You may not be able to cure, but you can ?give kids with cancer a good time?

By Brock Weir

After she lost her young daughter Haddan to cancer six years ago, Kim Eby uncovered a new side of her child.

When Kim picked Haddan, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of two, up from her first trip to summer camp, she knew there was something different about her daughter, but she couldn't put her finger on it. The pieces, however, started falling into place when she heard Haddan sing for the first time.

On this fateful day, her mother realised she had never heard her sing until she came back from camp.

?I thought, ?Wow, something major must have happened at camp, but I don't know what,'? Kim recalls. ?She wasn't willing to talk about it, but it was only after she passed away that, at her funeral, her Camp Ooch counsellors got up to speak and told me what happened at the camp.

?The reality is she was a different kid there. She was able to be herself and just be free. She would perform magic shows in front of all the kids and was just so confident and happy, which she wasn't in her regular life. It was her favourite place on earth, she absolutely loved it, and it was a place where she was at her best.?

Since Haddan's passing, her parents have spent their energy ensuring other kids facing the same challenges as their daughter find their best selves at ?Camp Ooch.?

Camp Oochigeas is a summer camp in the Muskokas devoted to giving the full summer camp experience to children living with cancer, as well as bereaved siblings of cancer.

Since they founded The Haddan Eby Foundation, her family has raised over $350,000 for the camp, which does not receive government funding.
All their work comes through private donations and these funds got a considerable boost on Friday as Ms. Eby and the foundation welcomed guests to a gala fundraiser hosted by TV personality Jennifer Valentyne.

?When Haddan was six, she came to me and said she wanted to go to camp,? says Kim. ?I said, ?Wow, okay.' I was a camper, a counsellor, and I loved camp, but I thought, how am I going to let her go??

She learned more about Camp Ooch through SickKids, which provided the necessary medical okays to allow Haddan to go and, when she turned seven, off she went.

?I thought she was going to have them call me after two days and say she missed me too much!? says Kim with a chuckle. ?It was huge. You just think how great it is to have an opportunity like that that, first of all, we didn't have to pay for and, second of all, a place where she was with kids who were going through the same thing. The world revolved around those kids when they are at the camp. It was unbelievable. You can't believe this actually exists for kids. It is such a necessary part of their treatment for them to get better.

?I think every kid should be able to go to camp and what we do is try to make sure that happens.?

Each counsellor at Haddan's funeral got up and told a story about their daughter that was completely new to them. In lieu of flowers, the family asked for donations to the Camp but when people came up to them asking them about Camp Ooch, they realised public awareness of who they are and what they do is not what it could be.

?I thought I needed to share this story with everybody so we can create a legacy for Haddan because she loved that place so much,? says Kim, noting Haddan's two siblings now attend the camp as bereaved family members.

The next summer, when she dropped her other two kids off, Kim went into the arts and crafts cabin where Haddan used to spend a lot of her time. For a child with a brain tumour, energy ebbs and flows, so crafts ?became her thing.? When she went into the cabin, she says what she found was ?dumpy, ramshackle? and in need of some TLC.

With their endowment fund, they decided to raise money to build a new Arts & Crafts Centre with up-to-date equipment and materials.

?It has everything a kid could need to make all this beautiful art for their moms because that is really the legacy; she used to bring home so many arts and crafts and that's all I have left ? the arts and crafts,? says Kim. ?It is an experience these kids so desperately need to connect. Other kids spend so much of their lives in hospital that they don't live a normal life. To have that offered up to say that my kid can now have a normal existence for two weeks is amazing for the parents. The parents get to see that child happy and relaxed and just like a regular kid should be, which is not like how most normal days are.

?I always say I can't cure cancer, but I can make sure those kids with cancer sure have a good time!?

And so can you. For more information on Camp Ooochigeas and the Haddan Eby Foundation, visit www.ooch.org.