

Facing Forward



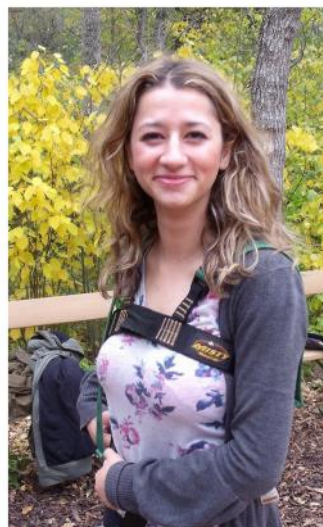
A B O U T F A C E

What an Experience!

...continued from front page

By Colleen Wheatley, Hannah St. Denis-Katz, Bahar Bahrani

Meet Hannah and Bahar. These two women became involved in AboutFace Camp Trailblazers over the winter of 2013. They were diligent in contacting AboutFace staff asking how they could bring a program like Camp Trailblazers to their patients and families in Saskatchewan. As medical students involved with the Cleft Lip and Palate program at Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon, they understood the importance of experiential programming and the benefit of camp in developing resiliency in young people. We are so glad their persistency paid off and after several discussions we agreed that while AboutFace might not have the resources to pilot Camp Trailblazers in a new province (yet), we could work together to raise funds to support some of their patients to attend Camp Trailblazers in Manitoba. It was clear that Hannah and Bahar had enthusiasm for the program, but more importantly, they were committed to making it happen. The two of them saw an opportunity to fundraise by taking part in Leap of Faith, but when they realized that some of the money raised from the program was spent on the fundraisers experience of skydiving they quickly decided to opt out of jumping and put all funds towards camp. Hannah and Bahar had originally planned on escorting the campers to camp and attending a medical conference in the area, but as the date approached, they decided that it was more important to spend the whole time with the campers at camp (and we're glad they did!)



Bahar Bahrani



Hannah St. Denis-Katz



The group from SK and AB!

archery, swimming, arts and crafts and so much more! For most of the Saskatchewan children this was their first camp experience. It was truly a pleasure to see them enjoy themselves and make new friends." - Bahar

"I had previously volunteered for two summers at Camp Liberty with the American Academy of Dermatology which is a camp for children with severe visible dermatological conditions, and I absolutely fell in love with the camp! I witnessed the difference that we were making in these children's lives, making them more confident and increasing their self-esteem. So when Hannah told me about Camp Trailblazers I was ecstatic to hear that there is a similar organization in Canada! I immediately wanted to get involved." - Bahar

"In September 2014 we worked with AboutFace and Central & Northern Saskatchewan Cleft Lip & Palate Program to send 6 Saskatchewan children to Camp Trailblazers Manitoba. We were able to fundraise the required (with added financial support from AF) funds to fly out with the 6 children from Saskatchewan to camp. The Saskatchewan children were quick to engage and make friends with the campers from Alberta and Manitoba. They had a blast at camp participating in all the different activities such as horseback riding, wall climbing,

Facing Forward



A B O U T F A C E

In preparation for camp, Hannah and Bahar arranged for a social gathering and information session for campers and their families. This allowed families to meet each other and learn about Camp Trailblazers. It also helped parents and guardians feel more comfortable with putting their children on a plane and sending them to another province for several days.

Upon arriving in Winnipeg I was expecting a group of seven tired campers (the group met up with another camper flying in from Alberta), and two weary volunteers who had been at the airport before some people start their work day. I was greeted instead with smiles and laughter as we met up with the group before heading to the bus pick up with the rest of the campers who came from different places around Manitoba. Hannah and Bahar had equipped the campers with treat bags to keep them fed and happy during the long day of travel. It seemed like the group had known each other for ages, quick to share their snacks and help one another with crafts and activities. We were joined by a younger camper from Manitoba who was starting to doubt his decision to join us at camp, and it was great to see both volunteers take time to talk with him and his mother about how they could make this easier for them. It was even more outstanding to see each of the campers making a point to welcome him into the group and talk about how much fun he would have at camp.



Bahar and some of the campers.

The energy and excitement in the small group couldn't be contained in one room so after a lunch (supplemented by local apples brought over by our friend Cindy at the Manitoba Centre for Craniofacial Difference) Hannah and Bahar offered to take the group to a nearby park. Before we knew it, was time to meet the rest of the campers and head to Camp Arnes.



Hannah, Bahar, Colleen and the SK campers.

While we waited for the bus, experienced campers from Manitoba welcomed new friends from out of province and again the group made sure to welcome first time campers who were feeling a bit nervous. Including the out of province campers, we had 22 campers and 7 volunteers, our biggest group yet in Manitoba! We had a fun and busy weekend that included high ropes, rock climbing wall, horse and pony rides, swimming, campfires, rain and a surprise blackout in our cabin! Through it all, the group smiled, laughed and supported each other. Campers from Saskatchewan contributed to group discussions and gave great examples of challenges they have encountered while living with a facial difference along with personal experience and tools they have used.

"My most memorable moment from camp was on the last day. We all engaged in an activity called warm fuzzies, where we wrote a note to everyone else in the camp and put in an envelope labeled with their name. I didn't get a chance to read the notes that were left in my envelope until I got home from camp. There were several notes from the Saskatchewan children thanking Hannah and I for taking them to camp. Reading the notes brought tears to my eyes, joyous tears of course as I began to appreciate the difference that we have made in these children's lives." - Bahar

Facing Forward



A B O U T F A C E

"My favorite activity at camp was one of the AboutFace activity times where we discussed how to face difficult situations like being stared at in public. It was difficult to hear about some of the situations that the campers had been in, but also inspirational to hear about how brave and strong they were. I think Camp Trailblazers is important for kids with facial differences because it gives them the chance to interact with other children with facial differences as well as share some of the challenges they face. It gave the children the opportunity to have fun and be kids, but also time to discuss the challenges they face and how to deal with this and understand that others can relate." - Hannah

None of this would have happened without the consistent energy of Hannah and Bahar. There were times the rest of us would go to bed and they would stay up to study, because med students aren't always able to take a day off. AboutFace would like recognize the hard work that these women put into our program and they have already committed to bringing more campers to Camp Trailblazers in 2015. It is exciting to think about the future contributions they will continue to make to patients and their families in the facial difference community as health care professionals. We are lucky to have people like them on our team.



Registration for Camp Trailblazers 2015 is now open! [CLICK HERE](#) for more info and to sign up. Are you interested in sponsoring a child to attend Camp? You can [DONATE HERE!](#)