

Monday, August 2, 1992 O&E

At Camp Midicha

A place and a chance to rap for young diabetics

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

The rap sessions scheduled at Camp Midicha have become one of the most meaningful activities counselors provide for the 100 or so young diabetics they meet each week throughout the summer.

"Our job is to get them to open up, get them to talk about how they feel about themselves and their problem," said Jill Cole, speaking for the counselors.

"Our job is to ask the right questions to start the discussion rolling, and I know them all," the Birmingham resident said.

Cole, who finished her degree in social work at Wayne State University this spring, has been a diabetic for 19 years. She's spent many of her childhood summers in Camp Midicha, and like many of her counterparts, returned as an adult to help youngsters — as she was helped.

"We didn't have the rap sessions when I was this age," she said speaking of her 8- to 12-year-old charges this summer. "But I had the same secret feelings that I'm now able to help these campers voice."

"So many have no one at home their own age to talk to about how they feel."

IF CAMP Midicha, which takes its name from the words Michigan Diabetes Children's Association, had a motto, it would undoubtedly be "Accent the Positive."

"Returning campers are the happiest thing that can happen to us," said Mary Lutz, who is now resource person for the counselors.

"When we see them coming back, we

know we've done something right. We've helped them cope and they're doing it without bitterness. You can't ask more out of a week at camp."

The Southfield resident, who is earning an education degree at Michigan State University, has been a diabetic for 16 years. Her summer job is evaluating how the counselors "are helping the kids grow," she said.

Both counselors and staff, the large majority of whom are diabetics, are hired because their own lifestyle acts as a model for the campers.

Orientation for the staff is given late in June with the across-the-board philosophy:

"I can do anything I want as long as I take care of myself," Lutz said.

"Every activity is very carefully planned. Everything you see going on is timed to instill the daily discipline that is required to balance insulin injections with diet and exercise," she said.

WHAT THE visitor sees going on is much the same as in any summer camp for youngsters: swimming, canoeing, campfires, groups involved in making crafts or studying nature.

But a group spotted making cookies for a late-night snack was also being given a running commentary on the food content of that recipe.

Another group had swimming time called to a halt because it was time for a glass of juice down on the beach.

And all camp activities are called to a halt four times a day so the campers can have their urine checked.

Camp Midicha is in its 28th season with a six-week schedule in the lower peninsula near Columbusville and a 10-week schedule in the upper peninsula near Big Bay.



The medical and program staffs make it possible for diabetic children to enjoy the rewards of a fun camping experience paying attention to their dietary and medical needs while the youngsters are constantly learning more about themselves and their diabetes.

Each camp receives about 100 campers a week. Statistically more females than males suffer from diabetes and

though cabins are assigned for girls and boys according to that ratio, there is often a waiting list for the young girls.

Michigan Elks Association provides campships to see that more than 100 get to Camp Midicha each year, and doctors and nurses who make up the medical staff come, for the most part, as volunteers.

CAMP MIDICHA is sponsored and operated by Diabetes Association-Michigan affiliate. The association is a voluntary health agency, concerned with the detection, care and education, is headquartered at 6131 West Outer Drive, within Mt. Carmel Hospital's complex in Detroit.

It is the association's belief that learning about the condition, learning to live with it, talking about it, learning to deal with the undisciplined and sharing, will strengthen the youth into mentally and physically healthy adults.

It serves about 250,000 diabetics in Michigan.

Information about the camp, public information programs and self-help groups will be given by contacting the office, 342-9333.

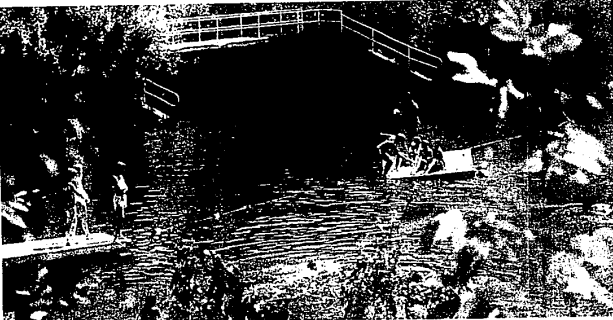
Staff photos
by
Randy Borst



What to do when you are invited to a pizza party was the subject under discussion for a small group gathered under a shade tree that included Julie Gordon (at left) and Sara Richmond. Julie is a first year camper who will go into seventh grade this fall at Holmes Junior High School in Livonia. Sara is a fourth year camper who will enter East Middle School in Farmington Hills this fall.



Mary Lutz thinks she's developed what she calls "camp-itis." Like many of her counterparts who came to Camp Midicha as a young child, they return as counselors or staff members to help the campers cope with their mutual problem of diabetes as they were helped. Lutz is a Southfield resident earning a teaching degree at Michigan State University.



Each summer since 1955, the Michigan Affiliate of the American Diabetes Association has conducted a camping program for youngsters with the problem. The goal is to provide the fun of camping

while teaching them that they can participate in all youthful activities as long as those activities are dovetailed with sound nutritional and medical practices.



Ten-year-old Ron Sobczak (left) from Farmington Hills is teamed up with Ken Sopiak from Warren in the buddy system that is a must in Camp Midicha. Ron is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Sobczak and a student at Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary School.

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