



Meet Charlotte

Charlotte is a sibling camper who first came to an Over The Wall residential camp when she was eight-years-old.

She's been to camp four times! Now, Charlotte is 14, and has learned lots about herself through camp. We asked her to share with us the key moments and memories that shaped her time at camp.

Residential camp: what's it all about?

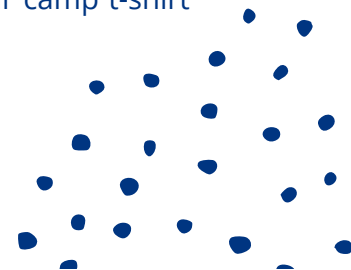
Camp brings people together. I tried not to cry too much, but you don't realise until the last day how much it means to you. Once camp is part of your life, it's never not part of it. You'll always remember camp. I still remember my first time at camp when I was eight because I had so much fun.

Arriving at camp

My first time at Over The Wall was when I was eight years old. I was really nervous about going, and I was the youngest person at that camp. I was so scared that I didn't know how to make friends, but I didn't have to worry though!

From the moment I got there, everyone was so nice and accepting. Not once did we talk about our siblings or their disabilities. At camp you don't talk about that because it doesn't matter.

Even though you know everyone's in the same boat, it brings you close together because you know these people have gone through the same sort of stuff as you and they understand what it's like. It's like a big family – as soon as you walk in and you put on your camp t-shirt everyone is there for you, and they're all so kind and funny.



“The amount of laughter at camp has to be my favourite memory”

I've kept in contact with lots of people from camp over the last few years. So, when I went this summer I got to see them again. It was movie night, but no one was watching the movie because we were all so interested in talking to other people.

Me and another girl talked through the whole movie. At one point we were laughing so much we had to step outside! That's just one example, but the amount of laughter at camp this summer has to be my favourite memory.

“OVER THE WALL CAMPS MAKE YOU FEEL INCLUDED, AND THAT WAS SOMETHING I HADN'T FELT A LOT.

Becoming myself

There were some things I was a bit scared to come out of my shell about. I'd not really been myself before camp and I was struggling to find my feet again and actually be who I wanted to be. I'd transferred school and was so scared I wasn't going to make any friends and I'd be really lonely. When I went to camp I realised I can make friends and people are nice. Everyone makes you feel so worthy to just be who you are. I was so grateful to be there. I'm much more confident, feel more myself and feel much lighter.

When I come out of my shell, I'm quite a loud person. I try to be a good person and make friends with everyone; I can definitely be energetic! Making friends when I was younger was never an issue, but after Covid, I realised I wasn't really happy with who I was and where I was when I moved up to secondary school. I always knew that who I was being wasn't me and I didn't know how to become myself again because I really missed who I was.

Over The Wall camps make you feel included, and that was something I hadn't felt a lot. It made me realise that people can be nice and who I was wasn't a problem. It's easier to make friends when I'm being myself rather than someone else. I'm very proud of myself for stepping out of my comfort zone and getting back to my true self.



Meeting others like me

I still speak to the friends I made at camp literally every day! I know I'll always have them to turn to. If something's going on in the family, you can't really turn to your friends for that because they don't understand what it's really like. But with the friends I made at camp, I can drop them a text to let them know what's going on and they understand completely. That's really nice.

When I was younger, we spent a lot of time in the hospital. I didn't get to see Mum and Dad for weeks sometimes, it was really horrible. I was really trying to find my mojo again and trying to be upbeat, but it was difficult. This was when I was struggling to be myself. I didn't know when it was going to end or whether anyone really cared about what was going on.

My friends didn't really get it. I knew they had other things going on, but I just wanted someone to be there for me. But the people at Over The Wall just knew. I've not told anyone at OTW about what we went through in the last two years because I don't feel the need. It's so nice to have people who you can relate to and who can relate to you. They know how difficult it is to be away from home for a long time and see someone you love in a state that no one should be in.

**“YOU CAN JUST BE YOURSELF, DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO.
THERE'S NO PRESSURE.”**

Stepping out of my comfort zone

We did lots of archery, a murder mystery game and team building stuff which brought the whole team together. The first evening is always the most awkward but it gets better as soon as you start doing the activities and have learned everyone's names- which takes forever! After those exercises you just come together as a team- you're a whole. Everything we did brought everyone together. One night we did a talent show. We performed Wannabee by the Spice Girls. I loved it, but we were terrible! It was so embarrassing; I'd never do that outside of camp! But at Over The Wall, nobody cares. You can do the most embarrassing thing and no one will care. There's no judgement whatsoever. You can just be yourself, do what you want to do. There's no pressure.



Looking back on camp

When I was younger, I thought it was a great place to make new friends. I knew that everyone there had a sibling with a health challenge, but I didn't care about that much. It's not something you should be insecure about, but I was insecure about having a brother with a health challenge.

