For today’s children, equal access to education and the support to succeed in the classroom is critical. Outside of the classroom, it is equally essential that children have the opportunities and support to participate in their communities.

Attending a day camp in the summer is one such typical life opportunity where children can fully participate in their community. For children disadvantaged by socio-economic or disability status, however, many barriers can impede their ability to take part in the camp experience. For example, many camps in the Boston area are expensive or are unprepared to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Camp Shriver is unique—while other summer programs may accept some children with disabilities or offer scholarships to lessen the cost to families, Camp Shriver enrolls an equal number of children with and without disabilities, at no cost to families.

For four weeks every summer, Camp Shriver ensures that all children—whether they have a disability, come from a low-income neighborhood, or are otherwise disadvantaged—can learn and play as equals.
At Camp Shriver, while the campers are having fun playing, they are learning, too. In Camp Shriver’s supportive inclusive environment, where all children are considered equal, campers with and without disabilities have the opportunity to experience invaluable personal development.

For campers without disabilities, attending an inclusive camp provides a unique opportunity for personal development and character building. At Camp Shriver, campers have a chance to interact with a diverse group of their peers, broadening their community to include children with disabilities, children from different backgrounds and children from different neighborhoods around the city. As positive peer relationships are formed, campers learn to be more accepting and tolerant toward those who are different, important personal qualities that they will take into school and beyond.

For campers with disabilities, an inclusive environment such as Camp Shriver provides the supportive structure, staff encouragement, and opportunity to interact with a diverse group of children, including peers without disabilities. Through participation in integrated activities, children with disabilities can enhance their social skills, self confidence, personal growth, independence, and resourcefulness. These social and personal skills will help children with disabilities build and sustain positive social relationships in the classroom and community.

Overall, the benefits of Camp Shriver for campers, with and without disabilities, from low socio-economic areas are many. In addition to social and personal development, for example, many campers learn to swim for the first time at Camp Shriver. Learning to swim can widen a child's horizon in unexpected ways; there are a variety of opportunities in Boston for low-income children to participate in such activities as swimming classes, sailing, boating, kayaking, or becoming a lifeguard in high school. Knowing that they can swim will allow our campers to pursue these previously un-thought of opportunities in the future. Additionally, the opportunity to spend four weeks on a college campus makes the possibility of higher education more real for a child who may never have thought of college before.

These benefits will help children, with and without disabilities, become more fully active participants in their schools and communities.

The Future
In 2013, the CSDE launched the first pilot site of its recreational model of inclusion. Camp Shriver at Stonehill College served 50 children with and without disabilities and will serve the same in 2014. In the future, the CSDE will continue to explore potential partnerships with colleges around the country to launch additional camps based on the CSDE inclusion model.
What Does Camp Shriver Do?

... So all children can learn and play—as equals.

To provide opportunities for social and motor skill development as well as the development of positive peer relationships, Camp Shriver provides 1) a supportive team structure with a 4:1 camper-to-staff ratio, and an equal balance of ages, genders and disability status and 2) inclusive sport instruction in swimming, soccer, basketball and more.

1) Supportive Team Structure. Camp Shriver teams are carefully constructed to maintain an equal balance of campers with and without disabilities. Team-building activities are integrated throughout camp and help campers develop shared values of appropriate pro-social behavior. Counselors lead this development at the beginning of camp, but by the conclusion of camp, the campers themselves are reinforcing positive behavior among their teammates. Campers understand their teammates’ strengths and challenges, and learn to successfully work together.

“Camp includes all people—we have kids with disabilities, but everyone is included.”
- 12-year old camper

“1 love being with my friends—they make me part of their team.”
- 10-year old camper

2) Inclusive Sport Instruction. The goal of inclusive sport instruction is both to allow all campers to have the opportunity to engage successfully in every activity and to develop motor skills in the context of sports and games. Each day, the teams rotate between the field, gym, pool and arts and crafts room for a variety of sports and games. Instruction is led by Camp Shriver coaches, who are experienced educators with degrees in adaptive physical education and all activities are adapted for the needs of children with disabilities.

