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Image: Cassie Corrigan Drymala



Image: Allison Engkvist

**TRANSFORMING LIVES,
SUMMER BY
SUMMER**

For thousands of children from underserved communities in New York City, summer isn't just a season — it's a whole other world. That time is filled with bike riding, s'mores, new friends, swimming in lakes, catching fireflies in the twilight, and endless stretches of grass, perfect for running and doing cartwheels. For more than 145 years, The Fresh Air Fund has been transporting children to the world of summer, and in the process, empowering them to create new worlds of their own.

the Fresh Air fund
because a summer can last a lifetime™



Image: Jenna Bascom

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
A camper learns how to play the guitar at The Fund's Camp Junior in New York's Harriman State Park.

Making lifelong friends is a highlight of every summer at The Fresh Air Fund.

A camper soars through the trees on the high ropes course at The Fund's Sharpe Reservation in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley.

Luis and Jayden enjoy an exciting day at a water park as part of The Fund's Friendly Towns Program.

Hailey celebrates after completing a hopscotch course at Camp Junior.

Campers have fun while playing tug-of-war at Camp Hayden-Marks.

A camper prepares her bow and arrow during archery class.



Image: Sandy Elkind



Image: Alexander Milligan



Image: Allison Engkvist



CAMP MARIAH: WHERE DREAMS MEET DIRECTION

ABOVE: At Camp Mariah, children make new friends while building independence and life skills.

BELOW LEFT: Sky (left) focuses on a chess match at Camp Mariah.

BELOW RIGHT: Teamwork is a fundamental skill campers develop in robotics class.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: Children explore their creativity during art class at Camp Mariah.

OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: Campers enjoy kayaking at Camp Junior.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: Children form lasting connections with the friends they make at Camp Mariah.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: Playing soccer is a favorite activity for campers and counselors.

Since it began in 1994, the career-focused Camp Mariah, named after icon extraordinaire and Fresh Air Fund board member Mariah Carey, has evolved and expanded — but it's always maintained its heart. Set at the end of a winding, leafy road in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley, far from the sounds of the city, Camp Mariah encourages independence and self-reliance in ways big and small. Life skills are embedded in nearly every activity: learning to work as a team, communication, trust. For the middle schoolers who have spent their summers at Camp Mariah, it is family, and it is home.

Each summer, hundreds of kids board buses from New York City, where, after two hours, they're met with cheering counselors, woods, grassy fields and a crystal clear lake. There, they spend an action-packed three weeks filled with traditional camp-like activities such as swimming, hiking, archery and sports, plus career-oriented classes: robotics, environmental science, creative writing, culinary arts, dance, photography and film production.

Camp Mariah is part of the year-round Career Awareness Program, which keeps campers connected and focused on their goals. Students participate in camp weekends and tutoring, as well as job shadowings, touring workplaces like architecture, tech and law firms, where they explore their own career interests. "The exposure to so many different things and people helped me learn to navigate the world with more confidence," said former camper, Ariel Pierre, now a rising executive working in finance. "Camp Mariah changed my life and opened my eyes to what's possible."

After finishing middle school and the Career Awareness Program, many go on to the College Connections Program. There they spend evenings after school with mentors, learning about time management and the college application process — including SAT prep,

essay writing and filling out applications and financial aid forms.

Above all, one of the most important aspects of the College Connections Program is found right in the name: the connections. "My favorite part is how the program keeps the same group of students and mentors together from start to finish," said Ralph, a high school senior. "It's awesome because we get to really bond and basically become like a big, extended family."

FROM MOCK INTERVIEWS TO MUSIC LESSONS: A SUMMER OF GROWTH

Ricky, 12, had never heard of a resume before he came to Camp Mariah, nor had he ever experienced anything like an interview. Now he's intensely preparing for the camp's Career Fair — it includes both — and is serious business here. Campers vie for mock jobs, interviewing with counselors posing as potential employers. While winners don't earn actual jobs, they do earn big-time bragging rights and effective preparation for the real world.

Striding confidently into a makeshift office, Ricky offered a firm handshake

to counselor/potential boss Jace, and sat down opposite him. Jace shuffled papers and smiled encouragingly. "What are your greatest strengths?" he asked. Ricky thought for a moment. "I'm very self-motivated," he answered. "I'll try to do what I need to do before you ask."

