

Andrea Knepper

Kayaking Blind - Independence at its Best in the Apostle Islands

With Gwen Botting



Gwen Botting, Executive Director of Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind, and Andrea Knepper, Executive Director of Chicago Adventure Therapy, and their staff will share with you the exhilarating experiences and the critical impact of providing persons with significant visual disabilities the opportunity to learn to captain their own kayaks in the Apostle Islands. Beautiful photos and meaningful descriptions will emphasize ABILITY rather than what's missing. OUB brought 6 campers, aged 12-17,

all of whom are blind or low vision, several of whom also have additional disabilities and one who also has only the use of one arm, and 7 staff members who are also blind or low vision, to the Apostle Islands to partner with Chicago Adventure Therapy to learn to kayak, experience sea caves first hand by feel, learn to kayak independently, and even try tandem kayaking with each other (not with a sighted partner). They also had opportunities to hike, visit waterfalls, play on the beach, shop and learn about native history and maritime history of northern Wisconsin.

Adventures like this one are important to our campers and staff, instilling confidence and self-reliance. The impact on the Chicago Adventure Therapy staff and volunteers, however, was even more palpable! Some were moved to tears as they realized the critical role they were playing in promoting personal growth among our campers and staff members. The sheer beauty of northern Wisconsin also played a significant role, as did the weather and the biting flies! OUB and CAT are planning another collaborative adventure in 2023, rock climbing and kayaking at Devil's Lake State Park in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Andrea Knepper is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, a sea kayak instructor, and a wilderness guide. The juxtaposition of these experiences provided the idea and motivation for CAT. Leading affluent people on vacations in the wilderness, I sometimes watched it change their lives. Over the course of a week-end, a 6-year-old girl on one of the family trips I led went from being terrified to paddle a double kayak with her father to demanding a single of her own. She spent the last day of the trip paddling her boat, lounging on the top of it, posing as the bowsprit, and chasing turtles. At the end of the trip, her father was near tears as he tried to express the impact this two day trip had on his daughter. At the time, I was working at a Community Mental Health Center. One of my adolescent clients couldn't stop opening and closing desk drawers, turning the lamp on and off, spinning the chair around and around. He

was frequently loud and inappropriate. If I went for a walk with him, he immediately stopped being disruptive and was remarkably vulnerable about his hopes and his fears. I founded Chicago Adventure Therapy in order to be able to work with clients like this young man, providing experiences like the weekend

