitchen and staff residences.

In 2014, SFAH established a Camper Advisory Committee (CAC) consisting of a diverse group of former and current campers, their parents, members of the Board of Directors, and management. It was formed to give campers and parents a stronger voice in future camp planning. This Board initiative has become an invaluable planning tool. In 2017, SFAH's Board voted unanimously to formalize the CAC by creating a permanent Advisory Board. Members of the Advisory Board endeavor to provide the Home with new perspectives based on their personal experiences and connections and will assist with improving programming and fundraising. Advisory Board Members are voting members of the corporation.

In 2016, with the addition of a year-round Assistant Camp/Program Director, we formalized our off-season programming, allowing us to move from a "summer+" model to a year-round resource for youth with physical disabilities. While our summer camp program is a successful one, our youth expressed a lack of recreational opportunities during the year and face social isolation in their communities outside of camp. Our off-season programs directly address these needs.

SFAH equips physically disabled youth with the skills they need to be successful in their communities. Our off-season programs further these goals through an innovative model serving both current campers, ages 8-18 and young adult "alumni" who have aged out of the summer camp program, but still need support as they transition into adulthood. The model includes components such as Life Skill Lab workshops, respite weekends, day trips, identification of colleges and universities equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities and social media groups to assess needs.

### **Statement of Need**

Young people with physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, spina bifida and muscular dystrophy face unique barriers in accessing recreational and social opportunities. Youth who require assistance with activities of daily living encounter a gauntlet of logistics when seeking such opportunities. Those with the option of paid caregivers are usually restricted by stringent Medicaid regulations dictating when and where care can be provided. In the absence of a paid caregiver, youth in need of personal care support depend on parents and family members to help them in social and recreational settings. As a result, the lives of parents and children with physical disabilities are unusually intertwined and both parties experience stress and lack of independence.

Thus, youth whose needs are primarily physical and medical represent an underserved population that is largely failed by existing recreational programs. Many experience extreme isolation, leading to a sense of loneliness and exclusion. Programs specifically designed for people with disabilities often focus on those with cognitive and behavioral issues and do not have the resources to accommodate participants whose needs are primarily physical. A significant portion of recreational programs, both mainstreamed and disability-specific, are not physically accessible to people with such disabilities or lack the adapted equipment necessary to enable their full participation. A lack of contact with peers who share similar experiences of disability can cause these youth to internalize ableist stereotypes.

The benefits of summer camp programs in addressing the recreational needs of youth with physical disabilities are well documented. Camps specific to people with disabilities are valuable in the development of positive self-identity and disability pride. Further, connecting with other youth with similar disabilities allows them to find community and strength in their shared experiences.

As one of the few camps in the nation specifically focused on the needs of youth with physical disabilities, SFAH plays a vital role in enriching the lives of these young people and their families. Free to play and learn alongside children in similar circumstances, SFAH offers these often-isolated children an opportunity to dramatically increase their sense of independence and self-esteem while developing crucial new skills. SFAH offers them:

- A barrier free community
- A home of their own to meet people living with similar disabilities
- An understanding of their full potential in all areas of life

- A comfort level in a social environment where disability is the norm, not the exception
- An environment to explore who they are and what they want to be
- An environment that provides simple recreational fun and enjoyment

While at SFAH, campers are:

- Building healthy relationships by socializing and interacting with young people with similar needs
- Gaining strength, flexibility, and self-confidence by participating in team sports and friendly competition
- Learning to embrace their disabilities while simultaneously accomplishing typical developmental tasks
- Learning skills needed to manage their own care and to experience new challenges and opportunities
- Sharing their hopes and dreams with each other and in turn developing goals for their lives after camp such as attending college, living independently and attaining gainful employment

Many of SFAH's adult alumni look back at their time at camp as the highlight of their childhood and as the single most formative experience in their young lives. SFAH's programs are the bridge that spans up to 10 years of child's developing years. Our most successful children start between the ages of 8 and 11 and remain with us until the ages of 17 or 18. 80% of our campers return for multiple years.

