It’s a week where he gets to feel special – treated like royalty,” said Mario Ortegon about his son Elliot’s experience at the Miami Children’s Hospital Ventilation Assisted Children’s Center (VACC Camp).

Elliot has attended the week-long camp every year for the last seven years. Now 19 years old, he was diagnosed with transverse myelitis, a neurological disorder caused by inflammation of the spinal cord, two months before his 11th birthday. It left him paralyzed from the tongue down and ventilator-assisted through a trach.

“He is nonverbal, so it gives him happiness to go and interact with people,” said Ortegon. “He totally enjoys it.”

VACC camp is a free, week-long, community-based camp program providing recreation and social support for families with children who need to use oxygen and/or ventilators long term.

And a full week it is. Campers and their families are kept busy with activities including music and shows, pizza and pajama parties, movies, a Hawaiian luau, a day at the beach, boat rides, bowling, art and games, to name a few. A volunteer staff of nurses and respiratory therapists and local teenagers are on hand to provide parents and families with some leisure time.

2011 Camps for Ventilator-Assisted Kids


June 5-10. Trail’s Edge Camp, Camp Fowler, Mayville, Michigan. Contact Mary Buschell, RRT, Camp Director, 231-228-3371, mkbuschell@yahoo.com, www.med.umich.edu/mott/trailside/index.html.


June 26-30. PA Vent Camp, Camp Victory, Millville, Pennsylvania. Contact Robin Kingston, MSN, CRNP, 717-531-5337, rkingston@hmc.psu.edu.