YMCA Camp Independence is a special place designed to assist children and young adults with Spina Bifida through the difficult transition to independence.

Kim Kiser | Executive Director
Rona Roffey | Camp Director
Susie Melton | Office Manager

OUR HISTORY
Camp Independence was founded by Dr. David G. McLone, head pediatric neurosurgeon at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Working together with the YMCA of Metro Chicago, the dedicated, accessible camping facility opened its doors in 2010.

In 2015, Kiwanis Club International selected Camp Independence as one of its “Gift of Play” Centennial celebration recipients. This project provided an accessible playground to campers, and has already allowed for learning, independence and growth that will have an everlasting impact.

OUR CAMP
YMCA Camp Independence, in association with the Spina Bifida Association of Illinois, provides children and young adults with the opportunity to not only enjoy the life-changing experience of camping, but also to participate in a program specifically developed to promote their independence.

Now approaching its eighth summer, the camp provides a unique, weeklong experience for more than 120 kids and young adults with Spina Bifida each year, many of whom have never spent a night away from home prior to attending.

OUR CAMPERS
More than 1,500 children in Chicagoland live with Spina Bifida. In the past, most children with Spina Bifida did not live into adulthood, but today many of them are outliving their parents. As such, the need for them to learn life skills necessary for independence is greater than ever.

At camp, children and young adults learn and practice life skills such as self-catheterization, meal preparation, showering and being active. Simultaneously, they have the opportunity to make new friends, build confidence and become increasingly self-reliant.
From the splashing of canoes in the lake, to the whooshing of the ropes course overhead, Camp Independence strengthens bodies, minds and communities. Where some see obstacles, we see opportunities for our members, volunteers, campers and staff to make a difference.

Since 2010, Camp Independence has been a destination where local children and families have the opportunity to discover who they are and what they can achieve.

"Camp is about building character," says Kim Kiser, executive director of camping at the YMCA of Metro Chicago. "Camping is about finding your inner courage. Instead of following the leader, campers learn to be the leader."

At Camp Independence, children and adults with Spina Bifida can have the full summer camp experience – bonfires, s’mores and all – in a setting that is uniquely designed to suit their needs. They learn the life skills they need to live independently, while having fun and making new friends in the process.

“We learned we could change the future for kids with Spina Bifida,” says Dr. McLone. “Our hope is that Camp Independence is scalable. One in every thousand children here in the U.S., and seven in every thousand children in China, is born with Spina Bifida. Our goal is to have camps modeled on Camp Independence exist all around the world.”

Get Involved

- **Register Today.** Visit ymcachicago.org/independence to sign up for camp, learn about volunteer opportunities, or share your favorite Camp Independence memories.
- **Make a Gift. Change a Life.** To learn more, contact Camp Independence at 847.546.8086 or make your gift today at donate.ymcachicago.org.

The YMCA of Metro Chicago transforms lives and communities.

Camp Independence is part of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. We’re a nonprofit well-known for our 22 centers, five resident camps, and health and fitness programs. But we’ve also moved wellness beyond the gym to prepare our next generation with the physical, academic and social skills they need to thrive. Our neighborhood base helps strengthen communities through programs offered at hundreds of sites citywide. This work promotes academic readiness, character development, violence prevention, and fitness and healthy living. Come to the Y for personal fitness, sign up for a family program, or play a more active role in our community service mission. When you join the Y, you’re part of something big.