### **Population Served**

Campers who attend SFAH's programs come primarily from low and middle-income families. Over 75% are from New York City, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties. The children live with a range of physical disabilities such as muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, osteogenesis imperfecta, spinal cord injuries and head injuries. While some children have congenital disabilities, others have acquired disabilities sustained in automobile and sports related accidents or through gun and gang violence. They range in age from 8 to 18, roughly half boys and half girls. Nearly 50% are African American, 30% are Caucasian and the remaining 20% are Hispanic and Asian. Campers use power or manual wheelchairs, braces or crutches. Some manage their own care with minimal assistance, while others require total care, receiving help with dressing, toileting, eating, bathing, and moving about.

### **Goals**

SFAH strives to serve as many physically disabled children and young adults as possible, many of whom also face economic disadvantages. Continued funding allows us to provide vital services for a range of disabled children and to create an environment in which they can overcome their fears, believe in themselves, and explore new possibilities. SFAH subsidizes all campers using grants, fundraising events and donations from our many loyal and committed donors. We at SFAH believe that:

- Youth with physical disabilities should have access to meaningful recreational and social opportunities

- Youth with physical disabilities should have the opportunity to connect with others who share in the disability experience in order to develop a positive sense of identity
- Both current campers and alumni with physical disabilities should have access to opportunities that better equip them for independent living, college, and employment opportunities
- Youth with physical disabilities should be given the skills to manage and have a voice about their own care
- Youth with disabilities build healthy relationships by socializing and interacting with peers who have similar needs
- Youth with disabilities gain strength and flexibility and self-confidence by participating in team sports and friendly competition
- Youth with disabilities learn to embrace their disabilities while simultaneously accomplishing age appropriate developmental tasks
- Youth with disabilities learn skills needed to manage their own care and experience new opportunities for success

## **Programs**

Each summer there are 2 three-week sessions as well as a one-week program for younger children who have never been away from home as well as for children who require a higher level of nursing care. Each summer session has an optimal enrollment of 50 children. To fully meet the needs of every child, SFAH maintains a camper-to-counselor ratio of 2:1 to instruct, guide, assist, and nurture campers throughout their stay. Campers live in spacious climate controlled, fully equipped dorms suitable for wheelchair users with 24-hour staff. Registered nurses provide 24-hour medical coverage, and a doctor is on call at all times.

While in residence at SFAH, participants enjoy our unique sports programs which include swimming, sailing, relays, golf, tennis, basketball, baseball, dodgeball, football, cycling and hockey. These activities promote motor and athletic skills, build strong muscles, develop agility, coordination, muscle tone and flexibility. Counselors work one-on-one to create an environment in which campers are fully involved and engaged.

Pool time is by far a favorite activity for all our campers and an emphasis is placed on getting each child into the pool each day for at least one hour. Swimming or hydrotherapy offers an exhilarating sense of freedom. Once in the water, campers experience buoyancy which immediately alleviates pressure on their joints and muscles and allows them to float, splash, and undulate their way to improved physical mobility, circulation, balance, coordination, posture, endurance while having a great deal of fun.

Sailing is an ideal sport for people with physical disabilities as well as a venue for fun and competition. It is more of a mental sport with physical interactions than a purely physical sport. Adapted equipment allows the children to participate in the most independent way possible. Sailing develops skills such as leadership, teamwork and self-reliance that will serve campers in every setting. The goal of the program is to offer campers the opportunity to "take the helm." For children with physical disabilities, the benefits of sailing include: increased independence, improved balance and the promotion of physical fitness, better communication skills and a sense of accomplishment.

Riding a bike is a childhood rite of passage and a milestone which can be hard for those with disabilities to reach. However, most children can do it with support and practice. Adaptive bicycles are designed to accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities. Such bicycles can be further customized and adjusted to the exact specifications and unique requirements of the rider. Learning to ride a bike builds physical strength, fine-tunes motor skills and physical coordination and improves balance.

