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What Every Parent's Talking About

# parenting



## THE SPECIAL NEEDS ISSUE

*Summer Camps for All Abilities*

*OC's Most Complete Special Needs Directory*

**CAMPS & ACTIVITIES, PRE-K TO 12 EDUCATION, SPECIAL NEEDS**

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Ralph Palumbo



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Jessica Peralta

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## On the Cover

(Left to right) Liam and Wyatt enjoying Beyond Blindness in Santa Ana's playground.

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## Special Issue

This month we spotlight the families in our community who have a child or children with special needs. For these families, the work never ends for keeping their children safe, healthy and engaged. We celebrate these families and offer several articles with insights and resources to help them in their daily endeavors. From finding the best special needs camp to learning ways to supplement your child's classroom special education, we've rounded up some experts for helpful, practical advice.

**Jessica Peralta**

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(Left to right) Wyatt, Liam, Santiago and Heath having fun on the playground at Beyond Blindness in Santa Ana, which hosts an inclusive summer camp.

Photography by Ralph Palumbo

# Finding the Best Camp

## What to look for when searching for a camp for your child with special needs.

By Jessica Peralta

Liliana was diagnosed with foveal hypoplasia three months after birth. It's a rare condition often associated with low vision and rapid, uncontrollable eye movements.

"I worried about what her life would be like and didn't know how to help her," said Jesi Sinner, Liliana's mother. "But at Beyond Blindness, she has made so many improvements that it gives me hope for her future."

Now 20 months old, Liliana has been receiving one-to-one services at Beyond Blindness in Santa Ana, which is helping her exceed expectations set by her doctors, who warned the family that their child might never walk, crawl or even roll over. Her therapists and teachers at Beyond Blindness have worked with her to develop new skills, from identifying tiny objects on the ground and picking them up to recognizing faces, voices and facial expressions.

Beyond Blindness offers an assortment of programs aimed to help children with visual impairments and other disabilities. The Beyond Blindness summer camp offers a structured opportunity for children with disabilities to develop life skills necessary for their growth and independence.

Though Liliana is still too young for the Beyond Blindness summer camp — the minimum age is 3 — the plan is for her to attend as soon as she can.

Camps for children with special needs offer many benefits. According to Beyond Blindness, their camp allows children to connect with peers, build social confidence and develop decision-making, problem-solving and self-care skills. It also offers access to new experiences that they might not otherwise have without a camp — including adapted sports, adapted art and inclusive field trips.

There are many things families with special needs have to consider when it comes to camps for their kids. There are key questions they can ask camp directors and specific things to look for in the right camp.

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

## Benefits of Camp & What to Look For

Jacob Garcia, a teacher of the visually impaired at Beyond Blindness, said that when looking for a camp for children with special needs, parents should consider the quality of the program.

"It is important to determine whether the staff is well-trained and knowledgeable in working with children with disabilities," Garcia said. "The activities should be adapted to meet the needs of all campers, ensuring a fully inclusive experience where every child can participate meaningfully."

"If considering a traditional camp, parents should look for one that is open to providing accommodations. Without appropriate accommodations, a child may not have the same access and opportunities as their peers. Parents should consider meeting with the camp director to discuss how the program will be adapted to meet their child's specific needs."

Debora L. Smith, founder/executive director of Autism Resource Mom, an Orange County nonprofit that provides support, guidance and hope for autistic individuals and their families, said benefits of camp include socialization, development and the opportunity to try new things in safe and fun surroundings.

"All these things help build self-confidence and push our kids out of their comfort zones — and that's when true growth happens," she said. "The specially trained support staff allows all this to happen. And just getting fresh air and exercise can be such a tremendous health boost. And while being separated from our kids can be scary for us parents, it can also be a much-needed time to recharge, regroup and relax."

[Read the full story at parentingoc.com.](http://parentingoc.com)

## Orange County Special Needs Directory

Early Childhood Center	Exceptional Needs Specialized School	A Variety of Disabilities	Infant to T-K	949-234-5505 rhdentf.capousd.org   Dana Point
Saddleback College Adult Transition Program	College Education and Adult Transition	Mobility, Physical, Occupational	Adult	949-582-4500 saddleback.edu   Mission Viejo
Santa Ana Unified School District's Special Education Department	School Program, Adult Transition, Workability Programs	Behavioral and Social-Emotional	Infant to Adult	714-558-5501 sausd.us/specialeducation   Santa Ana
Speech and Language Development Center	School Program, Adult Transition, Therapies	Behavioral, Counseling, Occupational, Physical, Speech	All Ages	714-821-3620   sldc.net   Buena Park
Taft Elementary DHH Program	School Program	Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Program	Infant to 6th Grade	714-550-1405   sausd.us Multiple locations throughout OC
The Prentice School	Mild ADHD/Dyslexia Specialized School, Therapies	Mild ADHD/Dyslexia	1st to 8th Grade	714-538-4511 prentice.org   North Tustin
University High School Deaf & Hard of Hearing Program	School Program	Deaf and Hard of Hearing	9th to 12th Grade	949-936-7600 universityhigh.iusd.org   Irvine
Venado Middle School Deaf & Hard of Hearing Program	School Program	Deaf and Hard of Hearing	6th to 8th Grade	949-936-6826 venado.iusd.org   Irvine

