

Volunteering for kids' camp is life-changing for kids and volunteers

Insight from Nicole Boyer, twice experienced camp volunteer and final year Nutrition and Dietetics student at Deakin University.

In January this year I attended Senior Camp in Anglesea. More than 60 campers between 12 and 14 years attended, with the supervision of 30 leaders including volunteers, diabetes educators, a doctor and a dietitian. Campers participated in a wide variety of activities including swimming, surfing, mountain biking, trying out the giant swing and high ropes course. We also held a concert, a disco and a trivia night and took a trip to the Geelong Adventure Park. Needless to say we were all exhausted by the end of the week!

This was the second camp I attended as a volunteer; my first camp was Autumn Camp which runs in the Easter school holidays for 8 – 10 year olds. My two camp experiences were very different and I will share a little of them both.

Autumn Camp was an extremely new experience for most of the campers as they had not been on a school camp yet and some had not spent a night away from their parents before. This meant many of them had never injected their own insulin as their parents had taken that responsibility. As such, one of the main priorities for this camp is educating campers about injecting their own insulin and encouraging them to do it themselves. For those that continually injected the same site we also discussed (and demonstrated) site rotation. Volunteering on this camp was both challenging and rewarding

I found Senior Camp at Anglesea easier as the campers were a bit older, which meant they had a better understanding of their role in their diabetes management and were usually aware of their own habits. The education still revolved around site rotation and correct injecting techniques but due to the large number of campers on insulin pumps there was more dietary information about carbohydrates offered. Having campers talk openly to me about their experience of diabetes, without my asking, and listening to them interact with each other and appreciate the company of other teenage diabetics was a highlight for me. Many campers who come from rural areas have met many others their age with diabetes so the social networking aspect of camp is very important for them.

Although I do not have diabetes, volunteering on Diabetes Camps enabled me to gain an understanding of what it feels like to live with diabetes. It also gave me a greater insight into diabetes management from a child and youth perspective. I would highly recommend volunteering on Diabetes Camps Victoria.

For more information about volunteering call Beth Dunlop at Diabetes Australia – Vic on (03) 9667 1791 or email bdunlop@diabetesvic.org.au.