Campers spend time in our Arts and Crafts Workshop where activities include visual arts such as painting, drawing, sculpture and photography. Campers use adapted tools in the arts studio such as paint brushes, pencils and pens with handles, easels that can be attached to a wheelchair or placed on a table; non-spill containers, and tools designed for placement on the head. Dance is modified to suit the campers' abilities. Counselors push campers in wheelchairs while they make their moves or campers propel themselves. The art of dance gives campers an opportunity to build strength and develop flexibility, creativity, and range of motion. Drama offers our campers an exciting way to express themselves. Campers have the chance to help with set designs, costumes, and writing scripts. We create a daytime disco in which campers have fun in a place where the music is "loud and theirs". Counselors create a dance hall atmosphere and campers have fun dancing with friends, being silly and being free in an environment that is comfortable and safe. Musical instruments such as keyboards, drum pads and guitars are offered.

There is a well-equipped computer center where the children have access to computers and our popular iPad program. For those unable to use standard keyboards, there are onscreen computer keyboards.

Gardening has long been regarded as a therapeutic activity, and research has shown that handling different plants and flowers has beneficial effects on both physical and mental health. The pleasure of creating a raised garden fosters self-confidence by successfully reaching set goals. As an added bonus, campers can enjoy the food and flowers they have grown. It is also a chance to learn about the outdoor environment in a safe and pleasant atmosphere and to develop a love of nature.

SFAH offers a transportation program to bring campers to and from New York City. With our fleet of wheelchair vans, we also offer a wide variety of off-site field trips including ocean beaches, sporting events, museums, concerts, carnivals, zoos, aquariums, farms, theater and more.

Through a robust Alumni Program, our goal is to mentor, inspire, encourage and provide tools and information for our alumni to prepare for life after SFAH. Throughout the year, SFAH offers alumni days and weekends where alumni get together and enjoy a baseball game or a movie or luncheon in the city. During the summer sessions, we welcome one or two alumni in each cabin to act as mentors and to help the younger campers adjust to camp life. During the off-season and on several days in the summer, alumni return to the Home to revisit old friendships and share their thoughts about life after SFAH.

No child is denied an opportunity to be a camper because of their inability to pay. SFAH provides over \$250,000 in financial aid rewards to approximately 100 of the neediest children every summer. Financial aid is available for all levels of need, from minimal need to 100% of camp fees. Typically, 75% of campers require some amount of financial aid to attend our program. The

actual cost of a child's stay at camp is over \$3,000 per week. Published fees are \$1,000 per week. Most of our families pay less than \$300 per week after financial aid is offered.

Between September 1 and May 31, SFAH offers a regular schedule of programs designed to offer recreational and educational opportunities for the children and young adults we serve. Youth with physical disabilities often feel excluded and stigmatized in mainstream recreational settings. Existing programs for people with disabilities are more often geared toward youth with cognitive and behavioral disabilities and cannot address the developmental and physical needs of young people with physical disabilities. Often, they are the only people with physical disabilities in mainstream schools, and contact with friends who share the experience of disability is limited to the camp session. Our off-season programs directly address these needs. Off-season offerings include:

- Bi-weekly day trips and outings throughout the year
- 2-3 respite weekend sessions during the year in September, October, November, December, March, April and May
- Life Skill Lab Workshops focusing on relevant topics such as independent living skills, managing personal care needs, job readiness, post-secondary educational options, etc.
- Access to an equipment exchange that offers wheelchairs, strollers, and ramps available to interested young people when others no longer use them
- Seminars addressing college and university options for campers interested in higher education.
- A Spring Open House/Resource Symposium featuring a keynote speaker who provides information and insights on a specific subject important to our community
- A Holiday Party in December to allow participants to reunite with friends and enjoy time together at a special time of year.

