

[shots of children sharing their favorite things about Camp LIFE]

Child 1: The zip line.

Child 2: The ropes course.

Child 3: Fishing.

Child 4: The zip line.

[shots of camp grounds and entrance signs]

Voiceover: Camp LIFE, an acronym for leadership, independence, and friends through experiences provides a fully supported camp adventure for children with disabilities and their siblings.

[shots interspersed of campers fishing at the dock, the zip line, cooking, petting zoo, canoeing, archery, swimming, dancing and climbing wall]

Voiceover: The campers not only get the thrill filled experiences of fishing, the zip line, and other rope course activities, but also get the opportunity to engage in good old fashioned s'mores, a petting zoo, canoeing, archery, swimming, dancing and late night pranks. Sterling Leija, Class of 2003, created the hypothetical camp life experience as part of a self-directed study at Texas A&M. Amy Sharp, the director of Texas A&M's Family Support Network, an outreach program that assists families who have children with disabilities, worked with Sterling and Camp For All campgrounds in Burton Texas, to make Camp LIFE not just a final project, but a reality.

[shot of Sterling Leija, co-founder of Camp LIFE]

Sterling Leija: We wanna teach the kids how to be independent and how to advocate for themselves and how to tell their counselors what they need and how to have new experiences, experiences that other kids have every day, and that they might not have the chance to do outside of camp. We just want to give these kids the opportunity to be independent and feel normal. The neat thing about camp LIFE is that our kids get to do every activity that you would get to do at any other camp. Our kids get to do a high ropes course, our kids do canoeing, fishing, horseback riding, archery, anything that you would do at a regular camp we get to do out at Camp LIFE.

[shots of children doing crafts and horseback riding]

Voiceover: Part of the Center on Disability and Development in the Educational Psychology department at Texas A&M University, the camp is staffed with counselors who

are pre-service special education students. These students have the rare opportunity to experience living for a weekend with children like those that they will one day be teaching.

[shot of Dr. Mike Benz, Educational Psychology department head]

Mike: When our students, are working, our future special-ed teachers, are out here at Camp LIFE and they're interacting with young kids with disabilities, interacting with their siblings and interacting with their family members, they have an opportunity to see these young people in a completely different environment than what they will experience in classrooms. It helps them to see the possibilities for young people through the various kinds of experiences they get to do out here at Camp LIFE.

[shot of Ally Vogler, Class of 2007, Camp LIFE counselor]

Ally: I definitely think that being at camp in general is just, the best preparation for being a teacher that I could ever ask for. You just have a lot more respect for the parents, even the kids, to just see what they go through.

[shot of campers and counselors roasting marshmallows at night and doing other activities]

Voiceover: The campers at Camp LIFE get highly individualized attention from their counselors. This individualized attention allows the children with disabilities to fully participate in all camp activities.

[shot of Linda Harris, Camp LIFE parent]

Linda: Mitch has been his counselor for... ever since he's been here, and he is just awesome. We were talking about it coming down here: "I wonder if Mitch will be there there." And when we got here, Mitch was the first person we saw, and we said, "Oh wow, he's gonna have a great time again!" We look forward to this every time.

[shot of Dr. Amy Sharp, director of the Family Support Network]

Amy: Camp LIFE is different in the aspect that for every kid we have at Camp LIFE, we also have a counselor, so it's a one-on-one ratio if the child has a disability. The highest we get in the ratio aspect of counselor to camper is one-to-two. So for every camper we have, we are paying for a counselor to be boarded and to be fed. That doubles the cost per camper here at Camp LIFE. We also like to send them home with a fun T-shirt with little pictures. Another thing we found this session of Camp LIFE is that we had to turn away some kids this time, and that was not an easy thing to do. We just didn't have the funding to be able to support all the kids that applied this camp.

[shot of Sam and Sondra White, Camp LIFE parents]

Sondra: Camp LIFE has benefited Quentin, probably the most by just giving him the opportunity and the outlet to explore different experiences and especially to meet different kids outside of our normal home environment. And then, of course, it provides such a wonderful rest for us just to take a weekend off and be with each other and strengthen our relationship.

Sam: Quentin gets to do things here that he wouldn't get to do anywhere else, really. I think we all know about the zip line tower and most kids aren't gonna get a chance to do that, and uh, and that's just a great opportunity. Plus this is such a great facility we feel like it's safe here, the staff is wonderful, this has been a great asset to our family.

[shot of Miriam and Jim Aune, Camp LIFE parents]

Miriam: Every single time they come home they are very, very happy and really, really tired, which we appreciate a great deal!

[shots of more campers enjoying camp activities]