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## Having fun a SNAP at camp

**Wimodausis teaches children coping skills and gives them a safe place where they can just be kids**

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He's been there and done it.

Now Elias McBean is helping other children do it, too: change bad behaviour into good.

Growing up, McBean was a handful. "I had a bit of a temper – attitude," he said. But he learned to curb it at a place that has grown close to his heart.

"I first went to Wimodausis when I was 6 and was a camper till I was 11," said McBean, now 18.

It's where his healing began. And it started with the counsellors.

"We got a lot of positive energy from all the counsellors," he said.

Camp began to change his life.

"A lot of kids don't have a positive environment at home," he said. "Camp was a good place to be."

It's why McBean has stayed on at Wimodausis, first as a leader in training and then a junior counsellor. He was able to connect with the kids, partly because he'd gone through similar experiences.

"I've been a full-on staff counsellor for two years and I like it better than anything," McBean said. "The kids know I am someone they can turn to."

"We have so much fun at camp and there are so many activities, there's no time to be angry."

And the rewards are priceless. There's nothing like seeing just how happy the kids are at camp, he said. Even more amazing is watching a camper, who at one time may have blow up in anger, "stop, take a deep breath, put his hands in his pockets and walk away."

The skills learned at Wimodausis stay with you for life, McBean added. "I still take a deep breath, put my hands in my pockets ..."

Wimodausis – from the words wives, mothers, daughters, sisters – began in the 1900s when a group of women philanthropists joined forces to raise money to help working families. The group had ties with the Earls court and Crèche child and family centres – now the Child Development Institute.

Though the group has long since disbanded, its work continues today through the CDI which

serves hundreds of children and families in Toronto. It offers healthy child development programs and early intervention and family violence services.

One of the most popular programs is Camp Wimodausis for children 6 to 11 years old, some with severe behavioural problems. Many face challenges at home and their difficulties often spill over into school. Some have been suspended. Others have had run-ins with the law.

Camp lets them have positive interaction with adults, said director Karen Sewell. "It happens in a safe environment where kids can be kids and behaviour doesn't stand in the way."

Camp Wimodausis has been supported by the Fresh Air Fund since 2000 and is one of a record 106 camps to receive funding this year.

Aside from traditional activities like swimming, day trips, sports, arts and crafts, and drama, campers learn to identify what sparks their anger and how to deal with it through a program called Stop Now And Plan. SNAP teaches youngsters to identify body clues triggered by anger or anxiety, to identify their first reaction and replace negative thoughts with positives ones, explained Sewell.

"The goal is to ... help them deal with their behaviour without being too onerous." Sewell added.

We can help them reach their goal by giving to the Fresh Air Fund.