Our Life Skill Lab Workshops are the most requested programs offered during the off-season. The workshops' main focus is to assess and improve a camper's ability to function day-to-day in daily activities at home, in school, out in public, and at work. The goals are to foster independence and productivity and to encourage self-care. Each workshop is designed to suit campers individual needs and abilities. The workshops enable participants to improve strength, dexterity, and coordination while performing tasks. Workshops include tips for activities of daily living such as hygiene, bathing/showering, dressing, feeding and increased participation in self-care through the use of adaptive equipment. Financial management, health management and maintenance, home management and maintenance, first aid training, leisure exploration, and development of social skills are some of the topics our campers find useful. Staff incorporate theme-based workshops and day trips for participants with similar identified goals. The Life Skill Lab workshops take place at SFAH and in the field, depending on the focus of the lab and needs of the participants. For instance, a lab which teaches wheelchair users to navigate the New York City public transportation system would take place in the subway.

The Like Skill Lab program has been designed and implemented by Anna Wotowiec, an occupational therapist with extensive experience working with our population. Anna has worked seasonally with SFAH since 2010, and as a year-round consultant since 2016. She evaluates each camper and educates summer camp staff members on manual handling, feeding, and care needs for children diagnosed with physical disabilities. Anna oversees all Life Skill Lab programs and personalizes each

offering to suit individual participants based on her personal knowledge of their circumstances and needs.

## **Measuring Effectiveness**

The Southampton Fresh Air Home continually evaluates and quantifies the effectiveness of its programs for physically challenged youth via the Long-Range Planning Committee. The Long-Range Planning Committee formulates the Home's strategic planning goals and reports on the implementation of these goals. The committee develops future programs and analyzes their operating and capital needs. These programs include: summer, off-season, alumni, camper family, and off-campus activities. It reviews proposed new programs presented by the staff, and makes recommendations to the Board and the staff about the future and the growth of the organization. The Long-Range Planning Committee oversees planning and decisions regarding the buildings, facilities and the usage of the camp. The committee sets important benchmarks to determine the reach, success and sustainability of the Home's programs.

The committee evaluates the effectiveness of programming by presenting quarterly reports to the Board on the number of programs offered, the number of campers served, and the impact and accomplishments of each program. The committee meets annually with key stakeholders to discuss the effectiveness of the Home's programs. The information gathered during this meeting is shared with the Board in a written, formal report allowing the Board to focus on and expand the most effective programs and set new goals for future programs.

At the Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors in October, the camp director presents a comprehensive report to the Board containing empirical data on the impact of our programs that include:

- number of campers served in each summer session, broken out by age
- number of campers served during the summer sessions
- number of campers attending more than one summer session
- total unique campers served during the summer sessions
- analysis of camper care needs
- number of returning campers
- number of first-time campers
- number of applications received
- geographic locations of campers accepted into the program
- total summer program camper days
- total number of off-season programs offered
- total number of campers served in the off-season program
- total off-season program camper days

The report also contains detailed data on program staff.

The camp director reports on the success, or lack thereof, of new initiatives as well as changes to existing programs. The camp director also reports to the Board any issues that have arisen during the year that have affected, or may affect the corporation. The camp director's report allows the Board to determine whether they have reached the benchmarks set by the Long-Range Planning committee.

## **Benchmarks**

We have set the following benchmarks to ensure tangible results:

- Summer camp program will operate at capacity, serving 150 physically disabled children regardless of their financial situation
- Off-season programs will serve 250 young people with physical disabilities regardless of their financial situation
- Summer and off-season camp programs will continue to help campers and alumni achieve their goals of higher education, employment and independent living
- 80% of our campers between the ages of 8 and 17 will return to the Home for multiple summers

## **Sustainability**

SFAH is in a strong strategic position. The physical plant is situated on four pristine acres in Shinnecock Hills, NY. There are 11 buildings, most of which have been rebuilt over the past decade. All the buildings, as well as the outdoor landscape, have been designed with the needs of our population in mind. SFAH has an ample endowment that allows the organization to navigate downturns in the economy and fluctuations in fundraising revenue. SFAH is a community organization with strong support from both local residents and businesses as well as support from regional and national foundations and corporations. SFAH hosts two signature fundraising events each summer. These benefits, together with private donations and grants, account for almost 80% of our annual revenue. Approximately 10% of our revenue is generated from program fees. Operating shortfalls are covered from dividends and interest earned from the endowment.

