

Mission:

FUN

For more than 10 years, Miami Children's Hospital's annual Ventilation Assisted Children's Center (VACC) Camp has been the "carrot" which has tempted families from more than 20 states to imagine vacationing in Miami. Parents want to socialize with peers. And they want their technology-dependent children to have a chance to meet other kids who look like them. Most of all, they want to do something as a family, and everytime, rewards exceed expectations. Parents gain, for themselves and all their children equally, not only great times in great company but a revitalizing sense of normalcy, capacity and community.

This incredible adventure translates into a free, week-long camp organized as an annual community event by the hospital's VACC. The campsite is a large park in the heart of greater metropolitan Miami. Out-of-towners sleep over while local residents join in as day campers. Each session, which serves 20-25 families, bustles with activity - games, swimming, singing, arts and crafts, entertainment, dancing, field trips, and special events like Carnival Night. There is free time, too, for table games, exploring the park, pickup baseball, swinging, or just hanging out. Parents talk over coffee and dessert after dinner and eat out together one night at a restaurant.

Because empowerment is an important goal, parents plan and fund their travel to and from Miami, bring all equipment and supplies with them, and remain fully responsible for their children. Camp provides a supportive environment in which families' special concerns are understood. Founder/director pediatric pulmonologist Moises Simper, M.D. attends full-time with the VACC team nurse practitioner, social worker, and coordinator.

A full time respiratory therapist troubleshoots equipment problems. Back-up equipment and supplies are available. Local agencies sponsor night nurses who check and treat children per parents' instructions.

Camp feels like a hospitality suite, or a big holiday picnic, as 150+ community partners and volunteers extend hometown hospitality to campers and honored guests. "Hosts" and "hostesses" include teen volunteers who participate in all activities with

Photo: Michael Carlebach,
"Favorite Camp Activity"



campers as guides, cheerleaders and playmates. The operations crew cooks and serves meals, keeps the campsite tidy, runs errands, and helps set up activities. Special volunteers entertain or facilitate activities. It is volunteer's camaraderie, enthusiasm, energy, creativity and spontaneity that make VACC Camp a dynamic happening. With personal attention to each camper, volunteers envelop families in a cloud of caring, excitement and belonging.