The team structure and inclusive sport instruction create a supportive environment within in which the Camp Shriver staff can successfully promote social and motor development, while helping the campers create positive relationships with their peers.
All aspects of Camp Shriver’s programming, including the camp’s healthy meals and transportation system, are designed to promote inclusion and the development of social skills.

Health and Nutrition. Community meals promote inclusion, as the team sits down to eat together, sharing likes and dislikes, and the opportunity to practice essential social skills, such as waiting in line, turn-taking, and participating in group conversation. Meals are carefully selected to maximize nutritional content and are paired with lessons to promote healthy habits.

Transportation. Riding the bus together to camp promotes inclusion, as no camper is singled out with a special bus and camp starts for all campers when they get on the bus together. Additionally, the time on the bus before and after camp provides the opportunity for campers to build relationships with campers and counselors from their neighborhood.

Finally, Camp Shriver offers these services at no-cost to families, so that Camp Shriver can serve the low socio-economic areas surrounding UMass Boston. For many families, Camp Shriver’s community meals bridge the summer gap between school-provided services and provide a respite for those parents most at-need. Where parents work or may be unable to provide/afford transportation, a free bus leaving from their local neighborhood ensures that all children have the opportunity to attend camp.

“Camp Shriver provided our family the ability to send Kevin to camp this summer; with our financial burdens, we didn’t think we’d be able to.”
– Parent of child without a disability
Who does Camp Shriver serve?

Camp Shriver remains committed to welcoming children, ages 8-12, boys and girls, with and without disabilities from low-income urban neighborhoods and ensuring diversity among its campers. This is especially important given that the high cost of summer programming prevents many children from enjoying a high-quality recreational experience each summer. In fact, for over 50% of 2013 campers, Camp Shriver was their first recreational summer camp experience.

In 2013, over 350 applications to Camp Shriver were received. 100 campers with and without disabilities were accepted from Boston (81%) and Quincy (19%). The majority of campers live in the neighborhoods surrounding UMass Boston, including Dorchester, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, Roslindale, South Boston and Roxbury. The ethnicity of 2013 Camp Shriver campers are representative of the communities in which they live: 56% of campers were Black/African American, 22% were White, 15% were Hispanic/Latino and 7% were Asian.

At the heart of the unique inclusive experience of Camp Shriver, is that Camp Shriver brings together an equal number of children with and without disabilities who engage in the same recreational activities alongside one another. In 2012, of the 100 campers served, 50% were children with an intellectual or developmental disability and 50% were children without a disability.

Additionally, Camp Shriver works with schools and community groups that serve children from low-income neighborhoods to identify families that might benefit from free summer programming. Camp Shriver serves a majority of children from families of low income by providing the camp experience at no-cost. In 2013, 70% of Camp Shriver families were low-to-moderate income as defined by the Federal Financial Institution Examination Council (FFIEC).
Jackson ran off the bus for his first day at Camp Shriver. He couldn’t wait to be able to run around the UMass campus for four weeks of fun and games, a far cry from the confines of his apartment. Jackson was in many ways a typical Camp Shriver camper: a ten-year old Haitian boy from a low-income section of Roxbury who ran from the bus to the tent each morning. For Jackson’s family, Camp Shriver was a life-line: a free, safe camp that provided transportation and lunch. There were no resources to send Jackson anywhere else—Camp Shriver wasn’t just the family’s top choice, it was their only choice.

But as the days progressed, Jackson began to notice that a lot of the kids at camp were not like him. They were different. He got upset. They got in his way. He got angry. Finally, after a long hot day, Jackson lost his temper and yelled, “What is up with all these r---- kids? I don’t belong here!”

His counselors immediately intervened, talking with Jackson and explaining that such language would not be tolerated, but Jackson continued to lash out angrily at his teammates all week. Director Mark knew that in some ways, it wasn’t Jackson’s fault. His family didn’t choose Camp Shriver because it was inclusive; they chose Camp Shriver because it was their only option. Jackson was never told what the camp he was going to would be about. But Jackson’s behavior couldn’t continue. If he didn’t drop his attitude and become a good teammate, Mark would have no choice but to ask Jackson to leave.

