



Some of the foster children at this summer's camp.



Camp counselors (from left) Jan Cobe, Susan McConnell, Elizabeth Felice, and Nick Sauer.

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

FOUR BARRINGTON RESIDENTS BECOME SUPERHEROES FOR CHILDREN IN ILLINOIS FOSTER CARE

FOUR BARRINGTON RESIDENTS spent time giving foster children a week away from their tumultuous lives. Read what they saw, how they felt, and what a difference they made as summer camp counselors for the children that Let It Be Us sponsored at Royal Family Kids Camp, which serves children in foster care in Cook and Lake Counties.

Jan Cobe, 2nd Year Camp Counselor; Retired Dentist
I couldn't wait to be part of the mission to provide a week of fun, hope, and positive memories to children of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. I knew that I could easily love and connect with children, but was surprised that it could be done at a frenzied pace. There was a flurry of activity involving arts and crafts, woodworking, fishing, swimming, boating, carnivals, Bible study, and worship. All captured by diligent photographers so the kids can have a book of cherished memories to bring home. One precious child asked if she could call me "Mom" and if I could adopt her. There were a lot of tender moments in our sharing and listening and hanging out together. It was satisfying at the end of the week to know that we were successful in providing the kids with "the best week of their life".

Susan McConnell, 1st Year Camp Counselor; Founder, Let It Be Us

After hours of extensive training and planning, I

arrived at camp and was assigned to two girls, ages 9. I fell 'head over heels.' They arrived with hardly a thing. It all went downhill, and uphill, from there. I was doing the most important thing in the world—investing in their well-being. For one week, they had me as a counselor, and as a mother. When we were trapped in our cabin during one of those 2017 summer thunderstorms, I knew I would never see them again and realized we could forge a forever bond. After a huge boom of thunder, I whispered, "For the rest of our lives, whenever we hear thunder, let's whisper 'hello' to each other. That way, we'll always remember each other and what we learned together." What I hope they hear in their hearts is me reminding them to, "Be strong. Always do the right thing. You are never alone because God is always with you."

Elizabeth Felice, 1st Year Camp Counselor, Barrington High School Teacher


As my car approached the point of departure for camp, I had a realization that something really cool was about to happen, or I was having a midlife crisis. On the bus, I turned to my co-conspirator, Susan McConnell, and wondered out loud what we were

doing riding a school bus full of 20-somethings to live at a camp. For a week. With strangers. For free. Seven days later, I knew the answer.

Camp was an exercise in radical compassion and united love. Camp taught me to keep busy, to play hard, to love unconditionally, to live in the moment, and to do one good thing well and trust in the power of that act. I cannot follow the campers home, I cannot undo what's been done, or even rescue them from the future. I cannot fix the system or their families. I cannot fix their broken hearts. But I can be here, for this week, for as many summers as I can be.

Nick Sauer, 9th Year Camp Counselor, Illinois State Representative

As a camp counselor, I have been able to invest in the lives of children in Illinois foster care. The camp adventures we go on inspire me. Camp offers these foster children new opportunities: exploring the great outdoors, developing new skills, playing without fear or concern for safety, and reassurance from unconditional care.

This special camp has altered my way of thinking about the unique challenges and opportunities foster children face. Poverty, abuse, and neglect were norms unfamiliar to me. The lessons and needs my campers have unknowingly imparted on me have become a cornerstone for why I serve. We all have important parts to play, and sometimes one week can make all the difference. 

Let It Be Us was asked to sponsor 20 children in Illinois foster care at a camp designed for those who have survived life-altering trauma, to help them become more hopeful and resilient. Let It Be Us is a Barrington nonprofit with the mission of adoption of, and education of, children in Illinois foster care. To learn more, visit www.LetItBeUs.org. In 2017, the Let It Be Us Summer Camp Program received a significant grant from the Illinois Association of Junior High Student Councils.