As the campers finished their mock interviews — many seemed relieved — it was on to less potentially high-stress activities, like music class.

With encouragement from guitar teacher Tor Snyder, Dyland, 14, strummed his guitar tentatively, grinning as he created his first chords. Soon he was strumming a just recognizable "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

Through a long-time partnership with The ASCAP Foundation, which provides guitars and on-site music teachers to all of The Fund's camps, guitar class is, for many, a rare chance to hold an instrument and take music lessons. "This is one of my favorite things here," said Dyland, carefully practicing his chords. "I hope I can keep learning how to play when I get home."

Other kids are busy at the robotics class, applying basic engineering concepts to the creation of flashing, moving, robots/machines. Michael and Aytken are busy soldering cables as they construct an LED cube that, if all goes right, will blink in coded patterns. As counselor Daniel, a college student

from Mexico studying electronics and engineering, watched over the campers, the boys tentatively pushed the red button on top of their creation. Immediately red, blue and yellow lights began to flash. "It's working," said Michael, with excitement mixed with surprise. "I like to figure out how electricity works, it's very interesting to me," said the budding engineer. "This will help me build things at home, to use my creativity."

After lunch, some campers headed to photography class, strolling around the lake, cameras in hand. Cristian leaned in close to a wildflower, snapping it from different angles then admiring his work. "I really love taking pictures of flowers," he said, before changing his focus to his friends, who laughed and joked in the afternoon sun. As the day wore on, the amateur photographers showed no signs of slowing down.

Soon enough however, it was time for environmental science, and a scavenger hunt. In groups of three, the campers were tasked with solving riddles and finding nature elements of varying colors. "Look there's blue," called Jai'den, 12, pointing at a flower peeking out behind a rock. Karima, the counselor in charge and a Camp Mariah alum, remembers her days exploring nature at camp, and how inspiring it was. "There's an excitement to it," she said. "It teaches kids to look closer at the world around them, the hidden beauty that's everywhere."

For some campers, chess class was daunting — but not for Sky, 12, the reigning Chess King, who has been playing chess with his father and brother since the age of 8. Is he the best player at camp? "People consider me the best," he responded modestly. Sky enjoys the mental exercise of chess, and, in a show of maturity beyond his years, extrapolates life lessons like accountability and responsibility. "If you make a mistake in chess, you lose a piece," he said. "And in chess, only you are responsible for your choices, and those choices affect the game. Like your choices affect your life." Sky is hoping to win the upcoming chess tournament, though, he

“Being at Camp Mariah has made me way more confident. I've become more outgoing and better at sharing how I feel. I can't wait for next summer!”

ELLIE
CAMPER

noted, "Everyone can have a bad day, or a really good day, so you never know who is going to win."

A group of campers are cooking up a storm in culinary arts class. For Jai'den, this is his favorite class by far. They've made pizza, pita chips and salsa. Today he's enjoying his latest creation, rice krispy treats. "I can go home and prove to my family I can cook now," he said. When he's not cooking, Jai'den loves swimming in the lake; if he could, he would spend most of his time there.

Annie's favorite class is dance. "It's so energizing," she said. Currently the girls are at work on a hip-hop number, with complicated-looking choreography that does not phase Annie in the least. She's looking forward to a show-stopping performance in front of the entire camp. "We've been working on it since day one, and I've got the choreography down. I can't wait to do it in front of everyone. It's really active here, that's what I love most about camp."

The essence of camp — besides the

emphasis on careers, bonding, teamwork and fun — is an atmosphere that's at once uplifting, nurturing and real. "Being at Camp Mariah has made me way more confident," said 12-year-old Ellie from Brooklyn. "I'm basically friends with everyone now. I've become more outgoing and better at sharing how I feel. I can't wait for next summer."

COUNTDOWN TO SUMMER

For thousands of children from New York City's underserved communities, participating in The Fresh Air Fund's summer programs is the start of an amazing journey full of new experiences and adventures. Thanks to many generous partners and supporters, campers discover a world full of expanded opportunities and new possibilities. The Fresh Air Fund's "Countdown to Summer" has begun! Learn more at FreshAir.org.