The Southampton Fresh Air Home anticipates raising operating revenue through activities including:

- Annual D-D-D (Decorators-Designers-Dealers) Event
- Annual Picnic Event
- Annual Board Campaign. We receive 100% participation from directors.
- Direct Mail (Holiday Appeal/Annual Report) and major individual gifts
- Both corporate and foundation grants in support of general operations as well as special projects
- Annual Author's Luncheon
- Program Revenue
- Endowment Dividend Income - Dividend Income from the Endowment is used to cover shortfalls

SFAH's integrative approach to life-long learning enlists the talents of a dedicated team. There are five full-time staff members (executive director, camp director, assistant camp director, administrative associate and facility manager) and 65-part-time members during the summer months (program staff, nurses and support staff) and over 100 volunteers who regularly work with the staff. The counselors receive extensive on-site training, and most study in related fields and work with children with disabilities throughout the year. The senior professional staff has worked with this population for over 50 years combines and provides expert care for all children who come to the Home.

A dedicated Board of Directors governs SFAH. There are 32 voting members and 8 honorary members. All voting Board Members are fully involved with the governance, goals, and fundraising activities of the camp. Funding for large capital projects has come from capital campaigns and bequests received through planned giving. SFAH's endowment also provides up to 20% of the funds needed for strategic capital projects.

Additional funding allows us to continue to offer and expand our summer camp and off-season programming.

### **Credentials of Key Personnel**

Thomas Naro joined Southampton Fresh Air Home in 2008, and became Executive Director in 2011. As Executive Director, he supervises all programs, administrative and fundraising activities of the organization. He is in charge of the annual operating budget and supervises all expenditures, accounts payable, accounts receivable and bookkeeping. He oversees the financial aid for each camper, oversees all grant reporting, and oversees the yearly audit and preparation of the IRS 990. He interfaces with parents on issues regarding campers and oversees facility management personnel and office personnel as well as volunteers. Prior to joining the Southampton Fresh Air Home, Tom was Press Representative for The Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival in New York City. He served on the Board of ATPAM, the Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers and was Chairman and Treasurer of the Eastern Long Island Chapter of The Surfrider Foundation, a not-for-profit environmental group dedicated to the preservation of the beaches. Tom received his BA from New York University in 1988.

David Billingham has been Camp Director since 2000. He began his career at the Southampton Fresh Air Home in 1993 as a Counselor. In 1996 he was appointed Head Counselor, and in 1997 he became Head of Boys Programs at the Fresh Air Home. In 1998 he was named Assistant Director and in 2000 Camp Director. David applied for and received American Camping Association accreditation. He developed a comprehensive week-long staff training program which was commended and approved by the Suffolk County Health Department. He also developed innovative programs for wheelchair campers in sailing, theater and court sports (tennis and basketball). During the Home's 2008 Capital Campaign to remodel the dorms, David served as the program design liaison with architects and builders, helping to develop a fully accessible and state-of-the-art activities building. David is a member of the Association of Special Needs Camp Professionals, the New York State Camp Directors Association and the American Camping Association. David received a BA (with honors) from the University of Hull, Humberside, Great Britain in Contemporary Studies and Leisure Management. David is married and has three young children.

Nathan Unwin has been Assistant Camp Director since 2015. Nate initially worked with the Southampton Fresh Air Home for over 8 summers; first as a counselor, then as Head Counselor, and then as Activities Director. He received a degree in Sports Management from the University of Sheffield in Great Britain. After working with the Fresh Air Home for several summers, Nate obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Special Education at the University of Derby in Great Britain. Nate is married and living in the United States permanently. He plans to continue his education in the US and work towards receiving a Master's Degree in Special Education. Nate works in conjunction with the Camp Director overseeing our off-season programming.