



NANCY ROKOS/PHOTOJOURNALIST

CEO Mark Dibble stands at the main entrance to Camp Ockanickon in Medford.

## Mark Dibble: *Everyone should feel they belong*

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Mark Dibble wants every kid to feel they have a place where they belong.

Dibble is CEO of the YMCA's Camp Ockanickon.

Tucked into 800 acres of woodlands in Medford, the camp serves more than 5,000 children each year.

The \$5 million non-profit is a year-round operation with two overnight camps, day camps, conferences, school programs and childcare in local school districts.

One of its most important functions is serving kids who might not otherwise have the opportunity to go to camp. Children in foster care and from low-income homes can attend at no or reduced cost. There are specialty camps for children

infected or affected by HIV or AIDS, children who are visually impaired or blind, and a bereavement camp for children grieving the loss of a loved one. The camp also serves many children in military families; some with a parent deployed overseas.

"We give a lot of opportunities for children to come and have an outdoor experience and get away from all the problems in their life," said Dibble.

The CEO knows how it feels to be different. As a child, he suffered from severe food allergies and asthma.

Two weeks after birth, he went into his first anaphylactic shock, and continued to suffer from the disorder. He spent much of his childhood in hospitals, and even went to live at a National Institutes of Health research facility for six months

so doctors could determine what he could eat. As a boy, he had severe allergies to dairy, wheat, citrus and legumes.

The 37-year-old has outgrown many of those food allergies but remembers the feelings of isolation and being different than other kids. Growing up in Rochester, N.Y., it was the YMCA that offered Dibble the opportunity to just be a kid.

"I had a traditional camp experience and it changed my life," he said.

Dibble's mission is to provide that same opportunity for local kids.

"I've just met, literally, dozens of children who've told me that camp is the only place that they fit in and have found a home," he said.

Just like adults, kids can experience deep hurts and hang-ups too.

"I think everybody, no matter who

you are or where you're coming from, has issues that they're dealing with. I just think that our role here is to provide an open and welcoming place," said Dibble.

Dibble shares a home in Medford with his wife, Beth, and their infant son, Emerson.

He earned an MBA from Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University and he went on to work as a corporate strategy consultant for Fortune 500 companies. Yet, his passion has always been for non-profits, which led him to take the helm at the YMCA.

"I figured I'd spend some time in the corporate world and take those skills I learned back to the non-profit world," said Dibble.