

Proposal requesting support for the

**National Kidney Foundation of Northern California's
Kidney Kids Camp**

Summary

Held for one week each summer at the YMCA Camp Jones Gulch near La Honda, California, Kidney Kids Camp offers children with kidney disease the rare opportunity to enjoy a summer camp vacation while continuing to receive necessary medical treatments. While attending camp, children can participate in all camp activities including hiking, swimming, horseback riding, team and individual sports and overnight campouts alongside regular YMCA summer campers. During the one week session, Camp Jones Gulch sets aside one of its cabins for use as a field dialysis center where campers can receive medical treatment. Local dialysis centers donate water treatment equipment, dialysis machines, dialyzers and auxiliary equipment for use during the week. Dialysis and all other treatments are administered by volunteer nurses, physicians and other medical professionals who also serve as chaperones for campers.

Through Kidney Kids Camp, children coping with kidney disease from all over the region are given the chance to enjoy a summer camp vacation and participate in exciting outdoor activities they otherwise would not be able to experience. In addition, Kids Camp affords campers an opportunity for peer socialization with both regular YMCA summer campers and other Kidney Kids Camp participants with medical needs similar to their own. Kidney Kids Camp aims to encourage these valuable connections with other children, to foster greater independence with regards to self-care, to increase campers self-esteem and activity levels, and to provide a safe and oftentimes first experience away from parental worries. The total budget for the 2004 Kidney Kids Camp is 20,000 and covers the costs of campers individual camp fees, volunteer expenses, travel to and from the camp for volunteers and campers and the facilitation of dialysis equipment at Camp Jones Gulch. The NKF of NC is seeking general support for the 2004 Kidney Kids Camp which will serve approximately 20 children this summer.

The Kidney Kids Camp Program

The National Kidney Foundation of Northern California has been offering the week-long Kidney Kids Camp program since 1997; since 1998 the program has been located at the YMCA Camp Jones Gulch near La Honda, California. Kidney Kids Camp is available to children aged 8-15 who have either received a kidney transplant or who are currently undergoing dialysis treatment. Kids Camp provides them with the chance to enjoy a summer camp vacation and engage in the wide variety of activities available at Camp Jones Gulch, including hiking, horseback riding, swimming, rock climbing, team and individual sports, and overnight campouts. Kids Campers participate in these activities alongside regular YMCA summer campers, affording them the opportunity to connect with both healthy children and children with medical needs similar to their own. Over

the course of the week, campers build friendships, develop greater self confidence, raise their activity levels, and learn to be more self-reliant and independent vital life skills that will assist them in facing both the challenges of disease management and as young people developing the skills necessary for a healthy and successful adult life.

While attending camp, participants continue to receive necessary medical treatments on-site under the administration of volunteer medical professionals who also act, along with Camp Jones Gulch staff, as chaperones. Individual campers require differing levels of treatment, with some simply needing regular medication and monitoring and others requiring hemodialysis treatments three times per week or overnight continuous cycling peritoneal dialysis. The medical equipment necessary for dialysis treatments, such as water purification equipment, dialysis machines, dialyzers and auxiliary equipment, is donated in-kind by local dialysis providers during the week of the program. The NKF of NC provides other medical equipment and health monitoring devices. Dialysis, health monitoring and other therapies are administered by nurses, physicians and other qualified medical professionals who generously volunteer their time with the NKF of NC to make Kidney Kids Camp possible each year.

Throughout their week-long adventure, all Kidney Kids campers are closely monitored for any health warning signals. Transportation and off-site physician s care is always readily available and camper s families are kept apprised of any health issues that may arise. But the focus of Kidney Kids Camp is not on the health concerns participants must cope with day in and day out, but instead on enjoying the opportunities for fun, activity and adventure afforded by Camp Jones Gulch.

The Impact

The impact of Kidney Kids Camp on children s interpersonal skills, self confidence and independence in terms of self-care is significant. Activities at Camp Jones Gulch are structured to promote communication and interaction and center around encouragement and positive feedback. As a result, NKF of NC volunteers have noted increased self confidence and positive interaction both between the Kidney campers themselves and with regular YMCA campers and staff over the course of the week. In many cases, the connections children make at Kidney Kids Camp become lasting friendships, with campers returning to camp each year in order to spend time with friends. In addition, camp activities are structured to encourage personal responsibility and independence qualities that can have an especially positive impact on children s disease management skills. While both YMCA camp staff and NKF of NC volunteers ensure that Kids receive all necessary treatments and medications, kidney campers are encouraged to take a greater personal responsibility in their care. Parents of Kidney campers have noted that this increased personal responsibility carries over in their children s behavior long after the camp experience has concluded. As a result, children become better prepared for the challenges of self-care they will face as they grow older.

Budget

Each year, Kidney Kids Camp aims to serve approximately twenty children from around the Northern California region and is offered, like all of the NKF of NC's patient services, free of charge. Kidney Kids Camp is possible because of the generosity of both the medical professionals who volunteer their time to care for and chaperone Kidney Kids campers and the local dialysis providers who donate equipment to treat those children requiring dialysis for the week-long camp. Thanks to these in-kind donations of time and equipment, the per-child cost of Kids Camp is relatively low: approximately \$1000 per child. This cost includes Camp Jones Gulch's standard camper fees (about \$600 per child for one week), transportation costs for campers and volunteers, the cost of rewiring and otherwise accommodating dialysis equipment at Camp Jones Gulch, volunteer expenses and additional food, medical supplies and equipment needed to care for campers.

Conclusion

For children, coping with kidney disease can be a very isolating experience. Dialysis treatment especially center-based hemodialysis treatment, the most common form of dialysis in the United States takes up a substantial amount of time each week and can severely limit options for travel and other activities. Kidney transplant recipients and their families face challenges of their own: from the stress of the transplant procedure itself, to rigorous medical follow-up and medication regimens, the possibility of organ rejection and other complications. Kidney Kids Camp attempts to relieve, if only for one week, the stress and isolation of kidney disease management. During the week of Kids Camp, the excitement of new activities and relationships shifts the focus of the daily routine away from the difficulties of treatment; and because campers are spending time with children with similar medical needs, the experience of disease management itself becomes less solitary. In addition, Kidney Kids Camp affords camper's parents and families a week-long break in their own stressful and time-consuming routines of caring for their children's needs: of doctor's visits, travel to dialysis centers, health monitoring, and the administering of treatment and medication.

The true value of the summer camp experience, regardless of the camper, lies in the transforming power of new experiences from new and challenging activities, to the new connections and friendships being made and the experience of a greater sense of independence and self confidence. And while the experiences offered at Kidney Kids Camp are no different, the rewards these new experiences confer can be especially profound for campers coping with the daily struggles of disease and treatment. For many Kidney campers, their time at Camp Jones Gulch is a truly unique opportunity both to enjoy the outdoors and outdoor activities and to enjoy the camaraderie of children their own age who face the same daily challenges that they do. Over the years, the bonds forged at Kidney Kids Camp and the self confidence and independence fostered through the camp experience have helped hundreds of children as they battle kidney disease. By partnering with the NKF of NC in support of Kidney Kids Camp, you help ensure that a

new group of children struggling with kidney disease will be able to enjoy the experience of a summer camp vacation, an experience whose rewards will stay with them for many years to come.