

# Camp Yakety Yak teaches the language of friendship

 **By Susan Mansfield**

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**All children deserve to have warm memories of summer camp. That is the philosophy that prompted speech pathologist and parent, Angela Arterberry of West Linn to start Camp Yakety-Yak at a friend's home and backyard in Tualatin last summer.**



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At left and from left: Speech pathologist Angela Arterberry yaks it up with her son, Ethan, Landon Crollard, Taylor Blanchard, Grace Springberg and her daughter, Ava, all Camp Yakety Yak participants.

Toward the end of the school year last spring, Arterberry and friend Kay Jellison, also a speech pathologist who has a practice in her home, were lamenting about the limited options they had to send their own children to a supportive and understanding summer camp. Arterberry's son has significant ADHD, and her friend's son has Asperger's Syndrome. From past experience, they knew that both children would be sent home from traditional camps, and Arterberry's son would leave the camps feeling confused and misunderstood.

Although there are a few camps offered for children with special needs, she found that these camps are either overnights for a week or for all summer. As a parent she wanted a day camp for a small part of the summer that was as cost effective as possible. When last year's camp at the Tualatin house brought families from all over the metro area, Arterberry and her campers quickly outgrew the house. This year she has expanded the camps, holding them at various churches.

"This year we just really expanded the program to accommodate more children," said Arterberry, "and grew our staff by more than 100 percent. It is basically one on one, with 20 to 25 staff for 25 kids at one time."

This amazing ratio of staff to students is accomplished by professional volunteers and the help of about 65 high school and college students.

"Kids from Lakeridge High School have really come through," Arterberry said, as a re-

sult of an email she sent to area counselors and administrators about her camps.

At Lakeridge, the school got the word out to families and students; and she received an overwhelming response from that community.

Another volunteer is a West Linn woman who has worked with adults who have had strokes and is now interested in learning more about the needs of children.

While the camps include children who might just be learning to walk at the age of 10 or who may be gifted intellectually but have autism or Asperger's Syndrome, it is also designed for "typically developing" children such as siblings, who are great role models for other children. About 150 children are expected to attend this year's camps. In fact, Arterberry's daughter, whom Arterberry describes as having DQ (drama queen) syndrome, gets as much out of the camp as those campers with special needs because they are working on skills she needs – how to get along with others.

"There is nothing quite like this camp," Arterberry said. "What I have tried to create is something from the outside that looks like every other camp – music, art, snack making – but when you get deeper, you see that it is basically speech therapy for three hours."

In fact, Arterberry chose the camp's name Yakety Yak because she knows talking with others is an important part of friendship development.

Arterberry said she designs all camp curriculum with her collaborators, a general education teacher and an occupational therapist.

"All our minds go together to create this and design a lesson. It helps me refine and generate ideas from their disciplines, since I am not a special education teacher," she said.

Each child attending will have one goal that all the staff are working on throughout each activity. The staff will be looking for opportunities for social coaching that even "typical" children sometimes need.

Even while they're having fun, the children are always learning lessons, such as when they have a snack. Instead of the camp providing snacks, the kids make their own by following a picture-card recipe. Arterberry feels this encourages children who don't like

a lot of different kinds of food to try new things because they have made it themselves. As the cards provide visual guidance, camp organizers don't need adults standing by to make these foods.

A camp offering this kind of attention for children with more specialized needs has been a real comfort for some parents.

"When I found out about Camp Yakety Yak last year," said Kristen VanTuyl of West Linn, "it was really the first special needs child activity that we had done because our daughter's diagnosis was new."

VanTuyl's daughter Emma, a student at Sunset Elementary, was diagnosed last year with Asperger's Syndrome.

"When you first find out something like this, you are about five seconds away from a panic attack," she remembered.

"Finding Camp Yakety Yak and knowing these people understood my child and they knew what they had to do to help is really peaceful and comforting. As a parent it just means everything."

The curriculum used at camp is the same one used by the speech pathologist at Emma's school, so VanTuyl's daughter knew exactly what she would be learning about and was ready.

"It was really cool to see interaction between all those kids (both special needs and "typical") in such a safe environment. Other kids then become more understanding, VanTuyl said VanTuyl continued, "In one week I saw major change in how Emma kept herself calm, used words to express what she wanted, had so much fun. It was a safe place to learn how to interact. We'll be back."

Although Camp Yakety Yak is designed for both children with special needs and those who are "typical" and would benefit in many different ways, this camp would not be appropriate for kids whose emotional skills are aggressive. Arterberry explains that camp volunteers do not have the skill sets to be able to support that kind of child in the best way.

Arterberry has a lot of help from people who believe in the project and are willing to help, and she said there is a strong focus on community building and relationship building.

“My goal is for a camp like this to be everywhere” Arterberry said, “– places like Prineville – and all over the state.”

The first camp was just completed at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Beaverton; future camps are scheduled for July 25 through Aug. 4 at Bethany Lutheran Church in Portland with a trip to OMSI fit in, and Aug. 15 to 25 at Hope Community Church in Lake Oswego, which includes a field trip to Happy Trails Riding Center.

Information about the camps may be found on the Internet under Camp Yakety Yak.