

# CNIB 2024 SUMMER IN REVIEW



From All of Us at CNIB Lake Joe,  
Thank You for an Amazing Summer!



## A Message from our Executive Director



**Thank you for transforming lives at CNIB Lake Joe this year.** Your generosity has woven joy, hope, and possibility into every camper's experience, providing essential opportunities for our participants to connect, grow, and thrive in a safe, supportive environment. Each experience—every smile, breakthrough, and memory—is made possible by your compassion and belief in our mission.

This year, we saw unprecedented demand for our programs, with many at or near capacity and some carrying waiting lists. **Thanks to your support, we were able to offer deeply subsidized rates for children and youth at just \$150 per week—an all-inclusive fee covering room, food, local round-trip transportation, and a wide range of enriching activities.** This commitment ensures families facing financial barriers can still experience the profound impact of camp.

With your help, we welcomed over **2,200 program visits**, both in-person and virtual, reaching **655 unique participants**, with nearly **800 more participating through special activities and events at Lake Joe.** These sessions helped campers build confidence, deepen friendships, and feel empowered to embrace new challenges. It's this impact that extends well beyond camp, and it's why CNIB Lake Joe is such a life-changing place for so many.

Throughout the following pages, you'll read stories of transformation—testaments to the power of your support and its ripple effects on each participant's journey. Thank you for being part of the CNIB Lake Joe community.

Together, we're creating a brighter, more inclusive future, filled with endless possibilities for those we serve.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Monique Pilkington  
Executive Director, CNIB Lake Joe

## Summer at CNIB Lake Joe

This past summer at CNIB Lake Joe, we created unforgettable experiences for children, youth, adults, and families with vision loss. Thanks to our generous donors, participants connected, grew, and achieved personal goals in an accessible, inclusive environment. **“My child’s confidence grows each time he comes to Lake Joe,”** shared a camper’s parent. “We look forward to our week all year.”

Our PLAY program encouraged young campers to push their limits with adaptive sports like 5-a-side soccer and rock climbing. Camp Abilities provided budding athletes with training in blind hockey, and water sports, creating life-changing moments that built confidence and resilience.

The Canadian Leadership Development Program (CLDP) and Counselor-in-Training (CIT) empowered teens and young adults to develop essential life skills, inspiring future leaders. **“Lake Joe gave me the opportunity to experience everything on an equal basis with everyone else,”** shared one participant. Programs like Buddy Dog Camp offered unique bonding experiences, with one family reflecting, “We brought our Buddy Dog... connecting with other families and sharing stories was truly special.”

For first-time campers, the experience went even deeper. “My daughter’s first CNIB camp was an amazing success,” shared one mother. “She loved every minute of being there, from the activities to just riding in the boat. **She felt ‘like she belonged’** and didn’t have to answer questions about her (white) cane. It brings tears to my eyes when I think about the absolute joy she exuded when she was telling us all her stories.”

With every activity, campers experienced the joy and freedom that CNIB Lake Joe uniquely offers. “Our attention is on the kids and making memories,” said a parent. “Thank you, CNIB Lake Joe, for giving my family a place to relax, learn, play, and make unforgettable memories.”



## Celebrating the Magic of Camp at CNIB Lake Joe

This summer at CNIB Lake Joe was nothing short of magical. Our programs blossomed as we welcomed back 70% of campers eager to return to a place they call home, while 30% experienced the joy of Lake Joe for the very first time.

One camper captured the heart of our mission, saying, **“I love everything Lake Joe does. They brought me out of my shell, out of my isolation. This year, I made new friends—that’s always a highlight.”**

This beautiful blend of returning and first-time campers embodies the true spirit of CNIB Lake Joe—a place of warmth, belonging, and growth, where friendships form and lives are changed. Every summer, our programs reach further, touch more lives, and create memories that last a lifetime. We’re deeply grateful to everyone who made this season possible, helping build a community that inspires, uplifts, and transforms lives in ways that words can barely capture.



## Building a Cross-Canada Community at CNIB Lake Joe

This summer, CNIB Lake Joe was alive with the spirit of community, drawing participants from nearly every corner of Canada. Our lakefront became a meeting place where campers of all ages connected, shared, and grew together. Families and individuals from coast to coast came together, fostering friendships that transcended distance.

From the cities of Calgary and Halifax to the small towns of Martensville and Okotoks, and bustling hubs like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, each camper brought a unique story and perspective. This incredible national gathering reminded us of the strength in diversity and the bonds that form when people are welcomed and celebrated for who they are. Whether it was gathering around the campfire, exploring nature, or simply enjoying time together by the lake, CNIB Lake Joe became a community where everyone felt at home, no matter how far they’d traveled. This season highlighted the power of inclusion and connection, making it a truly memorable summer for all. Thank you to everyone who helped create this vibrant, cross-Canada community!

## Accessibility in Bloom: CNIB Lake Joe's Fragrant Garden Unveiled

Thanks to the generosity of Susan Creasy Financial Inc., the first section of CNIB Lake Joe's Fragrant Garden has been planted! Nestled near M Cabin, this garden offers a sensory-rich experience, with fragrances like lavender and cedar, and the gentle rustle of grasses in the breeze. Designed thoughtfully with plants safe for guide and buddy dogs, it's a peaceful spot where campers can connect with nature in a new way.



Susan Creasy's longstanding connection with CNIB Lake Joe stretches back to her family's history with the camp's founding in the 1960s. Inspired by her great aunt's work on the fragrant garden at CNIB's Toronto office, Susan has brought this vision to life at Lake Joe. Continuing this legacy, her son Jack played a pivotal role in our fundraising success this year as a Cookout with Cuddy committee member and generous donor.



The Grounds Guys Barrie, with garden designer Veronica Stinson and her team, crafted this beautiful space, incorporating pollinators like butterfly bushes for sound and lilacs for their soothing fragrance. Our campers love wandering along the winding paths and resting in the Muskoka chairs to take in the garden's calming atmosphere.



Plans are underway to extend the garden's path to connect with the camp trail, making this cherished space even more accessible.

We're grateful to Susan Creasy Financial Inc. and all those involved in making the Fragrant Garden a special addition to CNIB Lake Joe—thank you for bringing this vision to life for our campers!



I am still sad that it's over! Blind people have so few opportunities to connect with one another so meaningfully and in such a fun and accessible environment. As blind parents, taking our children to Lake Joe is probably the only "vacation" we can do entirely independently, without needing to worry about multiple accessibility issues. I loved so many aspects of it - sitting with different buddy dog recipients over a meal while our kiddos bonded, tubing, the talent show, connecting with other parents, shoving one another off the lily pad, tandem biking and feeling the wind in my hair, etc. We were so happy for our sighted children to experience meeting many blind people from different walks of life, including people their own age. As a blind person, Lake Joe is one place where I'm normal. It was amazing.



## A Global Impact

What began as a camp serving Canadians has grown over the years into an internationally renowned retreat. During CNIB Lake Joe's Young Adult Week, two young women traveled from France to join us in MacTier, Muskoka. Fueled by encouragement from friends on a blind-access Discord channel, they took the eight-hour flight and arrived early to adjust, ensuring they could make the most of every moment at camp.

With the help of our French-speaking staff, their planning process was seamless. Once here, they dove into everything Lake Joe has to offer—from pontoon cruises and kayaking to arts and crafts. For them, the experience was far more than just activities; it was about building lasting friendships and belonging to a community that understands living with vision loss. "Seeing our friends is really important to us," they shared, capturing the true spirit of Lake Joe.

Thanks to donors like you, CNIB Lake Joe is more than a camp; it's a global community where individuals from all backgrounds can find their own voice and make connections. Your support makes this possible, bringing campers from around the world together in an inclusive environment where everyone thrives.



## Who Let The Dogs Out?

In 2024, CNIB Lake Joe introduced Goldie, Bentley & Kodi's Run, a "free run and rest" area for guide dogs and handlers. Thanks to longtime supporters John and Ann Firstbrook, this accessible, fenced space offers guide dogs a place to play off-leash, relax, and recharge.

Centrally located between cabins H&K, the enclosure features shaded areas, a water station, and fun play equipment, ensuring these hard-working dogs have what they need to unwind. Inspired by the Firstbrook family's beloved dogs, Goldie, Bentley, and Kodi, this space was created in response to guest feedback requesting a larger, more accessible area than the existing "Dudley's Den."

Reflecting on his history with CNIB Lake Joe, John Firstbrook shared, "My passion for CNIB Lake Joe began over 50 years ago. It means so much to our family to support a space where these dedicated guide dogs can run freely."



## Cookout with Cuddy - The Encore



Thanks to incredible support from our sponsors, attendees, and donors, Cookout with Cuddy: The Encore, presented by IG Private Wealth Management - Throssell Group, raised over \$430,000 for CNIB Lake Joe! The funds raised allow us to provide unique camp experiences for individuals impacted by sight loss.

Guests enjoyed unforgettable moments—from meeting future guide dogs at the CNIB Puppy Pit (thanks to Mantella Corporation) to hot-air balloon rides with Helen Hunt RE/MAX Hallmark York Group Realty Ltd., and interactive experiences like playing blind soccer wearing blindfolds/ VR goggles simulating vision loss. Our silent auction featured amazing items, from Taylor Swift and Arkells tickets to exclusive experiences with sports legends. The night capped off with a fantastic performance by the Jim Cuddy Trio.

The event wouldn't have been possible without our sponsors, partners, and especially our dedicated committee: Amar Powar, Chelsey Penrice, David Throssell, Genevieve Roch-Decter, Helen Hunt, Jack Creasy, Jayne McCaw, Liz Brown, and Sylvia Mantella. We are grateful for your support in making a difference for our CNIB Lake Joe campers! **Relive this day at [cnib.ca/cuddy](https://cnib.ca/cuddy)**

## GBay Team Series Supports CNIB Lake Joe

This year, the GBay Team Series, proudly presented by Leadbetter Foods, made a splash in more ways than one. Far more than a fishing tournament, it became a powerful symbol of community support for CNIB Lake Joe, all set against the stunning backdrop of Georgian Bay.

The event brought together seasoned anglers, families, and new supporters, creating connections that will ripple through our mission for years. With engaging activities hosted by Rahfish, including games, raffles, and 50/50 draws, the GBay Team Series showcased our cause to a vibrant new audience while building excitement and camaraderie.

A special highlight of this partnership was Leadbetter Foods' generous donation of a custom CNIB Lake Joe-branded tent and by collecting funds at their community BBQ's throughout Simcoe Muskoka. This invaluable addition has significantly enhanced our visibility at community events, allowing us to share our story and grow our network of supporters.

To the GBay Team Series, Rahfish, and Leadbetter Foods—thank you for making such an extraordinary impact on CNIB Lake Joe.



## Where Passion Meets Play: Camp Abilities

From July 1-6, 2024, CNIB Lake Joe, in partnership with Canadian Blind Hockey, hosted the impactful Camp Abilities Blind Hockey program. Youth ages 8-18 gathered to learn Blind Hockey skills, build confidence, and discover a love for the game.

A highlight of the week was a visit from Mark DeMontis, founder of Canadian Blind Hockey and 2024 recipient of the NHL's Willie O'Ree Community Hero Award. DeMontis shared his journey with the young athletes, inspiring them to pursue their goals and value community support.

Throughout the week, campers enjoyed on-ice training at Humphrey Arena in Parry Sound, ON, and off-ice activities at CNIB Lake Joe. National Team players mentored participants in ball hockey, creating even more excitement and learning opportunities.

Since its start in 2022, Camp Abilities Blind Hockey has grown thanks to committed staff, volunteers, and donors, paving the way for inclusive sports opportunities for youth with vision loss across Canada.



**“Every child deserves the chance to experience the thrill of playing sports. This program not only teaches valuable skills but also instills confidence and fosters a sense of community among participants.”**

-Eugene Chong, General Manager

## Remembering Randall



This summer, CNIB Lake Joe had the privilege of honoring the late Randall Oliphant, a dedicated leader and advocate for people with sight loss. For over a decade, Randall championed our mission, leaving an enduring impact. To celebrate his legacy, members of the Oliphant family joined CNIB President and CEO Angela Bonfanti, Executive Director Monique Pilkington and our team for a ceremony at the Lake Joe beachfront, sharing stories about Randall's unwavering dedication and unveiling commemorative signage in his memory.

As the sun set over the lake, Randall's family stood with us, celebrating a man whose passion for inclusion will forever inspire CNIB. With gratitude, we thank his family for joining us in this tribute.



## Salex's Day at CNIB Lake Joe

This past summer, CNIB Lake Joe was thrilled to welcome our incredible partners at Salex Inc. for a truly meaningful day of corporate volunteering. From the start, Salex's team brought an infectious energy and enthusiasm, beginning with a tour of our facilities and a spirited game of blind soccer with our youth.

Throughout the day, Salex's team fostered community spirit with our campers by joining in on boat-building and racing activities that encouraged teamwork and creativity. Their visit included a shared lunch at the Salex Family Picnic Patio, where laughter and camaraderie filled the air. The day concluded with a joyful beach party alongside our campers, creating unforgettable moments of connection.

Thank you, Salex, for your outstanding partnership and for embodying the spirit of inclusion and support at CNIB Lake Joe. Your contributions made a lasting impact on our campers and our entire community.



## Our Dedicated Knights of the Blind

Lions Clubs are an integral part of CNIB Lake Joe, infusing the camp with their commitment to service and community. Year after year, Lions personify their motto, "We Serve" by supporting people with vision loss to fully enjoy camp, embrace new activities, and forge meaningful connections in an inclusive environment.

In 2024, Lions clubs across Ontario ensured Lake Joe was ready to welcome campers. Members joined for the CNIB Lake Joe Work Weekend and additional work days, tackling everything from maintenance to vehicle repairs. This involvement is vital for both upkeep and creating a welcoming, accessible space.

Beyond their labor, Lions Clubs enriched Lake Joe with new experiences. The Cyber Niagara Lions Club donated instruments, adding vibrancy to the music program and fostering creative expression. Weekly Bingo nights hosted by clubs spread joy and built friendships.

Through every act of service, the Lions Clubs show that CNIB Lake Joe is more than a camp, It's a community with a commitment to better lives.





# THANK YOU

**Together, we're unstoppable.  
Find out how you can continue making a difference.**

**Endowment Gifts:** Establish a lasting legacy at CNIB Lake Joe through an endowment gift, providing transformative camp experiences for generations to come.

**Camperships:** Help make camp accessible by funding camperships, offering unique, barrier-free opportunities that build independence and lifelong friendships.

**Naming Opportunities:** Create a lasting impact by naming a space or program at CNIB Lake Joe, honoring loved ones and inspiring our community.

**Operational Support:** Keep CNIB Lake Joe's vital programs running smoothly with operational support, empowering campers through adaptive sports, skills training, and unforgettable experiences.

**Legacy Gifts:** By remembering CNIB Lake Joe in your will, you're building a legacy and providing future support to our life-changing programs, services and advocacy here at Lake Joe.

