

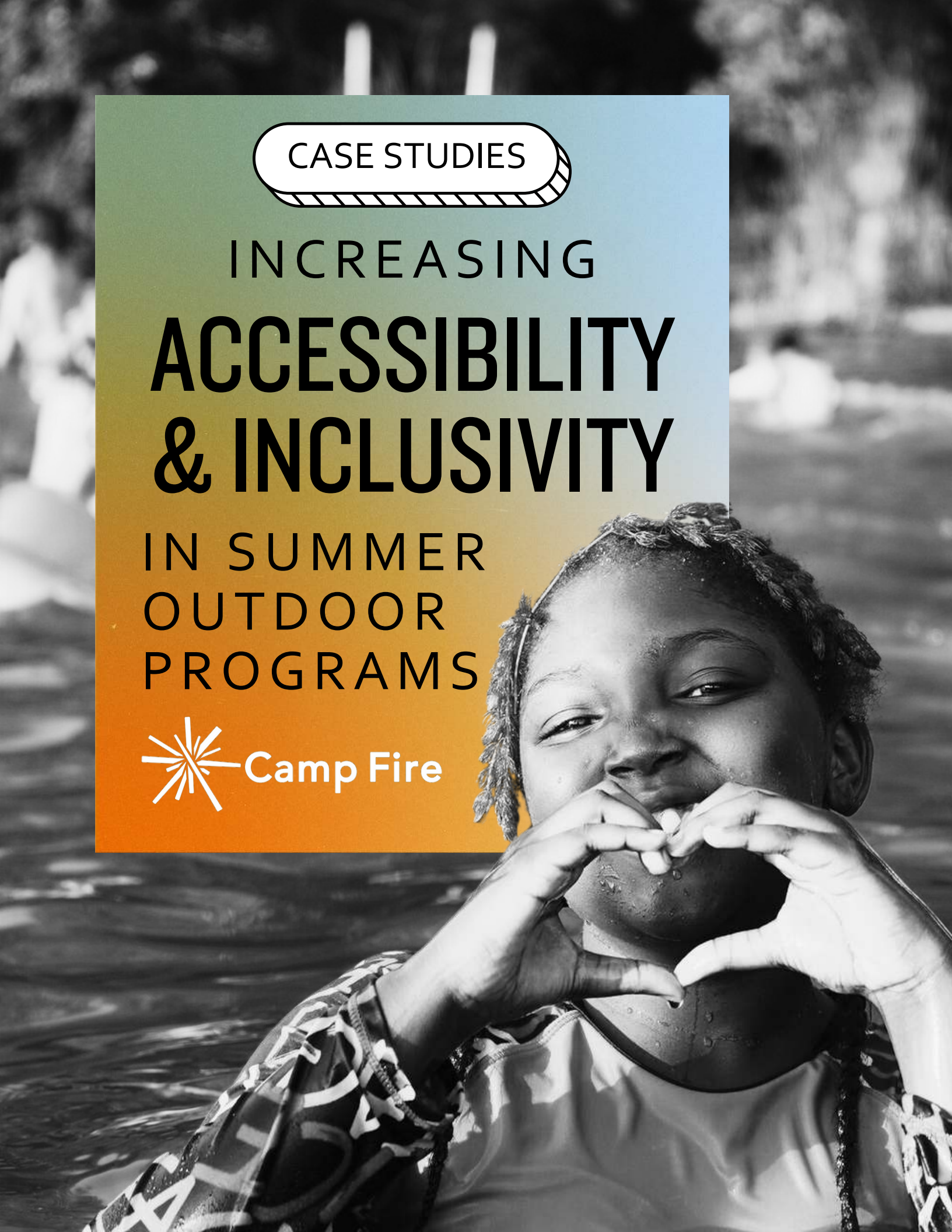
CASE STUDIES

INCREASING
**ACCESSIBILITY
& INCLUSIVITY**

IN SUMMER
OUTDOOR
PROGRAMS



Camp Fire





Camp Fire

Starting in 2022, Camp Fire National staff interviewed Camp Fire affiliate leaders to better understand what they have done to improve their programs and build a sense of belonging for youth. We asked about the specific policies, practices, trainings, and behavior changes that led to positive outcomes. From those conversations, we created case studies to share the successes of three affiliates:

CAMP FIRE

COLUMBIA

Case study based on a
interview with Janette
Kunkel, Executive
Director of Camp
Namanu, Camp Fire
Columbia

THE OVERVIEW:

Camp Namanu's land was acquired in 1923, and it became incorporated as Camp Namanu in 1924. Originally an all-girls camp, it allowed boys in the 1970s and has since evolved to serve youth of all genders. In recent years, the camp has prioritized inclusivity by increasing access to youth with disabilities, youth from families with financial challenges, BIPOC youth, and LGBTQ2S+ youth.



THE CHANGE: INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE CABINS

Camp Namanu staff made significant changes to their cabins to promote inclusivity and accessibility. Through various audits and focus groups, they identified areas for improvement to create a safe and supportive environment where campers and staff could feel a sense of belonging.

One of the audits focused on accessibility from an ADA perspective. Although a fully ADA-compliant camp was not feasible considering the camp's location in a mountainous area, Camp Namanu staff worked to enhance accessibility. This included installing bars in showers and toilets, creating zero-step entry cabins with ADA ramps, and obtaining an accessible electric golf cart to assist with transportation.



To address the needs and concerns of trans and non-binary individuals, Camp Namanu staff designed new cabins with separate changing, showering, and toilet rooms to alleviate anxiety and provide privacy and comfort. Furthermore, Camp Namanu staff incorporated sensory-friendly features, such as dimmable, sound-free lighting and openable windows, to create a comfortable environment for neurodivergent campers.

THE OUTCOME:

- An increase in the percentage of campers and staff identifying as trans or non-binary.
- A positive response from the community, with new families stepping forward to support the camp financially and by sending their children there.
- Maintained strong relationships with its alumni, with the majority continuing to donate, attend alumni events, and support the camp's initiatives.

WHAT WAS NEEDED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Camp Namanu staff were able to implement the necessary changes to create more inclusive and accessible cabins by having the following elements in place:

- Having leaders who recognize the need for change and are committed to addressing the gaps, particularly in terms of financial resources, and a supportive board that possesses the necessary skills, expertise, and vision to support the changes.
- Exploring diverse funding sources and developing a sustainable financial model that does not burden campers with increased registration fees.
- Creating a plan to communicate, educate, and bring alumni, staff, and the community along the journey of change.



“When I asked, ‘why do we want to be inclusive?’ It came down to ‘I want my kids to feel safe,’ or, ‘I want my nieces and nephews or whoever it is that comes to camp to feel safe and to have a place of belonging, to have that heart connection. So they would want to come back year after year.’ And then, okay, if we want that, then how do we bring them in? And how do we value them sooner, and that was where the focus groups came in.”

—JANETTE KUNKEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CAMP NAMANU

CAMP FIRE

HEART OF IOWA

THE OVERVIEW:

Camp Fire Heart of Iowa began as a single-gender, seasonal program and transitioned over the years to offering multi-gender, year-round programming. Today, Camp Fire Heart of Iowa's efforts focus on breaking participation barriers, creating inclusive and accessible experiences for campers and families, and building a safe and affirming environment for all those who attend.

Case study based on an interview with Owen Ballard, Development & Camping Programs Director, Camp Fire Heart of Iowa



THE CHANGE: ALL-GENDER SWIM POLICY

The issue of campers' swimwear has been a challenge each summer: How do we weigh what's appropriate versus what's body-shaming? As Camp Fire Heart of Iowa embarked on 2022 planning, they received feedback from staff and volunteers about other inclusivity issues in the community, including news about a trans man swimming without a shirt at a local community pool. This, coupled with an increase in campers identifying as LGBTQ2S+, led to discussion about what an inclusive swimsuit policy could look like. Camp Fire Heart of Iowa worked in partnership with Camp Fire National Headquarters and a local advocacy agency, Iowa Safe Schools, to determine the new policy.

Ultimately, Camp Fire Heart of Iowa landed on a swimsuit policy that would apply to everyone at the camp—campers, staff, volunteers, adults participating in the program, etc. They asked everyone to be covered from their clavicle to their stomach and to wear swim bottoms, which could be any combination of regular swimsuit bottoms with a swim shirt, a tankini, or a one-piece swimsuit. Camp Fire Heart of Iowa then worked with Camp Fire National Headquarters to receive financial assistance through the Friendship Fund to purchase extra swim shirts, as many anticipated pushback around the requirement of a swim shirt. This eliminated potential financial barriers or lack of awareness around the new policy.

