



Camp Heartland Is Closing

The longtime retreat served youth living with HIV.

January 6, 2025 By [Trent Straube](#)

Since 1993, Camp Heartland has offered a much-needed respite and joy to youth living with and affected by HIV. But the beloved Minnesota camp is closing because the facility is for sale. It has served over 6,000 youth affected by HIV and AIDS during its three-decade run.

“My Dear One Heartland Friends, I have a range of emotions today as I have bittersweet news to share,” announced camp founder Neil Willenson in an October 29 Facebook post. “I was informed recently that the Board of Directors of One Heartland has made the very hard decision to place the beautiful One Heartland Center up for sale. The ‘sweet’ is that mother-to child-transmission of HIV has virtually been eliminated in the United States in recent years. The number of children now born with HIV is in the handfuls versus the estimated 1,630 babies born with HIV during our founding year in 1993. One never could [have] imagined this incredible progress in three decades.”

Located in Willow River, Minnesota, about 90 minutes from the Twin Cities, the One Heartland facilities include cabins, lakes, a health center, a swimming pool and more spread across 93 acres. One Heartland has operated several camps targeted to different youth populations. For example, Camp Heartland served youth living with and affected by HIV, while Camp True Colors was open to LGBTQ and gender-expansive youth. One Heartland has offered camping experiences for young people facing other serious health issues, such as diabetes, as well as for unhoused youth and children facing other hardships.

In his Facebook announcement, Willenson continued:

“When we were founded 31 years ago, we had the goal of providing children affected by HIV/AIDS with a one-time, weeklong experience of unconditional love and acceptance. Through the tireless and unwavering support of tens of thousands of donors, camp volunteers, staff, board members and more, the program lasted 30 more years than my original intention. Along with moments of great joy and inspiration, there have been painful and profound losses of at least 150 prior campers. We cherish the time we had with them and remember them always.”

