

A Camp Cosmos Story

The children stood in a circle as they waited for the bus. One pointed to a tree and said the word in Arabic, the next child repeated the Arabic word and then translated it into French, another into English, another into Spanish and yet another into Creole. The exercise began again among giggles as someone pointed to a car.

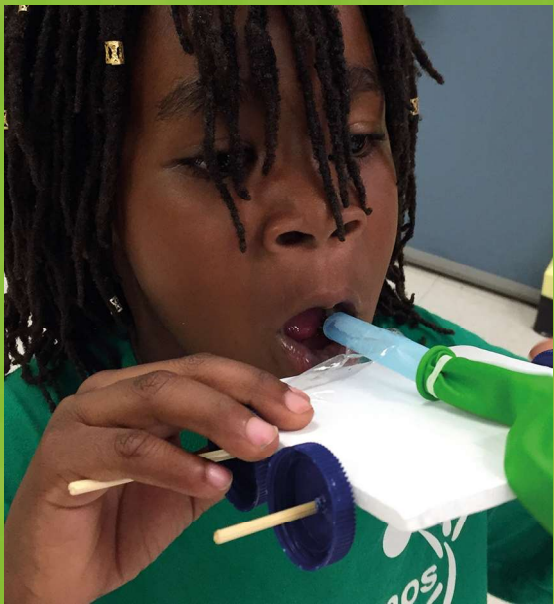
The bus pulled up and the excited kids jostled one another up the stairs. Words in four different languages sprang from their lips and danced in the air as they plunked down laughing in the seats. Two adults accompanying them wore hijabs and one a cross. A somewhat puzzled passenger eyed the eclectic group all decked out in bright green t-shirts, and asked the woman with the cross: "What is this all about Madame?!"

"We are Camp Cosmos" came the reply, "an inter-cultural day camp". The passenger's interest was piqued and the conversation continued as others on the bus turned around.

"And where are all these children from?" she asked. "Some have recently arrived from refugee camps, others are from Haiti and Latin America and some of course are from Montreal" replied the counsellor. By now the children had grown silent and were paying attention to the exchange, the older ones translating for the younger ones.

A Francophone spoke up from the front of the bus: " C'est merveilleux ce que vous faites" (What you are doing is wonderful) " It's how we should all live", he continued, "it's peace building from the ground up!" "Indeed", exclaimed the woman. Other passengers nodded and smiled. The children beamed with pride.

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Fun outings!

Coming back home with treasures!
The campers were happy to bring home a few surprises this summer. Fresh vegetables from the rooftop garden of Santropol Roulant, our community partner. Drawings and crafts they made themselves at camp as well as a few inventive experiments from the *Scientifines*, who helped the children make balloon-powered cars and light switches!

Creativity at the museum!
Our three groups had the pleasure of visiting an exhibition at *Les Impatients*, an art gallery that features work from artists with special needs. After the tour, they were able to harness their own inner artist as they drew pictures inspired by the artwork they had seen.

Other outings included:

- The Ministry of Cricket
- The Redpath Museum
- The Biodome
- The Botanical Gardens
- The Planetarium



Lights...Camera...Action
Don't miss our videos at
YouTube Camp Cosmos



Future plans

We hope to extend our Accessibility Program to the West Island in the summer of 2017, to continue creating a respectful and inclusive camp atmosphere that welcomes everyone!

We are looking forward to a new year of innovation and adventure as we prepare to implement an online registration system and aim to make the Camp Cosmos experience available to more families!



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into a kid friendly zone

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2016 Annual Report

Camp Cosmos is one of the oldest day camps in Montreal having first opened its doors in 1971. Over the decades, the camp has grown and adapted to a rapidly changing social environment. Today Camp Cosmos is an eco-friendly camp serving a diverse, multicultural population that is reflected in both the campers and staff. We welcome children with special needs that we accompany with an individual Shadow, thus providing some welcome respite for parents with modest means and teaching all children about the value of difference. Our CIT (counselors-in training) and SIT (shadows-in-training) programs allow young adolescents to gain a first work experience and have led many later on to choose a career in special education. Partnering with First Nations to welcome children and hire staff from native communities is now an important part of our mandate. Story sharing, activities and outings to First Nations communities educate all of us on the history and the role of First Canadians.

In 2016, we were faced with a new challenge - how to contribute to the welcoming and integration efforts for newly arriving Syrian families. We quickly decided to open up a second camp on Montreal's West Island. Together with our downtown camp we welcomed 23 Syrian children in 2016.

We also set a new record in attendance: 76 campers in Montreal and 30 on the West Island with 17 languages spoken!



Camp in numbers	2014	2015	2016
Campers	55	73	106
Counselors	6	6	10
Shadows	4	4	5
Counselors in training	8	6	5
Shadows in training	0	3	3
Campers with special needs	8	9	11
Newly arrived Syrian kids	0	0	23
Ratio-supervisor to camper	1-3	1-3	1-4
Recycle bins filled per week	6	6	10
Compost bins filled per week	6	6	10
Languages spoken at camp	12	15	17
Languages spoken	(Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Creole, English, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Kannada, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Tamil, Spanish, Vietnamese)		



Staff

Our dedicated staff represents a diverse population, coming from different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. All staff undergoes a two-week training during which they develop into an model community for the campers. The training includes a variety of workshops given by professionals in the field, with topics covering anti-oppression, inclusivity, child maltreatment, conflict resolution, child development, special needs, managing challenging behaviour, safety protocols and first aid, among others.

In 2016, Camp Cosmos tried a new approach to create a richer program. Each coordinator was given time to plan activities throughout the week associated with their field: Environment, Athletics and Intercultural.

The result: more eco-friendly activities, a full day of sports and cooperative games including a weekly visit to the gym, as well as partnerships developped with workshop facilitators from a vast array of cultures and traditions.

The Accessibility Program at the downtown location grew this summer. We had four Shadows and three Shadows in Training (SITs). These amazing young workers provided the necessary support and resources for campers with special needs to adapt and participate in the daily camp activities. Just like every other camper, our campers with special needs make an invaluable contribution to the camp ambiance.



Some highlights from the downtown camp

Camp Cosmos was fortunate to welcome a delegation of Japanese students who collaborated with us on three days of fun and educational intercultural games, as part of an exchange program with McGill University. We had facilitators come in for workshops about athletes with prosthetics, creating music, cooking healthy meals, and yoga.

We partnered up with local organizations such as Eco-Quartier, Sentier Urbain and Santropol Roulant to engage the children in educational and fun activities such as composting, agriculture and urban gardening.

Each camper got a chance to show their talent at the Camp Cosmos Final Show. The enthusiastic staff enacted a musical theatre production of The Lion King for the parents and campers.

Some West Island Highlights



- Half the campers were Syrian refugees and the other half were local children.
- All activities were led in 3 languages by the counsellors and coordinators (English, French and Arabic).
- Half of the Syrian campers learned how to swim by the end of camp!
- Campers taught each other about their languages and cultures (food, clothes, etc).
- Ribbons were tied to our 'Green Tree' in order to keep track of compost and recycling all throughout the 6 weeks of camp. By the end, the tree was completely green and filled.
- The campers got to cool off at a pool on hot sunny days!

New Partners include the Muslim Association of Canada, the West Island Black Community Association, the Bronfman Family Foundation and the Kahnawake First Nations Community.



Testimonies

My kids had so much fun and enjoyed all the activities and loved every one that at the end of the summer they started to cry! During summer every-day when they got home they were waiting for the next day to go back to the camp. My kids made good friends with the other children and they are still in contact with their new friends. And now they are waiting for the next year in Camp Cosmos.

Mouna

Our experience with the camp has been fantastic! As a mother of a child with special needs I can testify Camp Cosmos is a great place for integration; their staff is caring, friendly and highly trained and they provide a fun, safe and educational environment! I'm really grateful to have found such a wonderful place for my son to have fun every summer! I absolutely recommend Camp Cosmos!

Gabriela

Our son attended the Camp Cosmos for the first time last year. He was very happy to have quickly integrated the group thanks to the great work done by the camp staff. Hassan learned everyone's names and made friends with the kids in his section. He came back home every day with a new thing he had learned and that made us very happy. Once Hassan's little brother is of age he will join the camp as well!

Nouredine and Andrea



Testimony

Our family is very grateful that Camp Cosmos is offered to Montreal families and are thankful for all the generous contributors that make this dream camp possible. It was our first year and what most impressed us is the quality of the counselors and the programs. The diversity of the activities, the energy of the team and the modern sensibility to today's current topics (environment, health, etc) are the perfect formula to give every child a unique summer camp experience with great values and peace of mind for hard-working parents. We hope that the Cosmos team will get the recognition and financial support they deserve for all their hard work and their dedication to enrich and inspire future generations to be active and realize their full potential. Thank you Camp Cosmos!

Kim-Anh and Alexandre Bastien