Executive Director Michael Constance has invested his heart and soul in New Hampshire’s Camp Allen. Founded in 1931, the camp’s mission is to provide a safe, affordable outdoor experience for people of all ages with disabilities. The unstated but incalculable benefit of their programs is the opportunity to provide a respite for caregivers.

“Every summer I watch tired families drop off their loved ones but at the end of the session they return with renewed energy, happy to be together again. Pick-up day is my favorite time at Camp Allen because it reconfirms the value of what we do,” Constance says.

As an undergraduate student of history at the University of Vermont, Constance studied U.S. history during a semester at Warwick University in England, enjoying both the European perspective and the cultural experience. Although the directorship at Camp Allen is a long leap from his history degree, Constance believes that a liberal arts education prepares students with critical thinking and communications skills that apply to a wide range of pursuits.

After joining Camp Allen as a summer counselor in 2008, Constance accepted a promotion to camp director, then to executive director. He has solidified the organization’s financial health by doubling its assets, eliminating debt and increasing the number of campers. Responding to the multi-week session closures during the pandemic, he grew camper options by adding day and overnight outdoor sessions. To achieve a high ratio of counselors per camper, during the summer months he supplements local labor with international staff, noting that “the cultural exchange between campers and overseas staff can be transformational.”

Looking to expand his career skills, Constance enrolled in the UNH master of public administration on-campus program but the global health crisis required a mid-course shift to an online modality. The new format saved the time of a campus commute and the asynchronous schedule allowed him the ease to carefully review the materials and formulate his questions. Daily interaction with faculty and students on discussion boards evolved to a continuum of earning which enticed him to dig deeper into the course content.

“Online learning helped me focus on growing my leadership skills while offering the convenience of remote access and the schedule flexibility of asynchronous classes,” Constance says. “The online MPA faculty and curriculum at UNH has made me a better professional in the nonprofit field. I feel well positioned to pursue my long-term goals as an advocate for disability accommodation.”
As a student, Constance traveled to Washington, D.C. with the UNH Leadership Education in the Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) program to advocate for Medicaid recipients with disabilities. With years of practical experience and a master’s degree, he contemplates opportunities to leverage his expertise to influence public policy at a local and state level.

Constance served six years on the board of ABLE NH, a state chapter of a national organization dedicated to equity and social justice for people with disabilities. In 2017, he received the New Hampshire Governor’s Accessibility Award in recognition of his leadership with Camp Howard, a sub-program within Camp Allen that offers job training and pays campers in a work environment. Their first paycheck represents the satisfying fulfillment of a long-held desire to make a productive contribution.

“New Hampshire needs to foster better employment among this population,” states Constance. “Making our workforce more inclusive delivers a mutual benefit because these workers are highly motivated, reliable and contribute to a better employee retention rate.”

With a quiet smile, Constance reveals that his name will appear in the Union Leader’s 2024 publication of “40 under Forty”, the newspaper’s annual listing of 40 young professional influencers under the age of 40 who are shaping New Hampshire’s business, educational and financial environments.

Several years ago, Constance suggested to an adult camper that he shave before his family arrival on pick-up day. Rather than ask for assistance, the camper shaved himself for the first time in his life. This simple act of autonomy was an epiphany for Constance as he fully realized the limiting effect that external expectations can impose on any individual, with or without disabilities.

In his advocacy for people with disabilities, Constance seeks to dismantle obstacles in their path toward achieving greater independence and productivity.

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