

## 2016 Running Blind/OUB Adventure Camp is a Big Success!



The Adventure Camp gang on the Big Manistee River, left to right: Angie, Jim, Sheila, Aric, Rob, Hope, George, Maddie, Hailey, Gabby, Christian, Leah, Yong, Jenny, Callie, and Hal (Not pictured: Gwen, Becca & Aamone)

**The group (left to right):** Angie (OUB staffer), Jim (Gwen's husband and a volunteer), Sheila (OUB medical support), Aric (OUB VI staffer), Rob (Sheila's husband, medical support and volunteer), Hope (OUB VI staffer), George (volunteer and very experienced canoeist), Maddie (OUB staffer & lifeguard), Hailey (OUB VI staffer) Gabby (VI camper), Christian (VI camper), Leah (OUB staffer), Yang (VI camper), Jenny (OUB VI staffer), Callie (VI camper), and myself. Not pictured is Aamone (VI camper), Becca (OUB staffer) and Gwen (OUB director). (VI = visually impaired)

**For Immediate Release:** Ten visually impaired youth and OUB (Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind) staff members accompanied by nine sighted staffers and volunteers recently participated in an Adventure Camp consisting of a 4 day canoe trip on the Big Manistee River followed by 2 days at Lake Charlevoix for some beach and boating fun. (stop) Running Blind founder Hal Wolfe was the trip organizer, co-host, co-sponsor, and primary guide. Hal was a full time canoe guide as a Boy Scout in the Boundary Waters of MN for two summers during college, so he was well suited for this type of trip. (stop) Any multi-day canoe trip will present difficulties, and especially since this was the first ever such trip for all of the campers and most of the staffers, but even more so managing with more than half the group being partially to fully visually impaired. (stop) This made things challenging, but gratifying in many ways - below is an account of our BIG adventure... (Go!)

## Trip itinerary:

day	date	activity	hours	campground
Wed	13-Jul	drive up/nature class	0	Paddlesports campground - in at M66 bridge
Thurs	14-Jul	Manistee River day 1	6.5	Chase Creek Campground (no facilities)
Friday	15-Jul	Manistee River day 2	6	Baxter Bridge St Fr Campground
Saturday	16-Jul	Manistee River day 3	5.5	Indian Crossing Campground (no facilities)
Sunday	17-Jul	River day 4 - off river	3	Glengary take out - drive to Charlevoix
			<b>21</b>	<b>Total paddling hrs (~ 70 miles)</b>

Sunday	17-Jul	arrive at Charlevoix by ~ 4 PM	Whiting County Park
Monday	18-Jul	boating fun day at Charlevoix	Whiting County Park
Tuesday	19-Jul	head for home!	

## Trip Summary (written by Hal):

The canoe trip was arduous but fantastic. The OUB staff provided superb support as camp councilors, canoe stearnsmen and with food and logistics support. Trip highlights included wonderful, well cooked meals, swimming in the river at a perfect sandbar swimming hole, seeing two bald eagles and many other waterfowl, having evening stories read by Gwen, (who also played a very nice Native American flute one evening) and the great sense of accomplishment the kids and staff experienced in completing the often difficult journey. The final highlight was a great day of sun-drenched boating at Lake Charlevoix after being rain-drenched in a downpour on the last day of canoeing that left everyone cold, tired and a bit beleaguered. There were a couple of tense moments in the first hour on the river when a couple of canoes swamped, and some expressed doubts that the group could continue, but we recovered, made some changes including lashing some canoes together, and we pushed on – although the first day was a long one as we didn't get to camp until 7:30 PM, but we made it that day and the rest of them.

The final 2 days at Charlevoix staying in a motel were much less stressful and taxing and were a nice change of pace after the relative rigors of canoeing and camping along the river that included two nights at wilderness sites that had no fresh water or bathroom facilities. (The motel rooms all had bathrooms and even had showers!) OUB Director Gwen Botting said “despite the general level of exhaustion, I think the trip was a great success.” It certainly pushed everyone, and that is exactly what it was intended to do. For me the last month has been pretty tough being very busy getting the trip ready, directing the Gallup Gallop 5K which is a Running Blind fundraiser event, and then heading out on the trip itself a few days after the race. Now I need some time to recover from the various activities and relax and enjoy summer a bit before it's gone.

**Could you help us out with a donation?** For those that already have donated, we really appreciate it, but unfortunately the fundraising for the trip has not raised anywhere near enough money yet to cover the trip's expenses, so if can consider making a modest donation, any support you can provide would be greatly appreciated. (If so please see the [donation link in the Running Blind website under “Financial Support” > Donations.](#))

**Keep reading for the complete trip report and a lot more pictures!**

**Day 1 - Wednesday July 13** The group met on a hot day at the Paddlesports center near Cadillac. This was the outfitter I selected to use for the trip. We had a nice wilderness lecture from Maureen Stine who gives lectures on nature to various youth groups. She tailored this lecture for our visually impaired group and had exercises in identifying trees from the shape of the leaves, and similar for animal tracks. We also got fitted for life jackets and were treated to a well cooked meal by Gwen and crew. One staffer arrived late (around 11 PM) but made it and we hit the hay. A cold front came through during the night with a bit of rain and but also some cooler more comfortable temps.



**Day 2 – Thursday July 14** We had to break camp, which is always a daily task of a canoe or hiking trip, to roll up sleeping bags, pack up personal gear and take down tents. We had breakfast and packed our lunches and then had to figure out how to stuff all of our gear into one large OUB van. This took a while and we made it to our transport bus a bit late by around 10:30 AM. The drive to our launch point on the river took a bit over an hour, so we got there just before noon. We hit the water in the canoe teams that Gwen had worked out. I was to be in a kayak along with Maddie. We quickly had to start making adjustments due to some issues with our volunteer sternsmen. I traded my kayak with someone who was struggling in the back of their canoe. Soon after that we came upon a swamped canoe. One of the OUB staffers that had planned to guide a canoe had a broken wrist that hadn't fully mended yet, so she was in the middle with two of the least visually impaired participants. That was the canoe that swamped so obviously that wasn't going to work. Unfortunately shortly after we resumed a 2<sup>nd</sup> canoe got tangled with a deadfall (a tree down into the river) and also swamped. This one was a bit tricky but thankfully Maddie took charge and helped get them out of the water. I had to go out and pry the canoe loose, which very well might have been impossible, or the canoe could have been wrecked, but we got lucky and I was able to pry it loose with my leg strength.



At our late (~3 PM) lunch stop, George, one of the experienced volunteers suggested that we lash some of the canoes together like catamarans so that we'd need few sternsman. This was a good idea, so we scrounged up some sturdy branches and thank goodness we had just enough rope to work that out. So after lunch we finally got a good handle on the canoe guiding chores with myself and George manning the two cats and two other more experienced paddlers on the other two canoes. We got to camp (Chase Creek) quite late but we made it and had another nice meal. We also had a short lecture on our outdoor bathroom facilities. Some of our campsites were totally rustic and had no facilities so we had to bring our own – this was one of those. After a brief lecture on the outdoor bathroom protocol and we were ready for dinner. It was late so we didn't dally and after dinner we quickly move to the tents. The presence of some very pesky mosquitoes made that decision easy to make. Rain moved in that night and it rained steadily most all night.



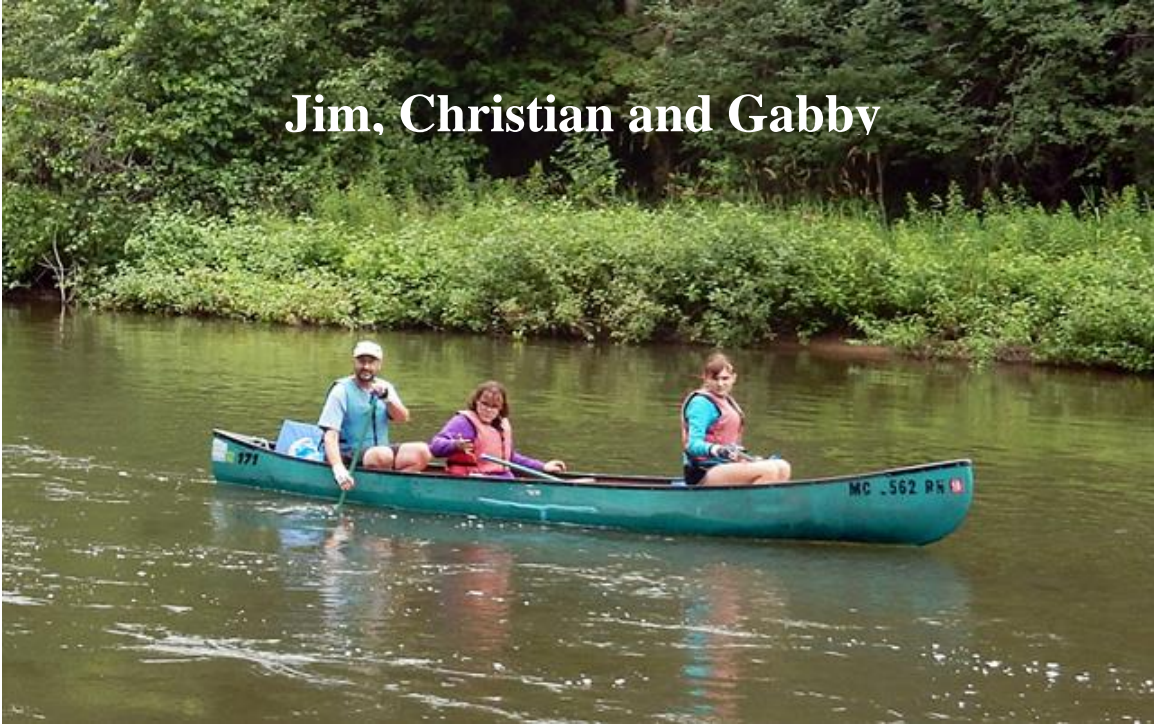
**Yong, Aric, King George, Angie  
and Maddie (in her kayak)**



**Day 3 – Friday July 15** We got a better start that morning and also had a shorter day of paddling to contend with. It was a bit chilly and it was spitting rain much of the day, but it was fine for paddling so that we did. At one of the overpasses we met up with a DNR employee who had helped OUB get a grant to pay for part of the trip. He was interested in the group as he'd never heard of a group of visually impaired kids making a canoe trip. He joined us with his own canoe and we assigned Hope (OUB staffer and Running Blind's communications director.) to join him for the afternoon. He enjoyed the paddle and we made it to our camp fairly early, by around 4 PM. That gave us time to set up and relax a bit as dinner was being made. Thankfully the OUB crew had decided to use two vans since Becca (with the broken wrist) was taken out of the canoes and added as a 2<sup>nd</sup> support driver. That made packing the vans with all of our (multitudes of) gear much easier to manage. That evening we had a nice campfire and the kids played a scavenger hunt game that Leah, the OUB activities director had worked out. This camp (Baker Bridge) was a maintained State Forest campground so it had facilities and quite a few other campers. After a nice evening of cooking our meals over the fire and relaxing, we were getting ready for bed when one of the staffers fell down next to the fire. Someone immediately recognized that he'd had a seizure and started to give him some first aid support to monitor him and make sure he was not having additional seizures, which as I was told, can generally be hard to determine. About a half hour after the seizure he started having a very pronounced and extended vomiting spell. This was somewhat disconcerting not only for his own wellbeing but for the disturbance it was creating for an otherwise quiet campground. (This was not a quiet event and was rather unpleasant to have to listen to.) Shortly after this started the decision was made to get him to a hospital and 911 was called. It took about a half hour for the ambulance to arrive, and they carted off the stricken staffer. A number of other staffers went along in one of the vans. There was again some doubt that we would be able to continue paddling but I made it clear that as far as I was concerned those of us that could paddle would. After this unfortunate episode things slowly calmed down and the rest of us went to bed.



**Jim, Christian and Gabby**



**Sheila, Leah and Aamone**



**Day 4 – Saturday July 16** When we got up we found out that the stricken staffer was not going to return to the trip and was going to head home to recuperate. Since some of the staffers had been up much of the night to and from the hospital, we got up late and got moving a bit slowly. We eventually hit the water by around 10:30 AM. We were headed for Indian Crossing campground which was another rustic, unsupported State Forest camping area. The weather was nice – alternate sun and clouds and a lot warmer than the day before had been, and the canoeing generally went well. At some point in this stretch we came upon a bald eagle that we ran into about 4 times as we meandered down the river. At lunch I made a few adjustments to the paddle crews as I realized that my crew was a bit stronger than the other catamaran and I tried to balance out the crew strength as best I could. This caused a bit of grumbling but I sold it by explaining that I wanted to give more people the chance to ride with George, who had canoed all over North America and had a lot of good stories. We headed back out for some enjoyable time on the river. We were passing quite a few cottages along this stretch of river as the river had widened out quite a bit and we were getting closer to the Lake Michigan coast. There were also a lot more paddlers on the river (it was Saturday) than we had seen previously. We came upon a nice sand bar that has some other canoers already stopped at and thank goodness our lead canoe also decided to stop so we could all go for an afternoon swim in the river. This turned out to be a great stop and everyone had fun frolicking in the river.

