



March 23, 2020

Dear Campers and Camper Families/Caregivers:

We have been monitoring the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic closely. We have been following the recommended social restrictions all while working remotely in order to continue to plan for summer camp. The planning we do this time of year is absolutely critical for summer success.

One of our biggest focuses is recruiting our summer staff. We must hire just the right amount of staff in order to offer the high-quality programs at the necessary camper-to-counselor ratio which assures full participation and safety for all campers. In order to do this, we hire staff from (literally) all around the world. Therefore, we have been particularly concerned by this global pandemic.

There have been some critical developments this week of which we want to make you aware. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Some of our key international recruiting partners have closed their acceptance of applicants;
- American embassies are cancelling appointments to people seeking J-1 Visas (which are required to enter the USA to work this summer); and
- there is a travel ban in place right now, that may or may not end in time for international staff to fly to Connecticut to begin training and start this summer.

Apart from these international recruiting concerns, a requirement has been made by the Governor of Connecticut that crowd capacities be limited to 50 people for all recreational gatherings effective on March 16, 2020 and lasting for at least 8 weeks.

These restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are proving to be the “perfect storm” for us because they create multiple challenges all at once and at the most critical time for camp planning. And, we cannot be sure when these international or state restrictions will be lifted.

At this point in time, it is not possible to effectively plan the safe, fulfilling, and meaningful camp experience that we pride ourselves on delivering every year.

We regret to inform you that Oak Hill’s summer 2020 camp programming, at both Hemlocks and Harkness, is cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand that you may be disappointed. So are we. We can only hope that everyone will continue to focus on maintaining their health and safety. We hope that once this pandemic and social restrictions end we can assess any possibilities for family activities or day visits at camp.

We will look forward, with great excitement, to Summer 2021 and hope you’ll plan to join us then. In the meantime, we have provided the following list of questions and answers regarding pending registration, deposits/payments, etc. If you still would like to speak with us, please don’t hesitate to contact Oak Hill’s Director of Camps and Recreation Jillian McCarthy at Jillian.McCarthy@oakhillct.org or 860-228-0393 ext. 4068.

Thank you for your understanding. Stay safe.

With appreciation,

Barry Simon
President & CEO

Bruce Stovall
Chief Operating Officer

Katie Hanley,
Senior Director Oak Hill Centers

Questions & Answers related to the closure of Oak Hill's Summer Camps in 2020

Q: I made a deposit or have paid in full for Summer 2020. Can I get a refund?

A: Absolutely! Please contact Oak Hill's Director of Camps and Recreation Jillian McCarthy at Jillian.McCarthy@oakhillct.org or 860-228-0393 ext. 4068.

Q: I made a deposit or have paid in full for Summer 2020. Can you apply that to Summer 2021, instead?

A: Absolutely! Please contact Oak Hill's Director of Camps and Recreation Jillian McCarthy at Jillian.McCarthy@oakhillct.org or 860-228-0393 ext. 4068.

Q: Does this affect Camp Hemlocks?

A: Yes, this applies to Camp Hemlocks. We will not be offering any summer camp programming at Camp Hemlocks in Hebron, CT this summer.

Q: Does this affect Oak Hill Camp at Harkness?

A: Yes, this applies to Oak Hill Camp at Harkness. Oak Hill will not be offering any summer camp programming at Camp Harkness in Waterford, CT this summer. That said Camp Harkness is a state park, and hopefully there will be opportunities for individuals and groups to enjoy it this summer. Oak Hill does NOT manage that part of the facility, so we recommend you reach out to the State of Connecticut Camp Harkness Director, Victoria Severin at Victoria.Severin@ct.gov or the State of Connecticut Camp Harkness Office Manager, Jacqueline Staller at Jacqueline.Staller@ct.gov. Both can be reached by phone at 860-443-7818.

Q: Why not just hire local staff?

A: For the past several years, we have not been able to recruit enough local staff in order to operate camp. Though we do love having a diverse group of dedicated workers – we hire internationally out of necessity. Without those international staff we will not be able to open camp.

Q: Camp doesn't start until June – why cancel now?

A: We spend the whole year looking forward to and preparing for summer camp. There is a lot of coordination with staff, campers, and our facilities. The planning we do January through April is a critical indicator for summer success. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be the "perfect storm" in that it created various challenges all at once and all at the most critical time for camp planning. It has created a barrier to all of our coordinating efforts, and we have run out of contingency plans. Even if this pandemic and its social restrictions ceased tomorrow, we would still not be able to recover from these setbacks in time for camp to begin.

Q: What other opportunities will there be this summer?

A: We hope that once this pandemic and social restrictions end we can assess any possibilities for family activities or day visits at camp. We will keep our campers posted when that happens.

Q: What about next summer?

A: We have been providing camp for decades and will continue to! We believe this year's cancellation is a rare exception. We will be prepared to host camp as usual next year, so please plan to return in 2021!

Q: I have some specific questions, who can I contact?

A: For all questions related to Camp Hemlocks and Camp Harkness, please contact Oak Hill's Director of Camps and Recreation Jillian McCarthy at Jillian.McCarthy@oakhillct.org or 860-228-0393 ext. 4068.

Q: Where can I learn more about coronavirus (COVID-19)?

A: The State of Connecticut has set up an information line for people with questions about COVID-19 symptoms, travel recommendations, what to do if you are sick with COVID-19, and more. You can call 2-1-1 on any phone and follow the automated phone prompt or visit <http://ct.gov/coronavirus> for the same information