



A YEAR-ROUND CENTRE FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION AND EDUCATION

# Camp Tawingo

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Dear Tawingo Family,

It is May 5th.

At Camp, the lake is open, the buds are bursting, the grass is greening, the temperatures are rising, the bugs are buzzing (though not biting... yet). Spring has sprung! And for us that is always an exciting harbinger of summer... a summer, in this case, we have ardently wanted and wished for – for your camper, our staff, and us - everyday and every night for well over a year.

Like you, we are reading and researching the latest news and views from the relevant scientific, medical, public health, and camping organizations and are reflecting on all we know... and all we do not know... and all we are still unlikely to know in the coming weeks. We are in touch, today, with a message for you and your camper. We ask that you please read it in its entirety – delivered, as it is, from the heart...

## HERE IS WHAT WE DO *NOT* KNOW...

There are many unknowns, at present, as regards the pandemic and planning for a safe summer. We have included some of these below. It is unknown:

1. Whether, after May 20<sup>th</sup>, the restrictions will continue or change;
2. Whether, after May 20<sup>th</sup>, the Government will allow Camps to open. Despite months of effort by the Ontario Camps Association (OCA) to get Camps included as part of the re-opening framework for the province, we are not there, yet. And the process to get us re-opened is neither simple nor quick;
3. Whether, either or both the case numbers and/or the transmission rate will come down enough in time for a re-opening this summer;
4. Whether enough young people (our staff's age) will be *fully* vaccinated in time for the summer;
5. Whether, the variants-of-concern will change in quality or quantity before or over the summer;
6. Whether, the current vaccines (one dose or two) will continue to cover the current and emerging variants-of-concern;
7. Conclusively, whether people with the vaccine can contract the virus - although mounting evidence demonstrates that they can – including the variants;
8. Conclusively, whether people with the vaccine can carry/shed the virus;
9. Who, among everyone planning on coming to Camp, may have an unknown/undiagnosed condition that would make contracting COVID a serious concern; and
10. Who, among everyone coming to Camp, may experience serious complications if they contract COVID.

## HERE IS WHAT WE *DO* KNOW...

“We have fun building great kids.”

Those who know us and have known us... who choose and have chosen us as the Camp to which they send their children or at which they work as staff know that these are not merely words. They are our purpose, our passion, our life. We steadfastly and fervently believe in the power of Camp to change lives; in the importance of Camp as a safe space where kids can *be* themselves and *become* their best selves; in the lifelong positive impacts that come from connecting with one another and to our natural world; in the lifelong friendships that come from living as part of a community...

We believe in children. And we believe in Camp.

Fundamental to this belief are our first two guiding principles:

- The **SAFETY** – of our campers and our staff – is of paramount importance – everywhere and at every moment of the day and night.
- Maintaining a constant **CAMPER FOCUS** is **vital** in all we think, say, and do. **Every** camper is **the** most important reason we are at Camp, and is deserving of our utmost respect, care, and attention – everywhere we are and at every moment of the day and night.