BECAUSE A SUMMER CAN LAST A LIFETIME

Since its founding in 1877, The Fresh Air Fund, an independent, not-for-profit organization, has provided free life-changing summer experiences in the outdoors to more than 1.8 million children from New York City's underserved communities. At sleepaway camps in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley, visiting volunteer host families along the East Coast, and in NYC-based programs, children learn new skills, have fun and gain new perspectives. Youth also participate in year-round leadership, career exploration and educational programs. Learn more at FreshAir.org.





CAMP MARIAH: GROWING UP & GIVING BACK

It's a process that's transmitted through the ages: camper, CIT (counselor-in-training), counselor and then, possibly, the pinnacle: camp director. For these counselors, each step represents another milestone on their Fresh Air Fund journey, growing their confidence for success at camp, and in life.

KARIMA

When she came to Camp Mariah at age 12, Karima, an only child, had her first experience living with other kids. "It was eye-opening," said Karima, now 20. "At first, I had a hard time sharing my space with so many girls. It was a very new dynamic for me."

Over the course of several summers, adjusting to that dynamic transformed her, turning her into a more flexible person, a team player. Surrounded by so many new friends and supportive counselors, Karima's confidence grew. "I was picked on at school," she said. "Camp helped me feel good about myself and to stand up for myself. And later, the bullying at school stopped."

These experiences informed Karima's focus as a counselor. She learned to become a giver, to be a stabilizing presence for the campers no matter what else was going on, to put her focus on the kids and what they needed. "I had to learn to be calm when things get hectic — and they get hectic a lot," she said. "I do what needs to be done, even when I'm not in the mood." Even if that means playing kickball when she was tired, or leading cheers when her voice was hoarse. Going the extra mile as a counselor had its own positive effect on her life. "When I push myself, I not only feel good that I did it, I usually enjoy myself too. And it spilled over to school — when I'm not in the mood to study, I do it anyway."

A biology major at UMass Boston, Karima always loved the sciences and dreamed of becoming a doctor. Her interest took a definitive turn toward obstetrics when, as a young teen, she learned about the disproportionately

high maternal mortality rates among Black women and the underrepresentation of Black women in the field of obstetrics. The Fund's College Connections Program helped her get on that path. "They guided me through the application process, financial aid and choosing a college," she said. "I'm leading the way for others."

As much as she looks toward a bright future, Karima also looks back, recognizing how much the two come together. "My years as a camper, then becoming a counselor, have shown me how strong I am, how much I can accomplish, and that I always have The Fresh Air Fund by my side."

DERRELL

At age 9, Derrell was sure he would one day be a professional basketball player.

Now an 18-year-old-camper-turned-counselor, Derrell still dreams of basketball and practices his layup every chance he gets, but his career aspirations have changed. A student at Borough of Manhattan Community College, the diehard animated movie fan is studying animation and motion graphics. And while he hasn't committed to a definite career path, he credits Camp Mariah with providing the tools and guidance necessary to create a positive future for himself. It's why he chose to become a counselor: to give kids like himself confidence, support and direction. "Camp changed and molded me," Derrell said. "It taught me to be myself, and showed me how big the world can be. I want to share that with the campers."

When the Queens resident first arrived at Camp Hayden-Marks as a child, he adjusted quickly. Instead of traf-

fic and cement there was space to run around, big green fields, swimming, sports — including his beloved basketball — and lots of quiet. Derrell tried archery for the first time and became so proficient that he is now an instructor at Camp Mariah's archery classes. He spent much of the school year counting down the days until summer.

As a quiet kid who preferred the sidelines, at times Derrell found himself in unfamiliar territory — particularly during dance class at Camp Mariah. Tasked with learning intricate hip-hop choreography with his more adept peers and then performing at the final camp show, he was way out of his element. "I wouldn't say I'm naturally gifted with rhythm," he confessed. However, this experience ultimately served as a catalyst for personal growth and a significant shift in his mind-set. "Back then, I was shy, easily embarrassed and lacked confidence," he said. "But I got so much support and encouragement from my friends and counselors, and by pushing through it, I began to try new things, take chances and put myself out there more."

