**BEYOND RESPITE: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF SUMMER CAMP FOR TEENS WITH NEUROBIOLOGICAL DISORDERS**

**Jenna Simpson1, Nicole Yantzi1**

**Laurentian University**

**Objectives:** Critical disability research has often focused on the perspectives of individuals with physical disabilities. As a result, people with neurobiological disorders such as learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder have been largely excluded from the conversation. Additionally, youth with neurobiological disorders are often assumed to lack the skills or insight to communicate and advocate for the needs of their community. This study engaged a group of high needs adolescents with neurobiological disorders to explore what attending summer camp means to them.

**Method:** Adolescents at a sleepaway summer camp with youth with neurobiological disorders were invited to participate in a photovoice project. While attending their two-week camp session, the teens were provided with digital cameras and asked to capture what summer camp means to them. After taking their photos, they were invited to an individual conversational interview to contextualise their photos and talk about the meaning of camp from their perspectives. Both photographs and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** Twenty three adolescents participated in taking photos and 13 were subsequently interviewed. The results were an in-depth exploration about what the teens with neurobiological disorders had learned at summer camp. Three key themes were identified; *I Can Do It, Personal Growth,* and *Life Lessons*. The participants discussed the value of skill mastery and learning social skillswhile at camp. The also talked about growing up and maturing and the role that summer camp had played on a personal level. Finally, participants talked about big life lessons that they learned at summer camp including “be yourself”, “what is inside counts”, and “direction, not perfection”.

**Discussion:** This research project provided teens with neurobiological disorders an opportunity to participate in research and express their perspectives. Their rich descriptions of what they have learned at summer camp support the concept that summer camps and similar respite services have meaning to their participants beyond providing a break to caregivers.

**Correspondence:**

Jenna Simpson, B.Sc.

Laurentian University

95 Ramsey Lake Rd

Sudbury, ON, P3E 2C6

jsimpson@laurentian.ca