It's something that's always in the back of your mind and you don't know how people will react. Some people are fine, but others make a really big deal about it. It's nice to know that there are other people out there who know what it's like.



Now it means more because I know the other people there are in the same situation as me. I'll definitely come back as a volunteer when I'm older because I've seen how much fun they have and what they get out of it. I just can't wait to meet kids who will be going through what I went through and see them come out of their shell. It's a really wholesome experience. You don't know their stories or their background, but you see them become a much stronger person once camp is over.

Camp is about YOU!

You don't know anything about anyone else's situation, only that they have a brother or sister with a health challenge. For the first time in our lives, you only know about the sibling. It's about solely you, not you and your sibling. It can be quite annoying when people see you as an attachment to your sibling. I'm my own person!

Camp was the first time I could be just me, without the added baggage. It was a weird feeling the first time! Camp isn't just about you though, it's about everyone there coming together.

“ I WAS NEVER THE ONLY ONE - THERE ARE LOTS OF PEOPLE OUT THERE WITH SIBLINGS WITH HEALTH CHALLENGES ”

Before camp, I definitely felt a bit sorry for myself and felt that my life was hard. Seeing other people at camp going through the same thing made me realise it isn't such a big deal. It really isn't a big deal; I just view it as something about my brother.

My brother, Alex, has Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia (HSP). I used to let his health challenge define me as a person as well as him. Now I feel it doesn't matter. Everyone's the same, we've all got things going on. I've just realised that I can be me and that it shouldn't be embarrassing to be yourself or to have a sibling with a health challenge. I used to think I was the only one and that my case was unique to me. But I was never the only one – there are lots of people out there with siblings with health challenges. I just never thought of it before.

Me and Alex

Normally you'd look up to an older sibling to protect you. Sometimes it feels like I'm protecting him. I'm trying my best to make sure he has the best youth he can. So sometimes it feels like a swap, but it's not really. He's still my older brother and he's always there for me.

I don't like people feeling sorry for me because of my brother. When they make a big deal out of it, it makes me think it's a big deal. There was a period of time when Alex was quite sick, and people would ask me about him, but they'd never ask me how I was doing.

I used to get a bit grumpy with him because I always thought: I'm a person too! I think lots of the siblings at camp could relate to that, and that's why everyone at camp asks about you first. It's a little thing that shouldn't matter, but it really does, because sometimes it makes me feel like maybe I don't matter as much to them. I know that people don't mean it like that and they're asking because they care, but it always made me think: what about me?

We're both into Formula 1 and motorsports. Alex went to Over The Wall camp too, so we can speak about that for ages. It's really nice that we have that in common as it brings us together.



CAMP WILL ALWAYS BE THERE. IT'S A PART OF ME NOW AND WITHOUT OVER THE WALL, I WOULDN'T BE WHO I AM TODAY.

“I'm representing women in STEM!”

I've picked an engineering course at school and would love to work in motorsport in the future. I'm the only girl on my course so I'm representing women in STEM! I'd like to be a race engineer or maybe a lawyer, but who knows? What will be will be what's meant. I want to work hard whilst I'm young so it pays off when I'm older. There's a little bit of uncertainty because I don't really know what I want to do, but I know it'll be somewhere within STEM. I think if I put my mind to it I can get there.

What I'll take with me from camp is the confidence I gained and the support network. I know my friends from camp will always be there for me and I'll be there for them. Camp will always be there. It's a part of me now and without Over The Wall, I wouldn't be who I am today. I'm very grateful to the whole charity for helping me find my feet and become the good person I believe I am!

You're part of a new family at camp

If you're not sure about coming to camp, do it! Just put your name down because it's the best thing ever. You don't know how good it is until you're there, so you'd be kicking yourself if you didn't try it. Just bite the bullet and do it!

You'll make friends there because everyone makes friends at camp. It's so easy because there's no judgement from anyone. Everyone at camp is lovely and kind. There's not one person who gets left out, so don't be worried! If it's the staying away from home that scares you, you won't even notice it. It's almost like a new home.

You do feel like you're part of a new family. Of course, it doesn't replace your own family, but I didn't miss home because I embraced everything about camp. It surrounds you- it's like a big hug. I don't know how they do it, because no one else could do this as well as Over The Wall does. I think it's so impressive what they do and what they pull off every year.

Camp in the Cloud

Camp in the Cloud is a really fun alternative to residential camp that you can do from home!

Nothing can ever replace residential camp, but Camp in the Cloud was a great substitute. I called two of the friends I'd met at residential, and we did Camp in the Cloud together virtually!

I really missed Over The Wall during the pandemic. It was like a little piece of me was missing, not being able to go to camp.

I think everyone needed Over The Wall even more during lockdown.

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