

Here's what I think ...

By Ty Ankrom

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Last week I had the pleasure of visiting Flying Horse Farms in Mount Gilead.

This camp for children with serious illnesses is an opportunity for children ages 7 to 15 from all over Ohio to enjoy a week being a kid and not think about their illnesses.

Campers may be battling cancer, heart conditions, rheumatoid arthritis, blood disorders, asthma, gastrointestinal disorders, kidney conditions and craniofacial anomalies. But at Flying Horse Farms, campers only have to battle the occasional mosquito as they fish, run, play, climb, swim and make friends. Seeing everything the camp has designed to make kids feel like kids really registered with me.

Flying Horse Farms is part of SeriousFun Children's Network, founded in 1988 by actor and philanthropist Paul Newman. Camp is free to all campers and families.

The camp promises to transform campers and, according to Kristy Eckert, the organization's chief communications officer, Yale University researchers have studied the camp for three years and proven they do exactly that.

"The most recent set of results are astounding: Kids leave with greater self-confidence, better social skills, increased willingness to try new things and so much more," Kristy said.

Other findings from the Yale Child Study Center team survey of more than 600 families whose children attended Flying Horse Farms — or one of four other SeriousFun camps — in 2014 included:

- 77 percent of parents reported noticing an increase in their child's self-esteem
- 75 percent of parents reported noticing an increase in their child's maturity
- 74 percent of parents reported noticing an increase in their child's independence
- 76 percent of parents reported noticing an increased interest by their child in social activities

The nonprofit organization covers all operating costs through donations. But another type of donation that is needed is time. Flying Horse Farms has many opportunities for volunteers.

To get more information about volunteering this summer at Flying Horse Farms, go to http://flyinghorsefarms.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/UltraCamp_FAQ_Volunteers_v11.pdf. For an application to be a volunteer, go to <http://flyinghorsefarms.org/get-involved/volunteer-opportunities/>.

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