

# Meet Cara Tavendale

Camper, supporter, performer, volunteer and fundraiser for Over The Wall



When Cara was 13 years old, she suddenly went from being a healthy, active child, to being seriously ill. On March 13th, 2007, her appendix burst, and she developed massive sepsis. Multiple abdominal abscesses meant that she required repeated surgery, which resulted in her spending nearly two months in a high dependency unit and left her with internal damage which stopped her gut from functioning normally.

Over the following years, Cara became a very frequent patient in hospital, often spending months there at a time. Since then, she has been fed either via a nasogastric tube, and for an extended period on parenteral nutrition via a central line. As a child, Cara became all too used to the hospital routine, the invasive procedures, the boredom and the long periods away from friends and family.

## Discovering camp...

“We heard about Over the Wall from one of the specialist nurses at hospital, and immediately thought this would be a great opportunity.” explains Cara’s mum, Cat. “Of course, we were terrified of the thought of her being away from us, but we also knew, thanks to long discussions with very supportive staff at Over the Wall, that she would be looked after -and would really benefit from camp.”

“Over the Wall gave back the fun missing from Cara’s life - the laughter and games, the playing, and challenges, and doing all the normal stuff that kids with an illness miss out on. At camp, ‘different’ is ok - in fact- ‘different’ doesn’t exist, because camp is not about illness. It is about living life and having some fun- which is why Cara loved it.”



Cara was profoundly affected by her experience of camp and went on to attend two health challenge camps and one family camp. She explains: “My time at camp was simply amazing. It gave me the opportunity to be with children my own age, to chat to them and to just be a child. In hospital, I was often in with babies. Babies are lovely but there’s not much chat! Camp gave me the opportunity to meet people my own age, and we all had an understanding of what each one of us was going through- without having to talk about it.”

“It made me feel like I wasn’t alone - I came to understand that there is always someone worse off than you. At school, it always felt like- I was- ‘the sick one’. But camp changed this feeling.”

“The camp talent shows also gave Cara the opportunity to showcase her musical talent.” adds Cat, “And this allowed her to develop a different type of confidence, which definitely helped her with her performances.”

Having been a keen singer and pianist since the age of nine, Cara’s camp performances in the talent shows led her to perform at the Over The Wall charity Gala’s in both London and New York, sharing the stage with Hollywood stars including Jake Gyllenhaal, Tina Fey, Jimmy Fallon and Jude Law.

Cara has even returned to camp - but this time as a volunteer, helping out as a lifeguard.



# Giving something back

## Cara's fundraising for OTW

Being the positive and ambitious person that Cara is, she made a decision that she would give something back to Over The Wall, due to the long lasting impression that camp had on her. On the year she would turn 23, she decided that she would mark the 10th anniversary of the date that her appendix burst (naming this date her 'Burst'-Day!), and would raise money for Over The Wall.

Cara first set out to raise £5k, but it was swiftly apparent that this target was too low, as she met it in a short amount of time- and so raised this to £10k! Cara chose 10 fundraising activities and encouraged friends and members of her community to join her and get involved. She started with a singing performance for the pharmaceutical company Shire, then organised a supermarket bag pack, a sponsored run with a local running club, a walk of the West Highland Way, a sprint triathlon, a ceilidh (where she also had 9 inches of her hair cut which was donated to The Little Princess Trust), a Santa run, and a yearlong small change challenge in her local community.

Cara also travelled to Oxford to busk, alongside fellow performers Sky and Ace (who were also former OTW campers). At the end of her fundraising campaign, Cara raised an amazing grand total of £12,911 for Over The Wall.

“Raising this money was very important to me, because I feel that Over The Wall has given me so much. I wanted to give something back, and to help the children that may be missing out due to their illness- just as I was. I hope the funds I have raised will allow more children to experience camp- and to feel the benefits it brings. Organising and completing the events has been a challenge at times- but overall it has been great fun and knowing that you are raising funds for such an important cause makes it even better.”