Becoming a CIT and then a junior counselor was another confidence booster. Derrell developed older-brother-like bonds with younger campers, connecting over basketball and conversations during cabin time. As he encouraged them to express themselves, he also learned to communicate better.

As a counselor, Derrell juggles a lot more responsibilities. It's a job he takes very seriously, and he tries his best to understand his campers' individual needs, dreams and challenges. In fact, he's even considering a new career path: child psychologist. "I like helping kids," he said. "And watching them grow, it reminds me of my younger self."

OLIVIA

Back when she was 11, Olivia thought the three-week-long, career-focused Camp Mariah was too long and would feel like school. But her friends from Camp Hidden Valley were going, so she decided, "Why not?" And although there were school-like aspects to Mariah, Olivia loved it. "The classes were fun and interesting, like dance and photography. And we didn't have homework. Or tests."

Over the course of three summers, Olivia attended career fairs and practiced mock job interviews, where she learned the importance of eye contact. She overcame her longtime stutter in public speaking and drama class — giving her the courage to speak in front of 100 people at a Fresh Air Fund event. "That would have been unimaginable to me a few years before," she said. With guidance from her mentors in the Career Awareness Program, Olivia is now a sophomore at City College, studying business management. "Camp gave me incredible focus and confidence."

For Olivia, becoming a counselor means giving her campers what she was given, with the benefit of her own time at camp. "When kids are a little homesick, I tell them 'you may not like it now, but on the last day you'll wish you could stay longer.' I'm pretty much always right." And as a city girl, she knows how transformative camp can be: the greenery, the space, the fresh air, the feeling of safety.

She still experiences many magical moments at Sharpe Reservation. "Sometimes, I just take a deep breath and enjoy the quiet and the beauty in every direction," she said. "One night, as I walked, I was struck by how the moon lit up my path and the entire camp — I had never realized how bright the moon could be."

As a counselor, Olivia learned to tune in to the kids and to fill their needs as best she can. "I know that sometimes they feel vulnerable and alone, being away from home, and I have to be a mentor and friend at that moment," she said. "I'm just doing what I saw my counselors

“The Fresh Air Fund gives me the momentum to keep pushing forward. I'm grateful I can give that to other kids.”

OLIVIA
COUNSELOR

ORLANDO

When Orlando became a counselor, he knew he had a tough act to follow. "My counselors were amazing," he said. "We had a great connection, and they made camp so fun. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people the way my counselors had made a difference in mine."

Orlando's connection to his counselors began when he was 11, waiting for the bus that would take him to camp for the first time. He had never been away from home, and was jittery with nerves. "I didn't know what to expect, I was scared," he said. Once he boarded the bus, however, the counselors made him forget he was nervous; they were friendly, upbeat, and turned the trip into an adventure. Seven years later, many of the kids from that bus ride are

still his friends.

Still, even as he made friends and began to relax, camp was an adjustment — different as it was from the Bronx. There were hikes and even overnight camping trips. "I was not used to being in the wilderness, and I had no idea what might come out of the dark," he said. And yet, after just a few days at camp, he didn't want it to end; he describes it as the best time of his young life thus far.

Today, his former counselors are always on Orlando's mind as he interacts with his 12-year-old campers, trying hard to be that guy who always looks out for everyone else and makes sure they have a great time. Not that it's always easy to go from being a kid without a care in the world, to a counselor with a lot of responsibility. He was accustomed to the life of a camper — i.e., a life without concern for schedules or safety. "As a counselor, you have to be on top of a lot of things, all the time," he said.

Now a freshman at Lehman College, Orlando credits The Fresh Air Fund and the Career Awareness Program with helping him get into college and showing him what's possible.

His goals? "Maybe one day I'll be director of Camp Mariah," he said. "Then I can make sure that future generations of campers have the same amazing experiences that I did. It's made me who I am today."

OPPOSITE, TOP: (Left to right) Orlando, Karima, Olivia and Derrell have all grown from campers to counselors at Camp Mariah.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Campers discover a new passion for playing the guitar at Camp Junior.

