

# Crip Camp shows a unique memory

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The weather is wintry, but many families are signing their children and teenagers up for summer camps. Camps of all types fill up quickly and require planning ahead. As the forms are filled out and payments paper, it's worth noting that the ability to go to camp years ago was all too often a pipe dream for youngsters with disabilities.

Camp experiences for children with disabilities didn't start to come into prominence until the 1950s and into the 1970s. Even then young campers, volunteers and staff often found themselves using established camp facilities with few if any accommodations.

The documentary *Crip Camp*, which opened to glowing reviews at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, recounts the history of one pioneering camp. The documentary is part of former President Barack and Michelle Obama's offering of Netflix programming, through their production company Higher Ground.

### *Official clip for Crip Camp*

The documentary focuses on Camp Jened, in the Catskills in New York State. The camp was championed by Larry Allison, who wanted teenagers with disabilities to have the camp experience. *Crip Camp* uses archival footage, interviews conducted by film students almost 50 years ago and interviews with former campers today to tell Camp Jened's story and the story of the young people who had life-changing experiences there.

The documentary has been described by reviewers as a frank story about discrimination, institutionalization, love, friendship, family, and disability rights. It is praised for its focus on ability and "I can." While *Crip Camp* is initially a documentary about place, it is just as much a film about the disability rights movement and how young campers' lives were changed by their experiences.

James Lebrecht, a former camper and *Crip Camp* film co-director, described the place as "summer camp for the handicapped run by hippies." It served young people with a wide range of disabilities.

*Crip Camp* closed due to financial woes in 1977. But it left a lasting legacy. Many of its campers went on to join the radical disability rights movement, ending up in Berkeley and founding a center for independent living there.

Minnesota has had its own camps for children with disabilities for many years. Early camps, starting in the 1920s, served children with tuberculosis. One of those camps was the [Glen Lake Children's Camp](#).

Other camps began in the 1950s, including Camp Courage in 1955. Another notable 1950s-era camp was Camp Indian Chief, run by Arc of Hennepin County for people with developmental disabilities.

Many groups set up camps for specific disability community groups, serving children or adults. The era of using camps that didn't have accessible facilities gave way to specially designed places.

While inclusive camping options are expected today, the documentary *Crip Camp* reminds the disability community of a time when equal rights and equal access were unheard of. Minnesota showings of *Crip Camp* haven't been announced.

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