After about a half hour we got back into the boats and as soon as we rounded the next bend, and there was the large orange OUB flag right in front of us (we used that to make sure we didn't overshoot any campsites), so we pulled up on another small sand bar and beached the canoes there. It turned out to be a bit of a mucky slog for about 50 yards to a path that went up a large bank to our camping site, but we worked together and made it – also avoiding some poison ivy that I spotted on the bank. An interesting manifestation of this particular camp – it was used as a semi-permanent summer watering hole by some of the locals, and we ended up right next to someone's camper trailer. Where they were at the moment was anyone's guess, but I figure it might be interesting when they showed up to their hideaway to find a motley group of 18 adventurers camped right next to what is normally their isolated backwoods haven. But the view of the river was nice so we made the best of things and set up our camp as well as we could with the limited space we had. One nice thing about the rustic camps was that there was ample firewood to be found, and we had also purchased some split wood so I found a great spot on the bank with an awesome view of the river and made plans for an evening camp fire, which I definitely wanted to do since this would be our last night "on the trail". We had made it to camp in good time and Gwen was making an epic pot of stew which ended up being well worth the wait. After dinner we moved down to our campfire location and had a nice time toasting marshmallows and also watching the locals drive back and forth in their pick-up trucks and checking us out. (They were generally quite friendly.) After a nice fire, people headed off to bed. I hated to leave the fire as it was a great night.





**Day 5 – Sunday July 17** This was our last day on the water and the weather forecast was calling for rain. There was some reorganizing of the canoe crews as some of the campers that had not had a chance to try out the kayaks wanted to do that. One of the campers that was visually impaired but a great paddler also wanted to try, so the other catamaran crew set her up with a rope tether tied to their canoes. Unfortunately shortly into this experiment, the cat crew got turned around when approaching a deadfall on a bend. They saw it in time to maneuver around it but the camper in the kayak got dragged right into it, and she flipped. But she didn't panic and the canoes got her back in check fairly quickly. Unfortunately the weather soon took a turn and the rain forecast for later that day moved in early. We spend the next two hours paddling into the steady cold rain. We finally came to an overpass that was the only landmark for the day. This was an hour short of our intended take out point but we headed in regardless, and waved the other boats in behind us. We got all of the boats landed just as the rain turned into a cloudburst. There was a small covered structure so we got our group under that to wait out the downpour. We called our outfitter and thankfully they could meet us at this location and they came in two vans vs the school bus we started in. We put the heaters to good use!

When we got back to the Paddlesports camp we decided to eat our leftover food for lunch. I talked with Gwen and she felt that with all of the rain in the area that it would be better to stay in a motel so they didn't have to set up camp again (possibly in the rain) and Gwen felt they could afford a motel at least for a night. She finally ended up with reservations for 5 rooms in Petoskey, which was only a half hour away, so that would work. The group had time for (hot!) showers before hitting a nearby restaurant for dinner. The campers were in high spirits with the change to a nice motel. It was a good



decision and made the kids feel a bit like rock stars, which was good for them because people with visual impairments don't get a chance to feel that way very often, plus earlier in the day we'd been a huddle mass of drenched and shivering humanity, so hot showers and dry rooms were a big bonus. After shopping for the next day's final barbecue dinner I got back to my cabin and was treated to an amazing electrical show going on across the lake. There was a solid line of dark clouds rolling past like a huge glowing mural. The amount of lighting was incredible and I counted between 15-20 strikes every 10 seconds, all of which lit up the clouds in a spectacular display of mother nature's fireworks. It was an awesome display but I was so exhausted and I could hardly keep my eyes open. After about 20 minutes I had to hit the hay as I was practically a zombie at that point.

**Day 6 – Monday July 18** This was the big boating day and I'd rented a big, beautiful pontoon boat from Boyne City Watersports, and a 3 person inflatable for tubing behind the boat. The kids had been looking forward to this all week. With another OUB staffer who came to help, we headed into Boyne city in my truck to rent our luxury liner for the day. We got a rundown on the boat and headed off down the lake. When we got to my place in the big boat I was a little unsure how well I could manage to moor the boat and load people in and out. After trying to use a buoy I had intended to use, we simply pulled out the boat's anchor and used that. The rest of the gang had arrived while we got the boat so they had set up some pop-up awnings and were getting chairs and tables set up. I figured we might as well make good use of the boat so we loaded up a big load of people and went for a ride before lunch. We toured down to the Ironton ferry which is an interesting landmark that can see heard as well as seen. On the way back we decided we might as well start tubing, so we loaded up some people on the tube and started having some water fun. It was a beautiful day, a bit chilly, but the kids and young adult OUB staffers didn't seem to mind a bit after everything they had already been through.

After lunch, we had the shirt ceremony – I had purchased special camp T-shirts for everyone that I handed out. We took a group shot on the beach and then it was right back out on the boat and more fun for the kids on the 3-wide tube. At the end of the day, everyone who wanted it had a chance for fun on the tube. After taking the boat back I grilled up a big variety of stuff including my traditional burgers and brats, plus chicken and veggie burgers. After dinner we did a small round of beach fireworks, which are always fun to both see and hear, and then we called it a day and the group packed up the tents and tables and loaded up the vans to head back to their rock star HQ in Petoskey.

**Conclusion** It's always sad to have an event like this end and to watch everyone head home, but it was also a relief to be done as it was a big effort for everyone. I'd had a lot of difficulty getting ready for the trip along with a large house construction project I have going on, and also organizing the Gallup Gallop 5K Run that occurred just 4 days before the trip started, so I had been really tapped out. But I was very happy that things had worked out as well as they had. Everyone had definitely had a great time and the trip accomplished exactly what it was intended to do. The kids (& staff) had been challenged, they learned a lot, pushed past obstacles and prevailed, regardless of any darn disability.

- Hal

**More pictures!**



**Maddie, George,  
Aric and Yong**



**Hailey, Callie,  
Jenny and Hal**





**Our flotilla on the Big Manistee River**



**Relaxing on the beach at Charlevoix**



**The big pontoon boat at anchor  
and the OYB flag flying!  
(Plus a canoe for good measure!)**



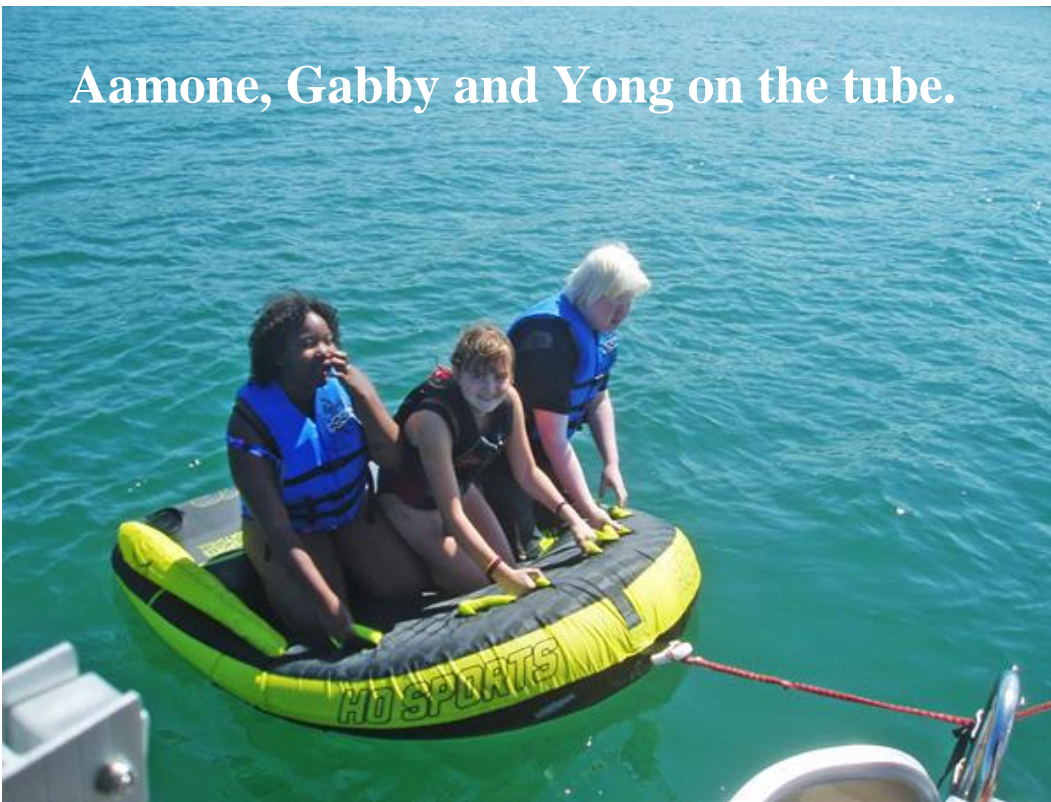
**Out on the yacht!**



**Callie, Hope and Yong  
getting ready to tube.**



**Aamone, Gabby and Yong on the tube.**





**Gaddy, Christian & Callie on the tube.**



**OUB staffers Leah, Hope and Maddie getting a wild ride!**



**The group on the beach at Charlevoix in our special adventure camp camo T-shirts.**

**Thanks to everyone that made the 2016 Running Blind Adventure Camp so special!**