

Please enjoy Cooper's story as it is told by his mother Val who has been one of our very strong parent advocates and leaders in our Conductive Education community.....

We've been fortunate enough for the past thirteen years now to have our son Cooper participate in the Conductive Education Program held in Chatham every summer. An opportunity that we are very thankful to have for many reasons.

Cooper is almost 16 years old and has severe Cerebral Palsy. He benefits greatly from attending the program every summer. The daily routine of massage, stretching, range of motion, and various intensive exercises and activities not only improve our son's condition while attending camp, but also throughout the year. By teaching the parents and personal support workers during the summer, the Conductors are giving us the tools we need to help our kids at home until we are back at camp again the next summer to build on what we have learned.

Increasing range of motion, relaxing severely tight muscles, reducing risk of contractures, improving balance and strength, the list of advantages in participating in the program goes on. Having it right in our home city is a huge perk as well, many special needs kids do not travel well, nor stay away from home, out of their regular routine comfortably.

In addition to the physical rewards the program provides, it also provides social and emotional connections for our kids, which is not easy for many of them in other environments. They get into a great summer routine, making physical gains, while enjoying friendship and laughs even through tough days of long hard work. Everything is easier and more enjoyable with friends, especially with camp friends that have similar issues and goals to work toward. Little did we know that the camp program would be so helpful to the parents as well! Over the years we have made wonderful friends there and now have a support system we can turn to whenever we need to. Whether it be to ask for therapy advice, vent to about getting no sleep lol, suggestions with equipment needs, to share info on programs for funding support, advice about navigating the school system, to get help in an emergency such as needing to borrow a spare feeding tube to replace one that has sprung a leak! It's nice to have the other parents to talk with at camp but also during the year in our crazy busy lives, sometimes just to have some wine together and chat with people who get it.' When Cooper first started CE, I honestly knew

nothing about the special needs world, he was only 3 at the time. Ethan's mom, Robin befriended me and taught me so much! In turn I've done the same with other new families. We have great people in our Chatham C family, a group that really supports one another. With the COVID-19 pandemic this year cancelling the program we were very sad and concerned about our son's physical and mental health. Many of our children are medically compromised so going out during a pandemic wasn't feasible, as well, all of their activities were cancelled anyway. Being shut in at home for months with limited access to things like social media to keep in contact with peers, like typical kids would, meant some very long, boring, potentially depressing days for them. When the sessions were brought to us virtually through Zoom, it was honestly such a relief, we were ecstatic. The Conductors, as always were amazing, so helpful and genuinely concerned with each child's well being, making sure to provide a program that fit each child's needs. I know it wasn't easy for them to provide their expertise without having their hands on! but they made it work and we are so thankful! In a time of such uncertainty this year, the virtual sessions still provided some much needed routine and normalcy, and benefits for the kids and parents that come from doing CE :) Not the same as our usual summer camp but still awesome!

We would really like to thank Rick and Christa and thank everyone and acknowledge all of the hard work, time commitments, and financial support the Optimists put forth year after year ensuring our kids can attend camp and work toward reaching their full potential. It really is an amazing program that benefits the whole family. We look forward to when we can all be together again!

With sincerest thanks,

Val, Brad, Cameron & Cooper Duquette

