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Living - Health

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 Tuesday, May. 25, 2010

Free camp has been helping, inspiring diabetic children for 30 years

By LIZ FABIAN - lfabian@macon.com

Giving up Snickers bars was the hardest thing Rebecca Moore has had to do since she was diagnosed with diabetes about seven months ago.

This week, the Macon 11-year-old is learning about the individual struggles of other young patients at her first trip to "Camp Little Shots" at Rock Eagle in Putnam County.



GRANT BLANKENSHIP/THE TELEGRAPH Above, Libby Parsons, left, holds out her finger to add a drop of blood to a glucose test strip while Jade Wright, center, pricks her finger for the test while on a Camp Little Shots field trip Monday at the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. Top, a drop of blood is seen on the finger of one of the campers after a test.

GALLERY: Camp for diabetic children in its 30th year

"I learned how to use a different needle, like a pin-thing, instead of a syringe," said Rebecca, who lives in Macon. "It doesn't hurt as much, because it's a finer needle. I thought it would hurt, but it never did."

Jim Tyner remembers what it was like when he was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 11.

The 37-year-old network administrator at Macon accounting firm McNair McLemore Middlebrooks has been part of the free camp for 26 years. Once he reached 19, he's returned every year as a counselor.

"I've just grown up here. I've learned a lot," Tyner said Monday while ushering campers into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame for a field trip to Macon. "I believe in the way they treated me and the love they've given me. I shudder to think what condition I'd be in if I didn't have their support."

Tyner is talking about Dr. Tom Jones and his wife, Elizabeth. The Macon endocrinologist founded the camp 30 years ago and relies on grant money and donations to house children from all over Georgia.

"No child has ever, ever paid," Elizabeth Jones said.

The Joneses are planning a gala celebration in August to commemorate the anniversary and to raise \$100,000 to continue their work.

Once the bus arrived at the museum, the children filtered out into the lunchroom and began checking blood sugar levels. "She's 66, so I'll put her in the line first," said one counselor as the group prepared to eat.

As adults doled out soft tacos and tortillas, the carb-counting began.

"The amount of carbohydrates is what they'll put in

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their pump to determine how much insulin," said Deborah Kruger, a camp counselor for five years. "I knew nothing about diabetes coming in, but now I know all the terms. I think I've grown a lot from it."

Many of Kruger's campers don't have any peers back home with diabetes.

Jayla Lyman, 12, of Sandersville, is spending her third year at camp. For her, Little Shots is not only an opportunity to talk to other kids, but she can enjoy her favorite activities at the same time.

"Swimming. We go hiking and canoeing and we do talent shows," Lyman said.

The children are divided into two groups ages 6 to 13 and ages 14 to 18.

"The little ones, they may come to camp and not be able to give their own shot," Elizabeth Jones said. "That's my goal — for them to give their shots and learn shot rotation and really determine how they're feeling with their sugar levels."

In addition to serving as role models for the younger kids, the teens come to grips with their own lives.

"This is lifelong," she said. "They have to have that balance of fitness and food and get their attitude in check because they can be angry."

Some of the best medicine for the young ones is to see older children living routine, healthy lives.

"I think they see, 'Here's this big strong guy and he can do it, so I can do it, too,'" Tom Jones said. "I think these kids look up to the older children who are taking care of themselves to talk to them about their care."

His wife said the success stretches beyond diabetes treatment as camp assembles people from all backgrounds and means.

"These kids are going to be our leaders," Elizabeth Jones said. "If I have a lower socio-economic kid getting along with a north Macon kid, they're going to be breaking down some barriers."

This year's camp runs through Wednesday.

To contact writer Liz Fabian, call 744-4303.

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baybgirl_24 wrote on 05/25/2010 09:40:11 AM:

I was wondering the same thing.....why not wait until school is out and the kids could enjoy this a lil better??? I know a child that would have loved to go to this event/camp. Does anyone know when they will be having another one? Please share if anyone does. This is great for the kids to get out and enjoy!

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dcedit wrote on 05/25/2010 08:46:45 AM:

Nice story. Good job Dr. Jones.

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emsbugbug wrote on 05/25/2010 08:40:01 AM:

This is a great camp for some great kids, but what I don't understand is why they do it when school is still in session. Why not wait until school gets out? That way these kids aren't missing anything.

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Tybeegirl wrote on 05/25/2010 05:31:28 AM:

What a great camp for some special children! I hope that they all have a great time at camp.

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