### Here is what we also know:

1. The province of Ontario is struggling under the weight of a third wave. Of particular concern are the **variants-of-concern** which now account for the vast majority of positive cases in Ontario, are exponentially more contagious, and are impacting young people in greater numbers and to greater effect... and which seem to be shifting, themselves, in quality and quantity - with new ones surfacing with seeming and concerning regularity. Recent graphs indicate that the case rates are highest for people 20-39 and are markedly higher for 0–17-year-olds than in Spring 2020. In short, this is a more potent pandemic than the one which caused Camps to be closed last summer;
2. The vast majority of Tawingo Staff are 17-39. Our TLCs are mostly 16 and 17. Our campers are 6 -17;
3. We have been instructed/warned – by Doctors and leaders in the camping community – **to think not in terms of “if” COVID makes its way into Camp, but “when”**. It may not make it into every Camp... but it will absolutely make it into some, or many, or most Camps – no matter the soundness, strictness, or strength of their suite of Public Health (PH) protocols and procedures. It may not impact the entire Camp community – but it will certainly impact the one or more who contract it – either in terms of their Camp stay and/or that of their cohort/cabin... and/or that of the entire Camp; or worse and most concerning, it may impact their short or long-term health;
4. It has been confirmed for us by PH and the OCA that **two positive cases**, in a setting such as ours, constitute an **outbreak** and may well result in a Camp-wide shut-down. Two for a population the size of Tawingo is an exceedingly low threshold (0.003%);
5. Unlike so many other illnesses, viruses, and infections - detecting a positive case of COVID in its early stages does not mitigate the potential severity of its impact;
6. It has become increasingly necessary during the pandemic for hospitals to give nurses additional hours and additional responsibilities. Also, we have learned that under the emergency measures plan, nurses will only be given limited vacation hours. Most of Camp's Health Care team is made up of nurses currently working in large institutions. These institutions, as you know, are struggling under the weight of the demands of the pandemic. This is and must be the current priority. As you can appreciate, this summer, of all summers, is not one in which we can operate without a *full complement* of nurses and a robust Health Care team; and
7. We need six solid weeks, at least, to properly prepare for Camp, employing a full team of Spring Staff, particularly with the additional items that need to be built, bought, and brought into place for a pandemic summer. In consideration of all the unknowns, our runway to Camp will become far too short all too soon.

### We know...

It has been a difficult year... to be sure, a year marked by the strength of the human spirit and our ability to adapt... but a difficult year, nonetheless. This pandemic – its length, the loss it has caused, the instability and social disruption it has imposed, the fatigue it has brought, and the consistent uncertainty it has wrought – has had a clearly defined and detrimental impact on the mental health of many of our young people. And we know that - for those able to enjoy the privilege - Camp, and being part of a community and being outdoors, can and should be an important part of the healing process. In short, kids could really use Camp this, of all summers.

And Camp could really use kids.

In other words, we have felt the loss, too. Deeply. This place is not meant to be empty or quiet... rather, it should be filled with the sight and sound of children. It was our profound hope, indeed, our plan to see it filled, again, this summer... to get your camper here this summer. For months we have been confident that we could and would be able to do just that... safely. And we have worked tirelessly to that end: planning as a Task Force; preparing with Staff; meeting with TLCs; developing an extensive Field Guide (that is driven by Public Health guidelines) that includes a strong testing regime, cohorting as cabins, masking, among many other things; and lining up *multiple* COVID-specific building projects and purchases for the summer. All to arrive at today... and today, we must balance the knowns, unknowns, and risks against the hopes and benefits.

- The **SAFETY** – of our campers and our staff – is of paramount importance

- **Every** camper is **the** most important reason we are at Camp.

We know that as vital as the mental health of our young people is, their physical health, safety, and overall well-being must be our priority, and therefore must drive our decision.

We know we assume some risk every summer at Camp. It is the nature of learning and living in an outdoor setting. This summer is different, we believe. We are all still very much in the grip of this pandemic. In recognition of the known and unknown factors, in recognition of our fundamental principles, in recognition of the health and safety of your camper, of our staff, of our Camp community, and of the wider community, we believe the balance is risk-heavy. We believe it is simply not worth the risk – the very real risk... to any one member of the Tawingo community... not now, not this summer... not yet.

**And so, we have chosen to not open/operate in-person Camp this summer.**

Even writing the words is incredibly difficult... No doubt they are just as difficult for you to read.

It has been a few weeks since the province's projections were made public on April 16<sup>th</sup>. We hope you know that, in that time, we have consulted with Public Health, the Ministry of Labour, with Doctors, Nurses, and leaders in the camping community, and held multiple meetings of our COVID Task Force all with a view to asking ourselves - is there something we may be missing... is there a stone we have left unturned, the turning over of which might cause us to choose differently... would allow us to feel comfortable about the risk we would be assuming on behalf of your children and their counsellors and TLCs? Would allow us to, in any way, comfortably answer the question: "What if I get COVID at Camp?" We have asked and been asked this question (i.e., "Is there anything we may be missing?") over and over... agonizing each time, in tears many times... because *we know* that kids could really use Camp, and that Camp could really use kids. And the answer - the most emotional and difficult we have ever had to deliver is, "No, there is not". Not if we genuinely believe in the fundamental importance of our first two guiding principles. Not if we stand by and behind who we are... and acknowledge the depth of our love and care for each camper, each TLC, each staff member. And we do... unequivocally.