So Mark and Jackson had a long talk on Friday afternoon. Mark asked Jackson about his neighborhood and the kids there and what makes Jackson angry when he is playing with kids from his neighborhood. Jackson said that he hated when the kids taunted him, telling him “to get back on the boat” just because his father was from Haiti. Mark allowed Jackson to set up the scenario and pointed out that when Jackson used the r-word to refer to a fellow camper with a disability, he was doing the same thing that kids from his neighborhood were doing to him: taunting, making fun, and telling them that they didn’t belong.

As Jackson took this in, Mark told him he had a choice. Jackson could come back to camp on Monday with a new attitude and work to include everyone, or he could not come back to camp. It was up to him. That Monday, when Jackson got off the bus, he didn’t run, but walked to where Mark was. Head down, he mumbled that he was going to try, that he wanted to stay. Mark nodded and told him go sit down with his team.

Throughout the rest of the summer, Jackson struggled at times, but the staff were always there to support him and to help him make better choices.

Soon Jackson found a new focus at Camp. He used to be the first camper angered at the slower pace of a game of inclusive soccer, where every member of the team had to touch and pass the ball before they could score. Suddenly, he became the greatest champion. He would steal the ball from the opposing team, pass it to a camper with Down Syndrome and hold off the opposition so that his teammate could make his pass. He did the same in every activity.

By the last week of camp, Jackson would spend his free time teaching a fellow camper with Autism how to play off-the-wall. He was completely transformed. He even asked Mark about coming back in the future as junior counselor. For Jackson, Camp Shriver was not only about basketball or soccer, or even about a having safe place to have fun in the summer, it was a chance to learn tolerance and practice equality, life skills that Jackson will take with him far into the future.
The Impact of Camp Shriver

Each year, a rigorous program evaluation is conducted to ensure that Camp Shriver excels at providing an inclusive summer recreational program. The evaluation is conducted by research staff from the Center for Social Development and Education with assessment instruments and methods drawn from scientific literature. The results of the evaluation are used to continuously improve the camp’s program.

Specifically, the evaluation focuses on Camp Shriver’s mission to bring children with and without disabilities together to provide opportunities for social and motor development, while promoting positive peer relationships among campers. In 2013, Camp Shriver served 104 campers, 52 with an intellectual or development disability and 52 without. The evaluation found:

Camp Shriver’s team model establishes a supportive environment.
Camp Shriver teams are carefully constructed to maintain an equal balance of campers with and without disabilities, supported with a 4:1 camper-to-staff ratio. The teams create an environment where campers feel supported: in 2013, almost all campers (96%) were proud of belonging to their team. Overwhelmingly, campers felt that their teammates liked them just the way they were (98%) and that their fellow teammates were friendly (98%). Campers felt included (93%), that their teammates listened (90%), and that they could be themselves (93%). Over the four weeks of camp, the support of this inclusive environment clears the path for friendships to follow.

Camp Shriver’s supportive environment leads to the development of positive peer relationships and friendships.
The supportive environment created by Camp Shriver’s team structure and low camper-to-staff ratio creates opportunities for friendship to develop. Almost all campers (96%) were named as a friend at camp; significantly, disability status did not play a role—children with and without disabilities were equally likely to be selected by their peers as a friend. Also notable, almost 70% of the friendships made at camp were cross-status, i.e. between a child with and without a disability; impressive, compared with a national study where less than 30% of children without a disability would interact socially with a peer with a disability outside of school and only 10% report that they have a friend with a disability.
Camp Shriver provides opportunities for campers to develop their social skills and appropriate social behavior. Throughout the four weeks of camp, Camp Shriver staff promote the development of social skills by modeling and encouraging appropriate pro-social behavior among campers. By the conclusion of camp, campers had improved in numerous pro-social behaviors including making new friends easily, offering to help other campers, encouraging and cheering on peers, and inviting other campers to play with them.