# LEARNING SERVICES

EDUCATION	SERVICE	FOCUS	GRADES	CONTACT INFORMATION
Beyond Blindness	Education Support, Early Assessment, Camps, Enrichment, Family Support	Blind or Visually Impaired, Other Disabilities	Infant to 22 Years	714-573-8888 beyondblindness.org   Santa Ana
Child Development Institute	Online Resources, Parent Support	ADD/ADHD	Parents	800-283-2973   childdevelopmentinfo.com   Virtual resource
Down Syndrome Association of Orange County (DSAOC)	Education Support, Support Groups, Resource, Programs Services	Down Syndrome	All Ages	714-540-5794   dsaac.org Virtual resource
Down Syndrome Foundation	Learning Program	Down Syndrome	Call for more info	949-298-2020 dsfoc.org   Newport Beach
Easterseals Southern California (ESSC)	Healthcare, Education and Employment	Developmental Disabilities	All Ages	714-834-1111   easterseals.com/ southernca   Newport Beach
OC Autism Foundation (OCAF)	Education Support, Therapy, Testing, Events, Support Groups	Autism, Related Disorders	Infants to Adults	714-799-3030 ocautism.org   Garden Grove
Orange County Childrens Therapeutic Arts Center	Arts Education, Education Support, Mentoring, Programs, Therapies	Cognitive, Emotional, Language, Physical, and Social Disabilities	All Ages	714-547-5468 occtac.org   Santa Ana
Parliament Tutors	Tutoring, Individualized Education Plans	ADD/ADHD, Dyslexia, Visually Impaired, DHH, and Adult Basic Education	Call for more info	877-873-0511   parliamenttutors.com Costa Mesa, Orange, Irvine, Huntington Beach, Newport Beach
Special Education Center at Mark Twain	Education Support, Socialization, and Communication	Call for more info	Infant to Adult	714-663-6050   marktwin.ggusd.us Garden Grove
Special Education Student Support Services	Variety of Learning Services	A Variety of Disabilities	K-8th	714-447-7500 fullertonsd.org   Fullerton
SuperDville	Video-Based Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum	ADHD, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, Dyslexia	Ages 7 to 12	superdville.com   Virtual resource
TASK	Adult Transition, Virtual Workshops	Emotional, Mental, Physical, Other Chronic Health Conditions	All Ages	714-533-8275   taskca.org   Brea
The Autism Community in Action (TACA)	Education Support, Awareness Resources, Online Resources	Autism	Parents	949-640-4401   tacanow.org   Irvine
Tutor Doctor School	Specialized School	A Variety of Disabilities	Infant to Adult	949-393-5988   tutordocor.com Orange
Young Scholars Academy	Events, Virtual Enrichment Education Courses and Summer Camps	Twice-Exceptional, Neurodivergent, Gifted	Ages 7 to 18	424-835-5324   youngscholarsacademy.org   Virtual resource
IDEA Educational Rights Consultant & Advocate	Advocacy, Educational Consultation, Legal Resources	Students with Disabilities	Call for more info	949-535-1818 ideaeducationalrights.com   Irvine
Irvine High School Special Classes	School Program, Individualized Education Plan	Call for more info	6th Grade to Adult	949-936-7000 irvinehigh.iusd.org   Irvine
La Tierra Early Childhood Center/Dept of Child Care Services Special Ed School	Specialized School	A Variety of Special Needs	Pre-K	949-707-5276   svusd.org/schools/ elementary-a/la-tierra-early-childhood-center   Mission Viejo
Mardan School	Private Non-Profit Therapeutic Day School	Emotional, Social, Behavioral, and/or Learning Disorders	K to 12th Grade	949-733-1500   mardanschool.org Irvine
New Vista School	School Program, Adult Transition	Autism and Related Disorders	6th Grade to Adult	949-455-1270   newvistaschool.org Laguna Hills
Fred Newhart Middle School Special Classes	School Program	All Special Needs	6th to 8th Grade	949-425-2232   newhart.capousd.org Mission Viejo
Olive Crest Academy	School Program, Adult Transition	A Variety of Disabilities	Kindergarden to Adult	714-998-6571   olivecrestacademy.org Garden Grove
Orange County Department of Education	Online Education Resource	A Variety of Disabilities	All Ages	714-966-4000   ocde.us/SPED/Pages/ default.aspx   all Orange County