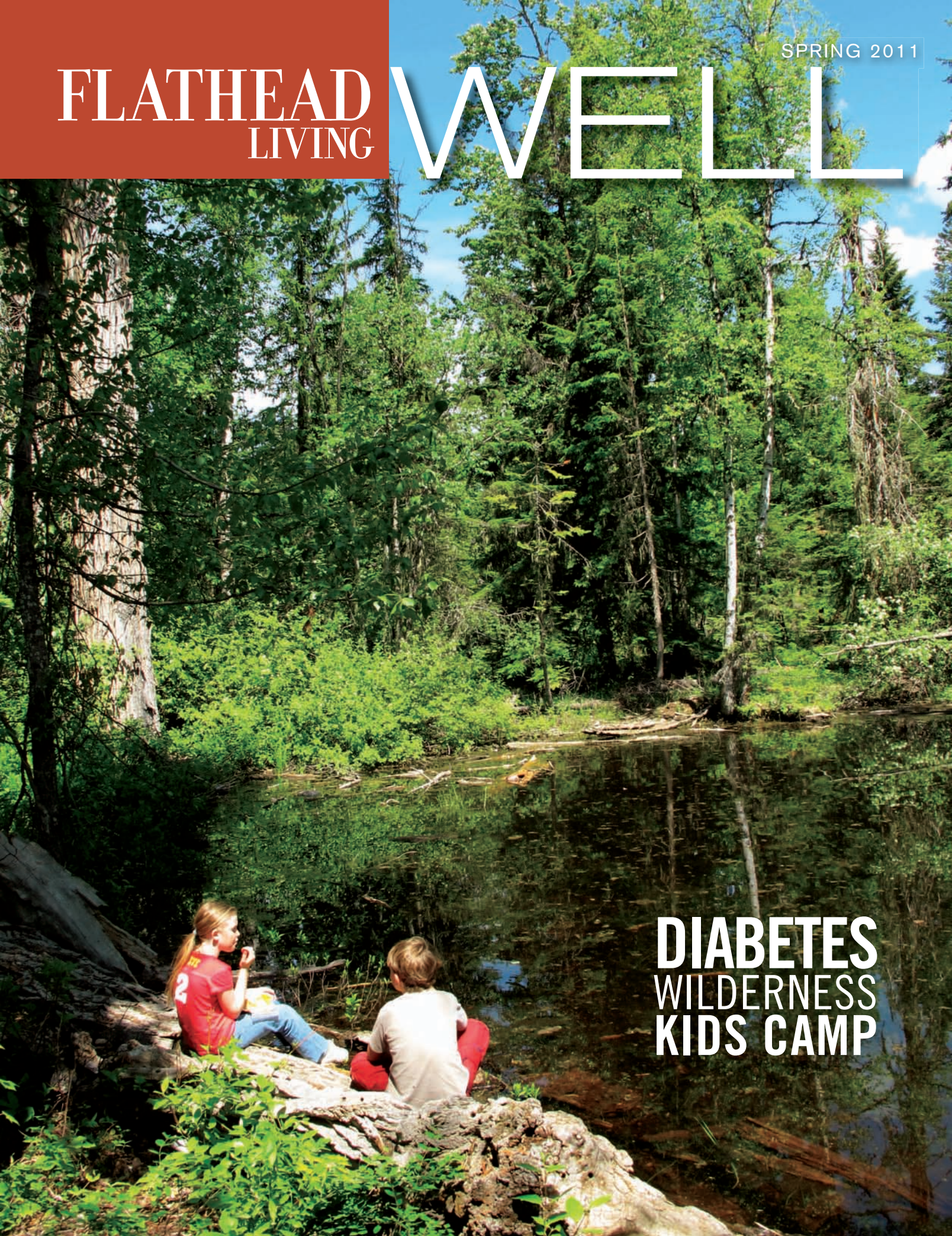


FLATHEAD
LIVING

SPRING 2011

WELL

**DIABETES
WILDERNESS
KIDS CAMP**



Ravenwood Type 1 Wilderness Camp

Where
Nature
Helps
Kids

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY TODD TANNER

Beauty of mine,
Spirit of mine,
I have the infinite within
my soul,
I have no beginning,
I have no end,
Oh, this I am...



Type 1 diabetes, formerly known as juvenile diabetes, is a chronic disease in which the body's immune system has destroyed the beta (insulin-making) cells in the pancreas. Once the beta cells are destroyed, the body cannot replace them. Because a person with type 1 diabetes can't make their own insulin, which is needed to process carbohydrates, insulin must be administered through injections or an insulin pump.

What does this mean for the family of a child with type 1 diabetes? For us it means poking our daughter's finger eight to ten times a day with a lancing device and using her meter to determine her blood glucose, adjusting her insulin or carbohydrate intake to "correct" her blood sugar if it's high or low, calculating the number of carbohydrates she consumes when she eats and giving her a bolus of insulin for them. Our typical day begins with a blood glucose (BG) test before breakfast and insulin at 7 a.m., a BG test before her carbohydrate-free snack at 9:45 a.m., a BG test before her lunch and insulin at noon, a BG test before her carbohydrate snack and insulin at 1:30 p.m., a BG test before her carbohydrate snack and insulin at LEAP (our local after-school program), a BG test before her dinner and insulin, a BG test before bed, and a BG test at 2 a.m. that my husband or I get to wake up to do. Obviously, she cannot escape this disease and type 1 diabetes affects every moment of her life, but we want her to learn that it does not *limit* every moment of her life.