Camp Shriver provides opportunities for campers to develop their motor skills in the context of sports and games. Camp Shriver staff continually emphasize the importance of full camper participation in all activities to ensure that every child has an opportunity to participate, regardless of disability status. By the end of camp, camper participation in all activities (on the field, in the gym, in the pool and in the arts and crafts room) significantly increased. By improving participation, staff create opportunities for motor skill development: in swimming, for example, 47% of campers who were at the beginning level advanced at least one level in the pool and 41% of campers who needed a life-jacket at the beginning of camp could swim without a life-jacket by the end of camp.

Overall, the Camp Shriver evaluation continues to demonstrate a high level of success at providing an inclusive environment that leads to the development of social skills, motor skills and friendships, as it has since Camp began in 2006.
As far as Anthony was concerned, Camp Shriver was the best. He got to play soccer and go swimming every day! Even better, he had a whole team to eat lunch with and talk to.

But his fellow teammates were a little alarmed. Every time Anthony wanted to talk, he initiated the conversation by sitting in the camper’s lap and holding the camper’s face. Anthony tried to hug every team member as they sat down for breakfast. When the team was playing basketball or kickball, Anthony was on the sidelines, grabbing hold of his counselors by the arm or the leg to gain their undivided attention.

Anthony was a 10-year-old Camp Shriver camper with Down Syndrome, and as much as he wanted to share his excitement with his new friends and counselors, he had trouble initiating that conversation appropriately, to the extent that it interfered with his chance to play with his teammates and be an equal member of his team.

Director Mark Spolidoro and Anthony’s counselors wanted Anthony to be able to share his excitement appropriately with his fellow campers and they wanted Anthony’s teammates to have a chance to play and interact with Anthony, both on and off the field; they came up with a plan.

Director Mark met with the team as a group and talked about what personal space means. The team talked about why high fives might be a more appropriate way to hello than hugs, and how to use words such as “excuse me” to gain the attention of a fellow team member or counselor.

As Camp Shriver progressed, Anthony’s counselors and teammates modeled the rules of personal space and soon, instead of grabbing hold of each new arrival, Anthony was just as excited to high-five each team member as they arrived at camp.

By the last week of camp, Anthony had made enormous strides in appropriately initiating conversation. That week, one of his counselors had been out for two days at a college orientation and Anthony couldn’t wait to see him again. Director Mark watched as Anthony ran from the bus to his table and he could see that Anthony about to make the leap into his counselor’s lap.

But suddenly, Anthony stopped, the concentration visible on his face. He walked slowly up to his counselor and said, “Excuse me?” Only when he had his counselor’s attention, did he sit next to him to talk about his weekend.

For children like Anthony, social skills that come more naturally to others need to be deliberately modeled and practiced. Anthony needed a supportive space where he could learn and practice these skills: strategies for a greeting or how to initiate a conversation. At Camp Shriver, Anthony found the support and encouragement to acquire social skills that he will take with him into school and beyond.
“We make new friends and play with them.”

“My camp friends are fun! They make me comfortable and help me meet new friends.”

“You get to show your talents, all the things you can do!”

“Camp includes all people—we have kids with disabilities, but everyone is included.”

“At Camp Shriver, you get to do fun things and be yourself.”

“Camp is about being good, being helpful and being careful.”

“You don’t just play, you learn while you are playing!”

“You get to meet people you’ve never met”
Camp Shriver has a diverse funding base, comprising support from the Center for Social Development and Education, the University of Massachusetts Boston and numerous corporate and private foundations. Camp Shriver will continue to actively solicit new and varied funding opportunities, such as its participation in the B.A.A. Boston Marathon Charity Program for 2013-2015, which will substantially increase individual giving to Camp Shriver.
A Grateful Thank You to Our Supporters

Camp Shriver and the Center for Social Development and Education would like to thank the UMass Boston community and all of our friends and sponsors: