

# Youth learn resilience at summer camp

Without phones and parents, kids grow their independence

BY SARAH PEARSON

**S**leeping in cabins. Paddling on the lake. Hiking in the woods. Making crafts. Building a campfire.

In many ways, summer camps have not changed much since the 1880s, when New Hampshire's first programs began. They connect young people with nature, provide space to test independence and teach skills kids aren't learning in the classroom.

Now, there's an added component: getting kids away from their phones.

"A lot of the parents can't wait for the girls to get away from social media, from screens, get back to just being a kid, being out in nature, just being with their friends,

working on independence, building resilience," says Susan Hild, president of the NH Camps Association and director of Camp Merriwood, a girls camp her grandmother founded in 1949.

"If you look at how kids interact these days, it's on mobile devices, it's through game platforms, and there's always the sort of hum of technology," says Nick Robbins, director of Camp Mowglis, a boys' overnight camp. "Camp is an opportunity to totally step away from all that and have quality interpersonal interactions, real friendships, to be partaking in activities in the great outdoors."

Those qualities all come together through the overnight summer camp experience. Children are introduced to cabinmates they've never met before and work out living together, without parents, for weeks at a time. They learn activities they may have never been exposed to yet. The school-year regimented schedule with classes, sports and lessons falls away.

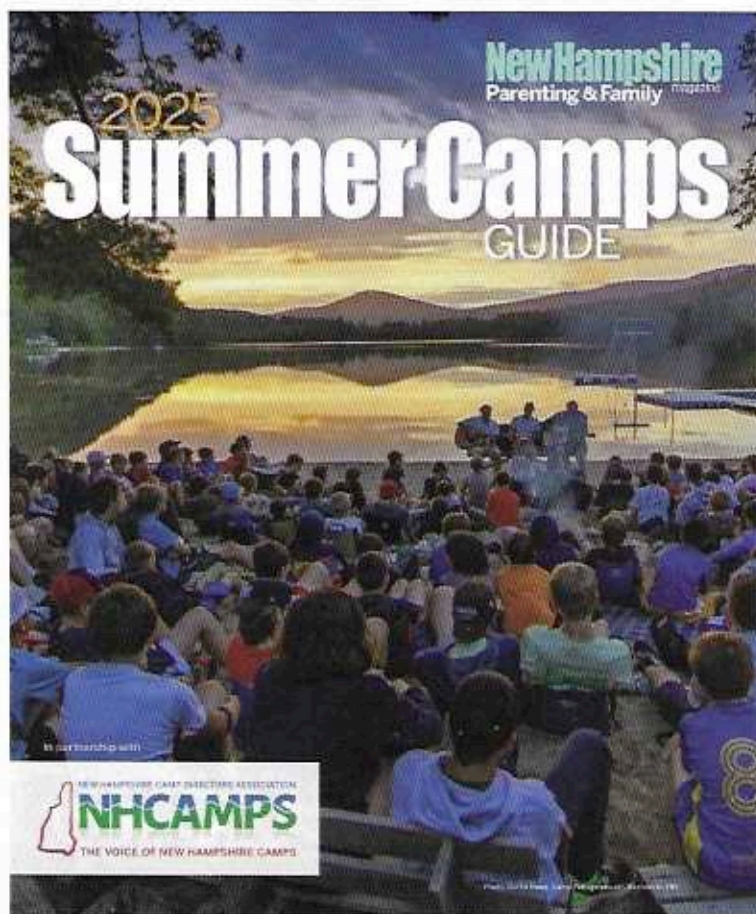
All the while not having access to Google for an instant answer or entertainment a click away.

"Sometimes things are difficult," Hild says. "They're hard. You have to push through. Whether it be somebody missing home or getting up on water skis. You just got to have to push through and build that resilience."

Sleepaway camps force youth to advocate for themselves and work hard for the things they want to achieve.

Tammy Fortune, director of Camp Wa-Klo for girls, explains that camp activities are pathways to more intangible skills.

"What camps are doing, we're building the skills that you don't see," Fortune says. "We're using archery and all these activities to help build grit and perseverance. And the kids think that they're just there to have fun."



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Mastering a sport or activity isn't the end goal itself, but a means for opportunities, many of which children can't access during their day-to-day, school-year life.

"In archery class, they are learning how to shoot a bullseye, but they're not going to shoot a bullseye the first week or two or even sometimes three. So we're sitting there teaching them how to build grip and how to persevere and how to push through, and also how to fail and be OK with it," Fortune says. "Every teacher I ever worked with wanted to build kids up, but they are having to split their time because academics are the larger focus at school."

Many campers find that time without their phones isn't so bad when there are so many other things to experience. They have the opportunity to explore activities that they're interested in.

"We're offering things like woodworking, rock climbing, fencing, theater, photography, nature studies, stuff that's really kind of new and different. Kids are going to come and learn a new skill, and they're going to feel good about that," Robbins says. "Then they're going to come home with that new-found confidence: 'I can learn new things.'"

"There's something about goal setting. It's not instant gratification," Robbins says. "You might hit the target in archery, right? But to get a qualifying score, you've got to stick with it. It's definitely an opportunity for kids to learn persistence and patience and resilience."

And even if kids aren't having fun every second of every day, that's OK. It's just another lesson.

"Being bored is all right," Hild says. "It's OK to be kind of lost in your thoughts, being lost with your friends, just hanging out down by the lake and reading or playing a game of Apples to Apples or UNO."

For parents interested in exploring what options are available for their children, NH Camps has a directory of the many day and overnight camps that give youth access to new opportunities in picturesque New Hampshire locations.

"It's just such a wonderful opportunity for kids to gain independence," Hild says. "Kids need to be with other kids. They need that time to interact with other kids out in nature, and the mental health and the physical health benefits are really important." **NH**

**Bare Knuckle Murphy's**  
163 Lake Ave., Manchester, NH  
603-623-6066  
<http://www.bareknucklemurphy.com>

**Berwick Academy**  
31 Academy St., South Berwick, ME  
207-384-6112  
<https://www.berwickacademy.org/summer-camps>

**Camp Glen Brook**  
35 Glen Brook Road, Marlborough, NH  
603-876-3342  
[glenbrook.org](http://glenbrook.org)

**Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains**  
(888) 474-9686  
[www.girlscoutsgwm.org/en/camp/our-camps.html](http://www.girlscoutsgwm.org/en/camp/our-camps.html)

**McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center**  
2 Institute Drive, Concord, NH  
603-271-7827  
[www.starhop.com](http://www.starhop.com)

**New Hampshire Audubon**  
84 Silk Farm Road, Concord, NH  
603-224-9909  
<https://nhaudubon.org>

**NH Climbing & Fitness**  
10 Langdon Ave., Concord, NH  
603-715-9171  
[www.nhclimbinggym.com](http://www.nhclimbinggym.com)

**The Palace Theater**  
80 Hanover St., Manchester, NH  
603-668-5588  
<https://palacetheatre.org>

**Scouting America New Hampshire**  
300 Blondin Road, Manchester, NH  
603-625-6431  
[www.603summercamp.org](http://www.603summercamp.org)

**SEE Science Center**  
200 Bedford St., Manchester, NH  
603-669-0400  
[www.see-sciencecenter.org/see-camps-and-programs](http://www.see-sciencecenter.org/see-camps-and-programs)

**The Granite YMCA**  
117 Market St., Manchester, NH  
603-782-2801  
[www.graniteymca.org/camps](http://www.graniteymca.org/camps)

**World Academy**  
138 Spit Brook Road, Nashua, NH  
603-888-1982  
[www.worldacademynh.com/programs/camp#intro](http://www.worldacademynh.com/programs/camp#intro)

**YMCA of Greater Nashua**  
10 Cotton Rd., Suite 1, Nashua, NH  
603-598-1533  
[www.nymca.org/summercamps](http://www.nymca.org/summercamps)  
[graniteymca.org/camps](http://graniteymca.org/camps)

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