**To not open... and be wrong will break our hearts.**

**Much worse, we believe, would be to open... and be wrong.**

*"The most difficult of the choices we will ever make will never be between the right and the wrong, but the right and the happy."* – Manika Narula

Last year, the government made the choice for us all. And they may very well do so, again. And we could very well wait for their answer. However, doing so will not change our view that this is the right choice for us... for the safety of this community. And, in recognition of our staff's and your need to have time to make other plans, we felt the sooner we communicated this terribly difficult message to you, the better.

It is a supreme understatement to say we are sorry that it has come to this, again, after the year you and your camper may have had... and the year we have had; and yet, we are - sincerely and supremely sorry. We are heart-sick and heart-broken thinking of your camper... of their having one more thing pulled from them by this pandemic... heart-sick and heart-broken for those campers who may have recently come off a Wait List that they have been on for months; for those who have waited *all year* for this... or *two* full years for this... or their *whole lives* for *this* summer... at Camp... waiting and longing to be a camper, to be a camper one last time, to get a Turtle Crest, a Fox Crest... waiting and longing to go on a WJ or a VA... to be a TLC... or counsellor. We are heart-sick and heart-broken for everyone.

It was difficult enough to share this news with you last year when the government made the choice for us... and, we know, difficult enough for you, too – to share the news with your camper and help them navigate their way through the disappointment and loss. We cannot imagine how much more difficult it may be to deliver the message this year. Again, we are terribly and truly sorry. If we can help in some way with this, please lean on us.

If you are currently registered for Day or Overnight Camp we will write to you again, in the coming weeks, detailing all the possible next steps for you – as regards refunds or rolling forward; as regards our oldest campers; and as regards the VA, WJ and TLC. For now, please know that we will do all we can to accommodate everyone.

To finish... or, rather, to look forward...

Camp is a feeling... a feeling like no other. It is virtually impossible to describe and genuinely difficult to explain to others. But it is a feeling we – all of us who choose and know Tawingo - share... a feeling we carry with us and inside us - whether we are at Camp or away from Camp. A feeling that fills up our cups and fills our hearts. A feeling that leads us to reflect – “Camp is my home away from home”. A feeling that – like a flame, can be re-kindled to a blaze at any time of the year... whether we are together or not – a blaze to warm us from the inside out... and light our way forward...

Camp is a feeling. Let us all hold on tightly to it until we meet, again... by the blaze of a Birch Beach campfire.

Camp is also a place. And this place - this Camp - is safe and secure and waiting for your return. We have every intention of being here *and open* for Summer 2022, and Summer 2023, and 2024... and for *every* other summer to our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary... and beyond. To *get* there... to look forward and get back to the Tawingo we know... to the homecoming of summer 2022, the next important choice for us is to close the doors and gates of Camp, this summer... to shut down the better part of the facility, this year. To do so amounts to a huge decision for us. However, this is the best, indeed the only sure path forward for us... the best path to being here for your camper next summer and for summers to come... the best path to having fun building great kids, again.

And we are determined to have fun building great kids, again.

We hope you and your camper can and will join us on the path and journey to Tawingo's brighter future... that you can and will join us for Tawingo's homecoming in 2022.

Until then... may your family find other unique opportunities to be together... and be outside. May you share moments that remind you of how precious life is and how fortunate we are to continue to have hope for tomorrow. May you hold on tightly to the feeling of Camp. May you *know*, in your heart, that we are thinking of you... and , *believe* in your heart, that we are here and we are waiting...

#LetThereAlwaysBeCamp

Be well. Stay safe.

Sincerely and warmly,

The image shows three handwritten signatures in black ink. The top left signature is 'Mike', the top right is 'TIA PEARSE', and the bottom center is 'John Jorgenson'.

Mike & Tia Pearse,  
John Jorgenson