

American Lung Association of Idaho Asthma Camps

Hiking, singing around the camp fire, making crafts and new friends...these are the childhood memories of summer camp. But too many children with asthma don't believe they can have that experience.

An estimated 140,000 Idahoans, including 40,000 children, suffer from asthma. Asthma is one of the fastest growing chronic diseases in the United States and children are especially susceptible. Although there is no cure, asthma can be successfully managed to improve quality of life. Children who are able to take control of their asthma have fewer missed school days, fewer ER and physician visits, and fewer hospitalizations.

Asthma not only impacts the physical health of a child, but may also affect the social and emotional health. A child may feel different because he/she has to sit down during playtime, or avoid touching the classroom pet because it may trigger an asthma attack. Or the child may feel embarrassment over having to take his/her medication in front of peers.

The American Lung Association of Idaho (ALAI) takes an innovative approach to helping Idaho asthmatic children learn to manage their disease in a setting that lets them still be kids. ALAI summer camps are designed to: educate children on the disease and teach them to manage their own illness; work with each child to develop an asthma action plan they can use when they leave camp; and participate in the fun of summer camp. Without our program, these children may never have the camp experience. ALAI offers both a 5-day overnight camp and day camps throughout the state for children age 5-17 with activities designed to promote positive self esteem, self reliance and self management of asthma.

Camps provide on-site medical care by physicians, registered nurses and respiratory therapists. ALAI works with many partners to make camp a fun and safe learning experience. Our partners include Boise Valley Asthma and Allergy, Boise State University nursing program, and St. Luke's and St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Centers.

Our policy is to make camp affordable and available to all children with asthma, regardless of their ability to pay. Research shows families living in poverty are exposed to more environmental tobacco smoke, older/substandard housing, and higher levels of indoor and outdoor "triggers" in the environment. We charge a nominal fee to families and rely on fundraising activities to support the cost of camp. Scholarships are available to families unable to pay the nominal fee and last year we provided full scholarships to approximately 90% of the children attending camp. Our goal is to raise \$35,000 to provide the camp experience to more than 200 children across the state. In addition, our outreach and education in preparation for camp will allow us to reach an additional 1,500 children.

ALAI believes children with asthma can live normal lives in which asthma has a minimal impact on their daily activities and learning progress. One camper's mom wrote, "If it wasn't for the American Lung Association having this camp, Courtney would never get to experience the fun of camping like normal kids." ALAI asthma camps provide quality, age-appropriate education for understanding and self-management of asthma.