

# MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday June 22, 2017



## Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) Grant helps create an online training program for counsellors to make camp a more inclusive place

London, ON – On Thursday, Thames Valley Children’s Centre CEO, Dr. John LaPorta welcomed representatives from community partners, Fanshawe College and the City of London to mark the launch of Camps on TRACKS, ([www.campsontracks.com](http://www.campsontracks.com)) an online training program developed to help make camp a more inclusive place. Using evidence-based peer-mediated approaches, the Camps on TRACKS program supports adult leaders to teach children the skills to be better friends to their peers with disabilities and social challenges, building a camp environment where all children are included and are meaningful participants. The website and online resources was funded by an OTF Grow Grant.

Local MPP Peggy Sattler, and Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant Review Team member, Peter Fleming were on hand to congratulate the partners and hear more about how this program is already making a difference at some camps across the region. Kelly Austin, mom of a camper with special needs explained how the program provides peers with strategies to make kids like her son meet friends, have fun and belong.

“The impact of this Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant cannot be underestimated, “ said Dr. John LaPorta, CEO, Thames Valley Children’s Centre. “This grant will allow us to enhance the program by including an online training component. It will ultimately, provide campers with diversity training, skills to interact with each other and strategies to help include everyone. It will help us reach more counsellors in camps throughout our region and province, allowing kids with special needs to have a more fulfilling and positive camp experience.”

“As one of the original development partners, the City of London has been using the “Camps on TRACKS” approach in our Neighbourhood Day Camps since 2009. We love to see children of all abilities directly helping one another participate and build strong relationships. We’re excited that through the availability of online resources, soon people all across the Province will enjoy the same benefits and positive outcomes we’ve seen with TRACKS.”, Tony Kyle, Manager, West Recreation Services, City of London.

We are excited for this cutting-edge, online training opportunity to be available to so many adult learners in Ontario to further disseminate the Camps on TRACKS project. Fanshawe College is proud to be associated with this project,” Pam McLaughlin, Dean, Faculty of Health, Community Studies and Public Safety, Fanshawe College.

An agency of the Government of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is one of Canada’s largest granting foundations. With a budget of over \$136 million, OTF awards grants to some 1,000 projects every year to build healthy and vibrant Ontario communities [www.otf.ca](http://www.otf.ca)

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## About Camps on TRACKS

Introduced in the City of London inclusive day camps during the summer of 2011, the Camps on TRACKS program promotes adult leaders teaching peers how to interact with children with disabilities and prompt through peers, rather than assisting children with exceptionalities or social challenges directly. This facilitates peer-to-peer interactions. The term "TRACKS" is a child-friendly acronym used to teach typically-developing children the skills they need in order to use this approach.

With over 120 children with special needs attending City of London day camps in 2011, TRACKS played a significant role in increasing opportunities for meaningful social interactions between campers of all abilities. Although the initial intent of the program was to focus on campers with ASD, the strategies benefitted numerous other campers by building a stronger sense of community at camp and placing an emphasis on being helpful to one another.

The success of the Camps on TRACKS program quickly rippled to other camps in London and across Southwestern Ontario, creating a demand for training. Camps were being transformed from a leader centered camp atmosphere to a child centered environment. Campers are consistently doing things for each other to make sure everyone is included. With the support of this OTF Grow Grant, the Camps on TRACKS team has created a website and online training modules that will easily train more camp staff across the province. Thousands of campers across the province will be taught the TRACKS skills and supported in summer camp to be better friends to their peers with disabilities and other social challenges.

[www.campsontracks.com](http://www.campsontracks.com)

Partners:

