

THINKING OF SENDING YOUR CHILD TO CAMP?

One of our best and most experienced Camp Carers shares her thoughts on MDNSW Camps

When asked to reflect on my experiences with MDNSW camps, I felt this overwhelming gratitude to the children and their families for allowing me into their world and for teaching me more about myself and the different challenges of life than I thought possible! I had absolutely no idea what I was in for on my first camp. I remember walking into the training day with little knowledge about muscular dystrophy and walking out overwhelmed with the facts and a preparation kit on how to survive camp as a carer. I was nervous, excited, scared.... actually I could list a page of emotions that I'm sure I shared with all the children and parents on the first morning of camp!



After my first camp I was hooked; what an amazing week! Watching the delight on the children's faces as they developed friendships with other campers is priceless. Seeing the campers and carers work together in group activities makes you take a step back and just appreciate these moments in life. Camp becomes a little family! Like everything in life, camp can have its emotional and physical ups and downs but that's where the friendships developed between the carers and campers really helps. Often you see the unity of the carers stepping in to help out other carers but it's the behind the scenes moments when you see or hear the campers having discussions with the other campers about their muscular dystrophy journeys that

make you realise the importance and joy of these friendships for the children; they can see they are not alone and that there are other children just like them. At the conclusion of my university studies and six MDNSW camps later, I am truly humbled to have been given the opportunity to continue coming along to camps and enjoying the journey with many of the campers. I have taken so much away from all the camps including such achievements as the Campers' Carer Award, Camp Team Leader and, as a result of my camp experiences, the opportunity to complete my fourth year eight week placement with the extraordinary Occupational Therapist, Helena Young, at the Children's Hospital Westmead, where I was once again able to work with many of my

camp children. I also was a walking talking advertisement for camp, recommending its benefits to anyone who would listen.

Although my camp journey has been halted by the reality of having to get a job, this is not goodbye MDNSW! I will continue to volunteer where I can, including the continuation of the Sing for Fun program in 2015. I cannot say thank you enough to the camp team - especially Loretta - and to the families who entrust their children in our care! Watch this space; I will be around, and who knows a future job in paediatric occupational therapy could be calling!! Lots of love,

Emma Cowley

Emma is now a qualified OT and was one of our most beautiful and talented Camp Carers, attending six camps in total. We will miss her this year and wish her well in her career - hopefully in the neuromuscular field - where she has amazing potential. Thanks Em for all your hard work and dedication - it was very much appreciated by about 250 families and campers and of course all of us at MDNSW!



Emma's OT skills were amazing during parasailing



Emma was particularly great with the younger kids