

# Camp WISP

## Watson Inclusive Summer Program

The Watson Institute offers an inclusive therapeutic summer camp program for children with autism and related disorders. The program emphasizes teaching social skills within a typical summer camp environment and using capable peers in naturalistic settings.

Most children learn how to play without being taught. For children with autism, play and social interactions can be painfully difficult, even for those for whom academic skills come easily. Without direct instruction in social interactions, they are not likely to learn to get along with their peers and, as a consequence, school will be a difficult place for them. Social skills are important for all children. In schools, children are continually exposed to an environment in which they must interact with other children their age. Social skills correlate highly with success in school and in life for all children. Yet, because social interactions are learned naturally by many children, most school programs do not teach children how to interact with their peers.

Children with autism typically experience regression in skills and an increase in behavioral problems during any interruption in services. Typical inclusive options during the summer are extremely limited, since typical children do not generally attend school programs during the summer and most recreational programs do not have the experience or resources to cope with the challenges presented by a child with autism.

We offer a model inclusive summer program to allow children with autism to be integrated successfully into typical summer camps with their peers. The program operates in multiple sites, trying to provide the child with services near their own neighborhoods. The program time and duration varies according to the camp schedule. Typically a camp program lasts eight (8) weeks and runs from approximately 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. In order to fully address program goals, we generally are unable to accommodate partial registrations (i.e, less than 8 weeks, five days per week for the scheduled program hours). In some cases, children participate in the program as part of a Summer Therapeutic Activities Program (STAP services). In other cases, school districts contract directly with The Watson Institute for services.

Parents, school personnel, and community service providers collaborate in developing detailed goals and objectives for each child's social skills program. Specially trained staff provide individualized programming for each child, teaching social interactions, communication skills, coping skills, problem solving skills, and behavioral competencies through facilitated participation in age appropriate activities.

Space in the program is extremely limited so that the ratio of typical children to those with special needs is kept large (10/1) and the program remains truly inclusive. For additional information, contact our Assistant Service Coordinator, Carolyn, at 412-749-2895 or go onto our website (<http://www.thewatsoninstitute.org/services.jsp>) and click "Summer Camp Programs."