

Action Figures: Mary Leighton saving summer

Age 30

How She Stays Fit

Pilates. As a certified instructor, she's adapted a class for her campers.

Latest Obsession

Decorating her newly built New England Cape-style house on 150 acres

Why We Admire Her

When Leighton met 13-year-old Jonathan the first day of camp, he was so self-conscious about leaving his wheelchair — he was missing a leg — that he barely spoke. The occupational therapist eventually coaxed him out of his chair to try Pilates and learn how to hop. By the time the Hawaiian-themed farewell bash came around, Jonathan was doing the limbo and grinning ear to ear. Helping kids with limb loss feel comfortable being themselves is the reason Leighton founded Camp Ability, a yearly 4-day event.



How She Got Started

In 2002, Leighton was working with 2-year-old Nicholas at Therapy Corner, a private clinic in Winthrop, Maine. Missing both arms, one leg, and part of one foot, Nicholas took his first steps ever with the help of a prosthetic. Amazed by his ambition, Leighton, who'd been looking for a professional specialty, had found her niche: prosthetics. In April 2004, a fellow therapist suggested she start a summer camp for disabled kids. At first, Leighton laughed. But a few days later, she phoned the Pine Tree Society, a foundation for disabled people that runs a 280-acre summer camp for kids with special needs. They agreed to host a minicamp. She began throwing spaghetti suppers to raise money and calling colleagues for advice. Health care companies like Hanger

Prosthetics & Orthotics soon signed on as sponsors. By August 2004, she'd roasted her first s'mores with five campers.



What She's Accomplished

In 3 years, Camp Ability has hosted 59 campers (14 of whom attended a sister camp in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, which Leighton co-opened last fall). In addition to hiking, swimming, and building campfires, kids attend support groups, exercise classes, and therapy sessions. "Helping these kids realize that this is just the beginning of what they can accomplish makes all this work worthwhile," says Leighton, who continues to work full-time at Therapy Corner and uses vacation days to run the camp with a physical therapist and 50 part-time volunteers.

What's Next

This summer Leighton is opening a third camp in Big Bear, California.

For more on the camp, visit [Camp No Limits website](#).