“If we went full, ‘no, this is just like an inclusion thing,’ we know that there would be some families in our programs that would not be happy about that. Whereas if we said, ‘there are three main reasons, one of them is for inclusion and making everybody just feel comfortable at the pool. And then the other two are health and safety related’—we thought that might be a little more palatable. And so when we presented it to staff and to families, we would say three main reasons.”

—OWEN BALLARD, DEVELOPMENT & CAMPING PROGRAMS DIRECTOR,
CAMP FIRE HEART OF IOWA



WHAT WAS NEEDED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Camp Fire Heart of Iowa was able to successfully implement the new swim policy and ensure a positive experience for all participants thanks to the following three components:

- Securing sufficient funding for all the program locations to implement the new policy at the same time.
- Managing the staff’s anticipation and anxiety by creating a communications plan to address diverse opinions and raise awareness of existing inclusive practices.
- Communicated the new policy effectively to all community members to diverse perspectives by presenting three equally important points: inclusion, child safety, and health benefits.

THE OUTCOME:

- Greater inclusion and sense of belonging with LGBTQ2S+ campers, particularly trans and non-binary campers.
- Increased water safety. The shirts are read, orange, and yellow, which increases campers' visibility in the water.
- Reduction in sunburns and UV exposure.
- Campers do not need to ask for help in applying sunscreen.

CAMP FIRE

ALASKA

THE OVERVIEW:

Located in the small community of Cooper Landing, two hours from Anchorage, Camp K has been offering youth programming since 1966. The Camp—much like the summer tourism industry of the town—has continued to evolve since then. Camp K offers the opportunity for youth to experience the wilderness of remote Alaska.



Case study based on interview with Evan Taylor, Program Director at Camp K, Camp Fire Alaska

THE CHANGE: LEADERSHIP IN TRAINING (LIT) PROGRAM

Staff members at Camp K recognized the need to create programming and pathways to reach and support older youth. The standard, natural progression was that campers aged out of programming by 15 or 16 years old, often choosing to get a summer job instead. Instead of just offering additional programming options, Camp K wrote a grant through the American Camp Association for the Leadership Pathways funding. This allowed the camp to structure a more comprehensive and curriculum-based program focused on Leadership in Training (LIT). The grant was written to build on their connections and relationships to bring kids in from more rural Alaskan communities—specifically from Indigenous communities. Now, Camp K can fly kids in and provide a month-long program, including LIT curriculum.

Camp K ran its first LIT program this past year with youth who had previously attended camp in some capacity before. Participating youth received a \$500 stipend for them to not only learn basic skills in youth programming such as how to run and facilitate an activity for younger campers, but also important skills and competencies like relationship-building, teamwork, communications, problem-solving, trauma-informed care, and mental health aid. Participants learned about various styles of leadership and worked to understand and strengthen their own leadership skills.

During the LIT program, youth built their leadership skills, enhanced their understanding of self, sparked interest in the program in younger campers, and participated fully without the usual barriers, such as cost, transportation, food, or housing.

“By design, the hope is that we are not only diversifying the camp environment for campers and for staff, but also building workforce pipelines for both our sleepaway camp as well as our rural program that's working on the local workforce development.”

—MELANIE HOOPER, CEO, CAMP FIRE ALASKA



WHAT WAS NEEDED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

In preparation for Year Two of the implementation of the LIT program, Camp K staff will take into consideration the following five lessons learned:

- Shifted from a Western lens to a more culturally competent and culturally relevant one through trainings.
- Building and maintaining relationships with rural Alaskan and Indigenous communities by creating opportunities for shared design and implementation of the program and working together to remove barriers to participation.
- Creating varied leadership tracks to meet the interests of participating youth.
- Restructuring the staffing model to allow some staff to focus exclusively on the LIT program.
- Building awareness about the program and supporting recruitment by developing a strong marketing plan.

THE OUTCOME

“Everyone had their own outcome, but the main overarching topic was being able to lead yourself to where you want to go.”

- Greater focus on cultivating safe spaces to learn about your own leadership style.
- The opportunity to step into adulthood without having consequences of failure; youth were free to explore and try something new.
- Support in building new skills and self-confidence.