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SUMMER CAMP CAMPAIGN

Where Saige grows free

By Juliette Funes

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Every time summer rolls around, Saige Washington anxiously reminds his brother Peter to sign him up in time to attend Camp Jay Nolan, an inclusive summer camp for kids with and without disabilities.

"It's a fun experience," Saige, who has a learning disability, said. "I have my friends, the activities we do and just the whole atmosphere."

Operated by [Jay Nolan Community Services](#), an organization for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, the camp welcomes about 200 children ages 8 to 15.

Making his third trip to the Wrightwood campsite, the 13-year-old Los Angeles resident will attend both of the camp's sessions this month and participate in hiking, talent shows and sports activities.

"We don't do the same things every day," Saige said. "At the first [session], you start to meet people. But in the second session, it's almost over, but you don't want to leave."

Saige was diagnosed with auditory dyslexia at age 9. After his parents ignored the problem and neglected the teen, they lost custody of Saige and Peter became his guardian.

"I saw things falling apart as they were happening," Peter, 25, said. "His parents made some really bad decisions."

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Taking on the role of Mom and Dad, Peter, a behavioral therapist, enrolled Saige in the Jay Nolan Center and other tutoring services to help the teen cope with his dyslexia.

"It's a challenge," Saige said. "It makes life harder, but if I try hard it's not so bad."

Despite not being very social, living in the integrated camp environment helps kids like Saige learn how to interact with others, Todd Bailey, the camp director, said.

Based on traditional camps, it "teaches them everyday life skills and fine motor skills, but it also teaches them social skills and friendship skills," he said. "They form relationships that go on for years."

In his past two summers at camp, Saige learned how to make friends and foster his socialization skills, Peter said. The experience "helps him to be OK with himself and not feel inadequate," Peter said, adding that he will also be going as a camp counselor to keep an eye on the precocious youngster and encourage him to explore.

With \$1.8 million raised last year by the Los Angeles Times Summer Camp Campaign, approximately 8,000 children will go to camp in Southern California this summer.

The Summer Camp Campaign is part of the Los Angeles Times Family Fund, a McCormick Foundation fund, which matches all donations at 50 cents on the dollar.

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