ABOVE LEFT: Campers are excited to try the high ropes course at The Fund's Sharpe Reservation.

ABOVE RIGHT: A counselor guides a camper in archery class.

BELOW LEFT: Counselors act as mentors and role models for campers.

BELOW RIGHT: Emmie, Aniyah and Ella enjoy spending time together in the pool at Camp Hidden Valley.

SUMMER CAMP ADVENTURES

At overnight camps in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley, children ages 8-15 hike wooded trails and learn about the environment while exploring the outdoors. Camp activities include swimming lessons, sports, boating, art and music classes, and activities that focus on leadership development, STEM and more. They return home with more confidence, new skills and new friends. In a typical summer, more than 3,000 children attend Fresh Air summer camps.

Five of The Fund's sleepaway camps are located on Sharpe Reservation, a more than 2,000-acre property with nature trails, lakes and streams, a Model Farm and planetarium, in Fishkill, NY. The Fund's sixth camp, Camp Junior in Harriman State Park, is for children ages 8-15 from the Bronx and is named in memory of Lesandro "Junior" Guzman-Feliz, a victim of gang violence.

STAYING CONNECTED

The Fund's year-round enrichment programs maintain connections and provide ongoing support. The tutoring program matches students with volunteers for one-on-one help with academic skill building and to serve as trusted role models. The College Connections Program provides guidance, resources and ongoing support for students as they apply to college and explore a full range of post-secondary options.

The Young Women's Giving Circle (YWGC) is a youth-led program, which teaches young women about the importance of community service and the power of philanthropy. The Circle of Brotherhood program provides young men with a safe and supportive space to discuss issues related to healthy manhood. Camp Junior participants, youth ages 8-15 from the Bronx, participate in year-round activities including a running club, self-defense and leadership workshops and service projects.



Image: Gaja Brooks



Image: Jenna Bascom

Image: Jenna Bascom

Image: Katie Borazac

Image: Credit TK

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PUBLIC SERVICE SUPPLEMENT

TEENS BUILD A BRIGHT FUTURE

ABOVE: Jeniffer (left) and Fiona (right) focus on building a new sign for Camp ABC.

BELOW LEFT: Kailey (left) and Hasseena (right) proudly display their new "CIT" sign for Camp ABC.

BELOW RIGHT: Eric (right) works with his counselors on a project through the Design to Thrive program.

OPPOSITE, TOP: Abby and Maura have shared countless memories together through the Friendly Towns Program.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: Maura (left) and Abby (right) love to go kayaking together.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The Svendsen-Tehan family warmly welcomes Abby upon her return to Berkley, Mass.

With the focus and precision of a surgeon, Hasseena pressed a long piece of oak firmly against another, its corners forming a "V" shape. "Clamp" she ordered; Kailey immediately gripped the wood with a blue bracket, while Hasseena drilled a perfect hole through both pieces. Moving their safety goggles to their foreheads, the 16-year-olds – both CITs from Camp ABC – high-fived, admiring their handywork.

After hours more of intense sawing, hammering and drilling, Hasseena and Kailey posed proudly beside their finished product: a new sign for Camp ABC – simple yet stylish, with light blue letters made of wood, a heart dotting the "i" nailed into bright white boards.

"It feels good to start from nothing, and then see something completely new come out of it," said Hasseena. "I didn't think I'd be so into this, but now I want to go home and build more stuff."

Throughout the summer, CITs from across The Fund's camps learn basic carpentry skills as part of the Design to Thrive program, a partnership between The Fresh Air Fund and PennPraxis at the University of Pennsylvania Stuart Weitzman School of Design, introduced by Fresh Air Fund Board Chairman William Lauder and his partner Lori Kanter Tritsch.

Meeting twice weekly under the guidance of PennPraxis instructors, CITs designed, built, stained and painted benches, chairs and camp and cabin signs, using reclaimed wood as well as wood from red oak trees that had fallen on campgrounds. In between learning how to sand wood and use power tools, they learned about color theory, design principles and composition.

