

Camp Footloose 2009

By Nadine Garland, Arthritis and Youth Educator

Camp Footloose 2009 was held at the Lake Burrendong Sport and Recreation facility near Dubbo in early October. 42 kids from NSW, ACT, Queensland and Tasmania attended the 6 day Camp with 12 first timers. There were also 16 leaders from a variety of backgrounds, 3 Arthritis NSW staff and a Camp nurse.

Lake Burrendong was a fantastic venue and the Sport and Recreation staff assigned to us were absolutely phenomenal. They were very supportive of the kids and seemed to really understand their needs. This view was reinforced when I overheard one of the staff telling a kid that even though she hadn't hit the archery target she should be proud because it was her first time and she had given it a go, thereby achieving a lot. These types of comments are so rewarding for kids who often hear that they shouldn't try something because of their arthritis.

Throughout the week the kids had to opportunity to participate in a variety of activities. A canoe and kayak regatta took place on the first morning at Lake Burrendong. Grass skiing was enjoyed by everyone who had a turn. The climb up the tower for the flying fox was daunting and most who achieved it felt the flying fox was a much better option than making the climb back down. The younger kids, who often do a good impression of spider monkeys at the best of times, really enjoyed the rock climbing and the many first timers who had never done anything like this felt a great sense of achievement on reaching the top.

Water bomb fights are a common occurrence at Camp so this year we scheduled an afternoon of paint ballooning. Instead of plain water, the water bomb balloons were filled with coloured dye and everyone was given white shirts to wear. We had hoped to create our own painted shirts with this activity but unfortunately the colours weren't as bright as planned. Nether the less, everyone enjoyed this activity, despite the icy wind chill.

The theme for Camp this year was "Go Wild" and our day trip was to Taronga Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo. The kids had the choice of travelling around the zoo by bike, walking, or in the special zoo carts. There was a meeting point arranged about half way for those who needed to switch their mode of transport. Everyone enjoyed searching for their favourite animals and a most enjoyable day was had by all.

The theme was carried through a number of craft activities as well as the Camp dance. It was interesting to see the interpretation of the theme in the costumes with the expected animals as well as tribal and cowboy outfits. The Sport and Recreation staff joined in the dance and encouraged everyone to get up and boogie.

As always, Education sessions were a compulsory activity and while they started out with the usual lack of enthusiasm, this year the kids were engaged and learnt a lot. The session on transition to adult health services was well received by the older kids while the physiotherapy students conducted the primary aged session as a talk show and dressed up as guest speakers in the form of well liked characters. While the kids thought it was simply good fun, comments they made the next day showed they had actually learnt a lot of new things to help them manage and understand their arthritis.

Camp ended with everyone exhausted but happy. Feedback from the kids and their parents has again been extremely positive. This Camp is a valuable event for the kids as it not only gives them an opportunity to learn and try new activities, for 6 days having arthritis makes them one of the group rather than being the kid who is different.