



Jake Greenwood (left) with mum and siblings

PHOTO: JONATHAN ABRAHAMS

Camp Simcha helps families to beat a supportive retreat

BY JC REPORTER

► SINGLE MUM Gina Greenwood is on her sixth Camp Simcha retreat. Her son Jake, 8, twin to Harry and brother to Ella, 11, has short gut syndrome with life-threatening complications.

"Jake's condition is unpredictable," she explains. "Earlier this year he collapsed and stopped breathing. While he thankfully came through it, it is that unpredictability which means he cannot go on outings or trips without me or a doctor present.

"Thanks to Camp Simcha retreats and programmes like their summer day scheme, Jake doesn't have to miss out."

The Greenwoods were among 150 family members at the latest Camp Simcha retreats in Oxford, where activities included a petting zoo, glow disco, theme park outing and laser quest.

With a doctor on call 24/7, medical equipment and caring needs catered for and more than 100 volunteers supporting the children, parents were also able to relax, enjoying a candlelit dinner.

Dr Michelle Jacobs, a specialist in paediatric emergency medicine and a member of Camp Simcha's medical panel, was the doctor at one of the retreats.

"She knows Jake and all about his condition," Ms Greenwood says. "She has had to step in in the past when he has needed urgent medical attention at retreat. Knowing he is in safe hands means he can have fun and I can have a break.

"Jake's illness has also taken its toll on Harry, who hasn't really wanted to leave my side since Jake collapsed



in March," she adds. "He gets into a terrible state.

"I had almost got to breaking point when Camp Simcha sent in an art therapist for him. Even just a few sessions have made an amazing difference. When we got to retreat, he went off and I barely saw him for the three days."

Camp Simcha's support for children with serious illness and their families has also benefited the Toubkins from Manchester, who were attending a retreat for the first time following four-year-old Talya's treatment for Wilms' tumour, a type of kidney cancer.

Talya has undergone surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy and it has been a difficult time for the family, who also have a baby son, Ari.

Mum Nicola was "overwhelmed by retreat and the thought that goes into it. From a babysitter for Ari so my husband and I could have time alone, to Talya's 'big sister' volunteer sending us pictures throughout the day from the Legoland outing so that we could see she was having a good time, even though we weren't with her.

"Camp Simcha really understands that a child's illness impacts on the whole family. During the treatment period, Talya was attached to me for so long that she now suffers separation anxiety. She's been sleeping in our room at home and only went back to hers for the first time after we returned from retreat."

This was because during the family's absence, "Camp Simcha helped organise a decorator to paint her room a colour of her choice. She was so excited when we got back. It's things like that which help lighten the load and make this journey easier."

Parents also used the retreat to seek guidance from Dr Jacobs, who sees her role "as pastoral as well as

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Chief executive Neville Goldschneider stresses that Camp Simcha focuses on all family members, "particularly the siblings, who are hugely impacted when a child is seriously ill. We know it is just as important that they are made to feel special."

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