"Students were engaged right off the bat," said PennPraxis Program Associate Daniel Flinchbaugh. "The projects went in order from small to large, and from the very beginning, everyone was excited about the work. And they learned a lot about themselves, and about the possibilities of influencing their environment through what they build." There were challenges along the way – incorporating the ideas of other kids in their teams, getting comfortable with tools, and developing the patience and focus needed to work on the same

project week after week. But all in all, the kids rose to the occasion.

Indeed, besides the hands-on skills, Design to Thrive is all about teamwork and collaboration, as kids tackle challenges and solve problems by working together. "I liked that I was able to find new ways of understanding how to work with others," said Camp ABC CIT Fiona. "Working with a partner is fun, and all the physical activities helped us learn in new ways."

By the end of camp, the CITs had a variety of completed projects – they were particularly proud of their new welcome signs, each an original, with a different shape and design: adorned with hearts, stars and peace signs, bold swirling colors, handprints, and one embellished with the word "welcome" in a dozen different languages.

Yes, there were lessons on sustainability, and an emphasis on understanding the life cycle of materials: where they come from and where they go. But mostly it was about building projects, together, and seeing the results of their labor. Between the whirring sound of drills and the echo of hammers, the experience was an awakening of sorts for many of the campers. "This has been very rewarding," said Camp Hayden-Marks CIT Eric, relaxing in the chair he built – which was solid, heavy and ergonomically constructed, making it surprisingly comfortable. "I was able to see my creation grow over time, which makes me want to build more things."

Through these construction projects, students did more than master the use and understanding of tools and materials; they learned to trust their instincts and embrace the joy of creating something unique, a manifestation of their efforts, creativity and perseverance. It instilled in them a pride of ownership – evident in the smiles and swaggers

that accompanied completed projects.

"I love being able to say, 'I made this,'" said Isaac, a CIT at Camp Hayden-Marks. "Learning woodworking skills like sanding and building furniture was really cool. The work was hard but was super satisfying." Beyond gaining carpentry skills, students gained life skills: "We really stressed the iteration process," said PennPraxis Program Associate Flinchbaugh. "Students had to design and redesign with our feedback again and again. The idea of iteration is not just critical for design, but also for life. The first time you do something isn't going to be the best time you do it. You're going to learn."

Richard, a CIT at Camp Tommy, loved wielding the power drill, confidently putting the finishing touches on his chair. He stood back, admiring the results. For him, seeing a concrete result of his effort was worth everything. "My favorite thing was being able to learn skills that are useful in the real world and being able to see and create something I can physically hold or use in my day-to-day life," he said. "I learned a lot about how every little part of the building process is necessary, even the small things."

Jeniffer and her twin sister, Jocelyn, clearly made a good team. It helped that Jocelyn attends a school that teaches woodworking. Jeniffer never used a saw before but has gotten the hang of it. She especially loves dismantling old furniture to reuse in her projects. She's ready to go home and make something of her own.

"Doing this, which was kind of hard and something I never would have done on my own, makes me feel like I want to try other new things," she said. "I feel like I have no limits. That I can succeed at whatever I try."

BEYOND FRIENDSHIP: STARS & SISTERHOOD

Abby, 15, and Maura, 12, are BFFs – although "friend" doesn't come close to capturing their bond. "She's my best friend, my sister, my favorite person," gushed Abby. "I love her so much, and we can talk about anything, do anything together, and it will always be fun." Indeed, since Abby began spending her summers at Maura's house nearly 10 years ago, they've done everything together, from swimming and baking to sharing their hopes and dreams. That Abby lives in busy East Flatbush, Brooklyn and visits Maura in green-as-far-as-the-eye-can-see, uber-quiet Berkley, Mass., population 6,764, is beside the point.

"We agree on pretty much everything," Maura said. "We have the same ideas, we like the same things. She's like a big sister in some ways, she always has good advice. And she's not bossy like some big sisters."

Host mother Kara Svendsen's family hosted Fresh Air Fund children when she was a child, and she knew that, when the time was right, it was something she would do, too. "As kids, we always looked forward to when the other kids would arrive, we loved the time together and we grew from the experience," she said. "I wanted that for my family."

And while Svendsen and her husband, Timothy Tehan, have always made sure that Abby's time in Berkley is filled with fun activities, the relationship between Abby and their daughter, Maura, has become the main attraction. "When Abby first visited, she was 6 and my daughter was 3, and I remember thinking, 'Will they be friends, or is it too many years apart?'" Svendsen said. "It couldn't have worked out any better. Abby is the best big sister figure I could ever imagine. She has such a love for life."

Planning for Abby's arrival is a family affair, created as the ultimate "staycation" for the whole household. They go to the beach, drive-in movies, swimming and boating in the river down the block, concerts and museums. And they always do one new activity none of them have done before.

But one of Abby's favorite outings didn't take place in the summer, or in Massachusetts – it was the day that the Svendsen-Tehan family surprised her

(with the help of Abby's mom), showing up in Brooklyn during Christmas break to take her to see the Rockettes. A student at the Repertory Company High School for Theatre Arts in New York, Abby not only loved the show, she appreciated the effort that went into getting her there. "They even figured out how to take the subway and everything," she noted admiringly. "Every New Yorker has to experience the Rockettes, but I would never have seen it if they hadn't brought me."

Both girls agree, they don't need over-the-top experiences like the Rockettes to keep them happy. "My favorite thing to do with Abby is just hanging out," Maura said. Confirmed Abby: "Any time we get to spend together, I'm excited."

As the girls get older, many of their interests evolve – but not all of them. They never tire of collaborative baking: brownies, cupcakes, cookies, and most recently, in a show of culinary maturity and daring, an attempt at tiramisu. "It was okay," said Maura. "I'm proud that we tried." Last summer they went full glam, painting each other's nails and applying mud masks – then running through the house scaring each other as if they were in a horror movie. In more personal moments, they discuss their plans for the future: As of now, Maura wants to be a marine biologist, and Abby a singer/dancer/actor.

A few years after Abby started visiting, Maura's sister, Bella, now 7, entered the picture. As one of six kids in her family, Abby knew just how to handle it, and quickly bonded with the young girl. "Bella has only ever known our life

with Abby in it," Svendsen said. "Abby is very patient with her, and Bella loves her like a sister."

Although Abby enjoys being surrounded by nature, she gets nervous among what she calls the "random creatures" she sees near the river: jellyfish, snails, crabs and fish. "I can tolerate them from afar, but if I see them in the water with me, no way."

Summer mornings for the girls follow a predictable routine – they wake up at virtually the same time (early if there's a trip planned). Breakfast is simple, peanut butter on toast, or maybe pancakes and waffles. They spend a lot of time outside – a nice change from Brooklyn.

Abby gets into her happy zone sitting around a campfire at night, eating s'mores, trying unsuccessfully to catch fireflies, and looking at the brightly shining stars and moon. "In Brooklyn, you have to really stare, and even then, it's pretty hard to see anything in the sky," she said.

Although their lives have many differences, in some ways, Abby said, Maura understands her better than her friends at home. "She knows a lot more about me than the kids at school, I can let my guard down," she said. "And the three-year age difference? She doesn't even notice it."

Reflecting on her experience with the Svendsen-Tehan family, Abby is thoughtful. "The Fresh Air Fund has given me a chance to learn and do so many things I never would have," she said. "Most of all, I have two more sisters, and a second family." *



PUBLIC SERVICE SUPPLEMENT

FRIENDLY TOWNS

The Friendly Towns program, created in 1877, provides children ages 8–18 with the opportunity to visit volunteer host families for one-to-two weeks over the summer in rural and suburban communities along the East Coast. Many children return for extended visits with the same host families year after year, creating lifelong connections and gaining new perspectives.

A visit to stay with a host family is full of fun experiences like riding bicycles, making s'mores, playing in the backyard, catching fireflies, swimming and making new friends! Every host family goes through a rigorous screening process including a home visit, interview, references and a background check. Make a difference this summer and volunteer as a host family. Learn more at FreshAir.org.



Image: Allison English

Image: Allison English

Image: Courtesy of the Svendsen-Tehan Family

Image: Courtesy of the Fresh Air Fund

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A photograph of three young girls smiling in a forest. The girl on the left is wearing a purple hoodie. The girl in the middle is wearing a green shirt and holding a green water bottle. The girl on the right is wearing a red hoodie and has braces. They are standing in front of a dense forest of green trees.

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