

# Camp Ten Oaks

## Camp Ten Oaks opens for gay youth and children of gay families

By Cynthia Nyman Engel

**W**hen Camp Ten Oaks opens in August, it will be the first summer camp of its kind in Ontario.

The one-week, sleep-away summer camp for children of gay families and gay youth is an offshoot of the Ten Oaks Project, a not-for-profit organization serving children and youth of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, transgender, queer) families, and/or non-traditional families, youth who identify as LGBTQ, and their allies.

At Camp Ten Oaks, being gay or having a gay family is not an issue. There is no need for children or youth to 'come out' about their families, their own identities, or to struggle with the thought of 'coming out' at summer camp. It's a place where kids can just be kids.

Holly Wagg worked with a similar camp program operated out of Philadelphia and introduced the concept to Ottawa. "The American camp is hugely successful," she says. "It's full every summer. Kids come from all over. When I came back to Canada and realized there was no program like it here, we launched the Ten Oaks Project.

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Scheduled for August 21-27, Camp Ten Oaks will be situated on a rented 108-acre camp facility situated in the Gatineau Hills. The camp environment and programming will address the unique situation of children and youth from non-traditional family backgrounds and allow them to thrive in a positive atmosphere.

The camp will offer a mixture of the recreational (sports and aquatics), artistic (arts, crafts, dance and drama) outdoor (canoeing, camp outs, hiking) and social justice (media, sexism and environment). A part of the day will be devoted to discussing racism, classism and similar subjects, and how these issues impact the campers' lives. Campers also will be empowered through play that enhances self-esteem, social skills, leadership and self confidence.

"We're serving the eight-to 16-year-old population and are anticipating the ratio of

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staff to camper will be one staffer to two or three campers," says Ms. Wagg. "And, because we feel that every child deserves to have the camping experience, we're operating on a sliding scale fee structure. Camp Ten Oaks is accessible to all families, regardless of income."

Camp Ten Oaks is member of the Ottawa Area Camps Committee. For further information call Holly Wagg at 730-6983 or visit the web site at [www.tenoaksproject.org](http://www.tenoaksproject.org).