

Dream Day Cape Cod

Nestled in the woods of Nickerson State Park in Brewster, a group of campers engages in all of the activities that characterize a summer's day on Cape Cod: fishing, playing, and making s'mores over a fire. At first glance, the campers seem indistinguishable from the thousands of other visitors who come to this area each summer. But as part of Dream Day on Cape Cod, a special weeklong program for families from all over the country with children battling terminal illnesses, the group is anything but ordinary.

Inspired by Connecticut's Dream Day on the Sound program, Margaret Kennedy founded the Dream Day organization in 1993. Today, under the guidance of Executive Director Kathleen Giorgio, the group hosts eight families each week for six weeks at its 17-acre Camp Nan-Ke-Rafe, complete with eight cabins with bunk beds, a ropes course, a playground, and access to Rafe Pond. For families struggling to pay big medical bills, many of whom have not enjoyed a vacation away from home in years, this is a very special time. "It's amazing what an elixir for the soul a week on the Cape can be," says Giorgio. "And we get to offer that every year to these very special people!"

Spending time with other individuals going through similar situations helps strengthen the families who come to the camp, Giorgio says. The schedule is light and flexible. An average day might start with arts and crafts, followed by fishing, swimming, canoeing, or kayaking on Rafe Pond. Trips to the beach are a delight to some of the families who have never seen the



Dream Day makes it possible for seriously ill children and their families to spend a free fun-filled week at a camp in Nickerson State Park.

ocean, and a staff chef cooks breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Campfires take place regularly; Giorgio says they are a special part of the experience, offering Dream Day families chances to share stories and bond with the parents and siblings of other children with terminal illnesses.

Giorgio loves being director of Dream Day. "When I tell people what I do, I often hear 'That's so sad,'" she says. "I always say, 'On the contrary!'" The days at Camp Nan-Ke-Rafe are filled with joy, laughter, and spirited fun. Local companies volunteer maintenance and landscaping services, and families do not have to pick up any of the cost of this special week. "We say to the families that if you can get to us, you won't have to spend a dime the

whole week," says Giorgio.

To support Dream Day's \$195,000 operating budget, Giorgio works year-round organizing fundraisers like the Cape Cod Bass and Blue Fish Tournament in Dennis and the Nun Run 5k in Chatham. She also continually recruits volunteers so the program can help even more families next summer.

"I know that what happens here has the power to transcend all of the day-to-day pain and struggle these families endure the rest of the year," says Giorgio. "At Dream Day, these families create loving, lasting memories together."

For more information on Dream Day on Cape Cod, visit www.dream-dayoncapecod.org or call Giorgio at 774-994-7346.—Desiree Lavallee