

Sandy Hook foundation provides alternative to canceled triathlon camp

By [Rob Ryser](#) 10:14 pm EDT, Monday, June 15, 2020

Photo: Contributed Photo

Steven and Rebecca Kowalski, Chase's parents and sisters Erin, left, and Brittany at the 21st Annual Sprint for Monroe, the Kid's Fun Run was renamed "Linda's Story Time Race4Chase Kid's Fun Run" this year to honor Chase Kowalski, one of the victims in the Sandy Hook tragedy.

NEWTOWN — A triathlon summer camp organized in the name of a slain Sandy Hook Elementary School first-grader has found a way around the coronavirus crisis by offering a modified program for kids who want to swim, bike and run.

Instead of a six-week program with a finale featuring 3,000 spectators, the Race4Chase program has proposed an abbreviated two-week program that starts later in the summer, to take advantage of easing reopening restrictions.

"In certain areas, we know there are people who are desperate for summer camps," said Kevin Grimes, executive director of the Chase Michael-Anthony Kowalski Sandy Hook Memorial Foundation, which runs the triathlon camp in conjunction with 28 YMCAs in Connecticut and three other states. "On top of that, kids want to come back to compete because they had such a great experience the year before — some kids learned how to swim and bike at these camps."

Chase Kowalski was one of the 20 first-graders and six educators who were slain during the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting. The child's parents converted their grief into action, forming a nonprofit to honor his spirit by providing grants to run free triathlon camps.

This year was supposed to be the biggest Race4Chase triathlon camp season to date, with 16 sites in Connecticut and 12 others in South Carolina, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

It was also supposed to be the year that a Race4Chase camp was going to be located in Newtown for the first time, at the newly built Community Center on the town's sprawling 185-acre Fairfield Hills campus.

But in late April as the COVID-19 pandemic surged in Connecticut, the CMAK foundation was forced to cancel its camps.

Since then, the state has seen a steady decline in coronavirus hospitalizations — a reliable sign that the worst of the COVID-19 outbreak is behind Connecticut for now. In response, the state has been deliberately reopening beaches, parks, hair salons, hotels, offices, retail stores and restaurants. On Wednesday, the state plans to reopen amusement parks, gyms, libraries, nail salons, tattoo shops and theaters, all with social distancing and infection-control rules.

As a result, the CMAK foundation proposed an abbreviated triathlon camp to its participating sites.

No one is happier about the decision than staff at Newtown's Community Center, which is preparing for its own phased reopening on June 22.

"The Race4Chase camp is the perfect program to be offered at the Community Center and to be hosted on the Fairfield Hills campus," said Matthew Ariniello, Newtown Community Center director.

The camp registration in Newtown is booked. Information about camps that may be providing the modified Race4Chase program at nearby YMCAs in Brookfield, Milford, Stratford, Trumbull and Wilton-Norwalk is expected soon at cmakfoundation.org.