For those of us whose lives have been touched by diabetes there is poking, and testing, and counting, and eating, and injecting, and crying, and fear, and frustration, but there is also balance, and learning, and strength, and courage, and resilience, and opportunity, and most importantly: HOPE. As of right now, there is no cure.

—Sara Peterson

Have you heard the story about the skunk, the fox, the snowshoe hare, the bull trout, the black bear and the hummingbird? No? Well, once upon a time, six kids with names like Ben and Lily and Natalie and Conor and Brooke and Halle decided to immerse themselves in the natural world. Jump right in. Get out in the mountains and the forests, breathe the fresh air, feel the cool breeze and the sunshine and the gentle splash of rain on their faces.

And as you might guess, it didn't take long before a young boy like Ben was magically transformed into "Hummingbird," or Lily gained the name "Bull Trout," or Natalie morphed into "Black Bear." Nature, especially here in northwest Montana, has a way of bringing out the best in our children—even when they suffer from type 1 diabetes.

This past June, Ravenwood Outdoor Learning Center—in conjunction with the Kalispell Regional Medical Center (KRMCC), the Kalispell Lions Club, the Northwest Healthcare Foundation at KRMCC, the Glacier Restaurant Group, and the KRMCC Diabetes Care and Prevention Center—put on a special day camp for area children who'd been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. On a wooded site off Foothill Road, tucked up against the western edge of the Swan Range, Ravenwood's Brett Holmquist helped some very special kids strengthen their relationship with nature.

For five days, through all kinds of weather and under the watchful eye of trained health care professionals, the children learned about the outdoors, listened to Brett's amazing stories, and took long hikes through the woods. Most of all, though, they had fun. You'd never know that the boys and girls playing Foxtail or Eagle Eye or Run, Rabbit, Run were suffering from a serious disease like diabetes. And that's the magic of Ravenwood. Kids, even kids with real physical limitations, blossom and grow when they have the opportunity to experience nature on such an intimate and meaningful level.





It was amazing to see the changes that manifested themselves over the course of the camp. Guarded looks turned into huge smiles. Unsure eyes started to sparkle and shine. Tentative steps gave way to children racing through the grass, laughing and chasing each other. It was almost as if Brett and his staff were alchemists, turning the challenges and mundane realities of everyday life into something truly remarkable.



And it wasn't just the kids. The Ravenwood experience pulls parents into the mix and helps them share in both the enthusiasm and the learning process. In addition to Nurse Practitioner Virginia "Ginny" Lewis, who provided expert medical care for the children at the camp, Ravenwood asked Dr. Michael Swinyard, a highly respected pediatric endocrinologist from Salt Lake City, to make the long trip up to the Flathead. Dr. Swinyard spent the better part of a day answering questions and helping families adjust to the realities of type 1 diabetes.

As one parent said, "There wasn't a dry eye during the closing ceremony. There is no way to put into words my gratitude for the care, attention, and level of skilled professionals that were at this event. Bless Ginny, Dr. Swinyard, and Ravenwood!"



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Another told me, “As a parent of a type 1 child, there are many days her life is focused on what she CAN’T do: she can’t eat the cupcakes her classmate brought to school because her blood sugar is too high, she can’t go out for recess because her blood sugar is too low, she can’t go to summer camp because her dad and I have to work and can’t run out there several times a day to take care of her medical needs. Ravenwood’s Type 1 Wilderness Kids’ Camp allowed her to focus on all the things she CAN do. Instead of feeling different, she felt like she was one of the crowd. It gave her independence from her parents, a sense of pride at being able to do something without us, and the feeling of being normal.”

As you might imagine, the diabetes campers benefited from Ravenwood’s holistic approach to outdoor learning. There was the morning circle, the bow drill fire, the ash cakes and herbal tea, the story of the day, the closing circle, and the teepee...not to mention the ongoing focus on nature. The kids listened to bird calls, looked at animal tracks and painted their faces with the rich black earth. They also climbed over fallen logs and smelled wildflowers and raced through the woods—the very same activities that so many Ravenwood students have enjoyed over the years.

Which brings us to the crux of the Ravenwood experience. Whether it was Ben Hummingbird lying on his back and following a tree swallow through his binoculars or Brooke Skunk leading her new friends in a charge across a sunlit meadow or Halle Snowshoe Hare helping Brett light the teepee campfire with a bow drill, the children were developing a profound respect for, and a deeper understanding of, the natural world—a connection that will never stop paying dividends.



CONTACT

Ravenwood Outdoor Learning Center is a local non-profit organization that gets the valley’s kids outdoors and turns learning into the ultimate adventure. While the focus is typically on childhood education, Ravenwood also partners with parents and teachers to strengthen our communities and mentor our young adults and future leaders. For more information on Ravenwood and its programs, you can call Brett Holmquist at 406.837.7279 or visit www.ravenwoodolc.org on the web.





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