

## Graphite Bible Camp reacts to provincial announcement

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By Chris Drost

This is the second in a series of reports about large camps in the region and how they are facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the provincial government formally cancelled overnight camps during its press conference of May 19, the board of directors for Graphite Bible Camp quickly convened to confirm some hard decisions. A few hours later a letter from camp director Brad Ferguson appeared on the Facebook page. The letter explained that "it is with heavy hearts that we, along with our board of directors, have decided to cancel our previously announced summer programming for the 2020 season." While the province has not ruled out the possibility of day camps being able to operate, Ferguson says much will depend on the restrictions. "If we cannot handle the restrictions, then no, we will not be able to open a day camp," added Ferguson. Some of the regulations are expected to be around physical distancing, hand washing, having a certain amount of space around each individual etc. "We know it would be difficult to keep children away from each other but if the parameters are attainable, we will try," explained Ferguson. This will be the first time in 60 years that Graphite Bible Camp will not run. Besides the disappointment that it will create for many, there is also the financial implications for the camp and the impact on local businesses that typically supply goods and services for the camp. "Some parents, even those whose children were still on a waiting list, have stepped up to donate the registration fees regardless of whether or not the camp runs," says Ferguson. Local people have been sending in some sizable donations. "People understand," says Ferguson. Each year a large number of local children have been able to have a free camp experience at Graphite. Ferguson explains that it will be a great disappointment to those families. The other important consideration in whatever decisions are made, is the staff. The safety of staff and campers is the priority. In the interim, camp organizers are eagerly waiting to hear about the new requirements for operating a day camp. Announcements will be made once those regulations have been reviewed by the board and a decision made if and when to proceed with a day camp this year. "I never would have dreamed that camp would not be running for the first time in 60 years," says Ferguson in his heartfelt letter.