California Wildfires Destroy Camp for Teens Living With HIV [VIDEO]

For 24 years, Camp Hollywood HEART, part of One Heartland, offered creative arts programs to the kids.

November 20, 2018 By Trent Straube

The California wildfires have razed a long-running summer camp for HIV-positive teens. Located at Gindling Hilltop in Malibu, Camp Hollywood HEART was a program of the larger One Heartland camp—formerly known as Camp Heartland—located in Minnesota.

Camp Hollywood HEART is “a place where children from across the country affected by this disease could go for unconditional love,” Neil Willenson, who started Camp Heartland 24 years ago, told Milwaukee’s WTMJ-TV Channel 4.

“It was totally ravaged,” he said, “only two cabins remain on this beautiful hillside.”

About 80 teens attended the camp, which specialized in creative arts, offering the teens chances to learn filmmaking, fashion design and creative writing. Celebrities such as actress Mila Kunis

often pitched in to help with camp activities.

Luckily, no one was hurt in the fires.

The camp was set to celebrate a 25th anniversary party next year, but that is uncertain now.

“Camp is not about the building,” Willenson told TMJ4, “it’s about the community, and when I think about my own memories, very few of them are of the building. They were sunrise, sunsets and stargazing. All the hugs and the community. Nothing will change in terms of the community that One Heartland provides for the kids, but I think a couple years from now, there will be new memories to make.”

In related news, an Ohio-based camp for kids with HIV shuttered this year because fewer children are born with the virus these days. For that story, click here. And to learn about a podcast featuring several participants and volunteers from Camp Heartland, click here.

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