In 2015, dozens of campers and volunteers descended upon Martinsville, Indiana for a week of camaraderie and outdoor fun at Camp PossAbility. The camp, then in its inaugural year, gives young adults with physical disabilities a safe place to relax, connect with others in similar circumstances, and enjoy themselves without worrying about adapting to the world around them.

The campers had fun and made connections, but something was lacking. Although the campgrounds were adapted for and typically used by children with special needs, it quickly became apparent that they didn’t meet the needs of Camp PossAbility’s adults—adults who cannot be lifted with as much ease.

“Almost all of our campers are dependent on lifting and need people to transfer them from their wheelchairs,” explained Lauren Harmison, CEO of Camp PossAbility. “After performing a number of lifts without a device, our volunteers became fatigued and the campers began to dread the threat of pulling and shearing. It made us realize how important it is to have the right equipment.”

SOLUTION

In 2016 Camp PossAbility acquired five Hoyer lifts which were used in the cabins, at the zip line, and with a gantry at the lake.

“In general, people with quadriplegia don’t have a lot of body control,” Lauren said. “Many of our campers had never done water activities, but because of the lift at the lake, everyone was able to go canoeing. That was a huge difference for us compared to the first year. Also during our first year we needed up to five people to get each camper into the zip line chair. Logistically it was extremely difficult and it was scary for the campers too. With the Hoyer lift, the transfer only requires one volunteer.”

“When we’ve used (Hoyer lifts), we can’t imagine not using them.”
- LAUREN HARMISON, CEO OF CAMP POSSABILITY
One of the campers, Candice Bennett, said she would not have attended camp a second time without the Hoyer lifts. “I wouldn’t want to jeopardize not only my safety but the safety of the volunteers doing all the transferring,” she said. “Having the Hoyer lifts was my only way to be safely transferred in and out of my chair, the beds, and whatever activities I was partaking in.”

But today, Candice has no hesitation to attend camp—something Lauren describes as “Huge!” Mason Ellis, also a camper, liked that the lifts were simple to use and improved his safety. “They were a lot easier on the campers and prevented them from getting scratches on their skin,” he said. And because transfers with the lifts required the assistance of fewer volunteers, he realized they freed up volunteers to assist other campers at the same time. “It enables you to do things a lot quicker with all the campers.”

The volunteers were also on Lauren’s mind when she decided to acquire the lifts. “People are giving up a lot; they shouldn’t have to be exhausted or fear an injury,” she said. “Some volunteers probably would not have come back if we didn’t have the lifts.”

Today, Hoyer lifts are a seamless part of Camp PossAbility. “Now that we’ve used them, we can’t imagine not using them,” Lauren said. “The camp didn’t seem the same the second year and the lifts were a huge part of it. Even the campers felt that way. They made a huge difference.”

Free from worry about transfers, Candice, Mason and the other campers were able to swim, boat, and enjoy all the activities.

“To be able to be suspended in the air on the zip line and travel at a quick speed—it wasn’t something I would think I could do!” Candice said. “It was freeing in that I wasn’t just bound to my wheelchair. It gave me a different outlook. After four and a half years of having a spinal cord injury and being wheelchair-bound, I have been given the gift of a new perspective.”

“Participating in these events is a big deal for campers,” Lauren said. “They feel like, ‘If I can do it at camp, I can do it somewhere else too.’ It’s so exciting to watch. Just to see the looks on their faces when they come back from an activity—their smiles and even tears. It’s amazing, and Joerns Healthcare is helping us make that happen.”