

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**October 2018**

## **Kids Step Up to Challenge of Childhood Arthritis**

This World Arthritis Day (12 October), Arthritis New South Wales is helping a group of children with arthritis, gain a sense of control over their condition through sharing experiences including kayaking, archery and rock climbing, with others like them. Arthritis currently affects 3.5m<sup>1</sup> Australians and is expected to double over the next 20 years.



Taking place over five days, Camp Footloose (8-12 October) is a fun program for those living with of Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA). The painful and often debilitating condition affects one in 1,000<sup>2</sup> children and is often misunderstood by the wider population says Arthritis New South Wales (ANSW) CEO, Sandra Vincent:

“People often think of arthritis as an old person’s condition, yet it affects the lives of an estimated 3,000 children in NSW alone. These children often feel marginalised and concerned that they are ‘letting the team down’ when it comes to physical activities. Camp Footloose is a parent-free experience that gives children aged nine – 18 the chance to play and challenge each other on a level playing field, without fear of judgement.”



Camp Footloose has become the event of the year for its young campers says Keelie Sammons, 10, who was diagnosed with JIA at 21 months old after her parents noticed that she was limping and had a swollen knee, which spread to her hand and wrist:

“For me, the camp is a chance to be myself, as I spend most of the time pretending I’m fine. I get tired quite often and sometimes I’ve just had enough and people don’t always understand because they can’t see the problem. At camp I don’t have to explain myself and can rest or sit out of activities and I don’t have to explain myself, everyone just gets it.”

Facilitated by a dedicated team including health professionals, volunteers and staff, the annual camp has been proven to improve the lives of attendees. Academic research has shown that the feeling of community and support from other young people who share the same experience, helps these children regain a sense of

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Arthritis Snapshot 2018 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/chronic-musculoskeletal-conditions/arthritis-snapshot/contents/arthritis>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Juvenile Arthritis web Report 2017 [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/arthritis-other-musculoskeletal-conditions/juvenile-arthritis/contents/what-is-juvenile-arthritis](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/arthritis-other-musculoskeletal-conditions/juvenile-arthritis/contents/what-is-juvenile-arthritis)

normality as they face the daily challenges of life with JIA. However there is still more to do adds Sandra:

“Camp Footloose brings proven benefits to around 30 children each year, that’s just 1% of children living with the condition across NSW, with many making long uncomfortable and painful journeys from as far as Victoria and the ACT to attend. We want every child with JIA to have the opportunity to enjoy sports and make friends easily, but to do so we need more funds.”

In addition to Camp Footloose, ANSW develops and delivers professionally led support programs, such as Camp Twinkletoes, an annual education weekend for families of children up to nine years old who are living with arthritis. While the parents attend presentations from health professionals and network with each other, their children are supervised with fun activities and provided education on coping strategies.



Programs are also customised to specific areas of need, such as the Rural Health Initiative, which is tailored to the experiences of farming communities. Across all its initiatives, ANSW is focused on helping those diagnosed with arthritis live full and complete lives and to have freedom from arthritis, concludes Sandra:

“Camp Footloose will help our kids stand up to Arthritis and is part of ANSW’s mission is to help every person with the condition in New South Wales to have freedom from arthritis. Cases of arthritis are predicted to double to 7 million nationally by 2050, making it more important than ever that we continue to raise money to deliver much needed services and programs to the increasing number of sufferers.”

To support ANSW go to <https://arthritisnsw.org.au/donation/>

For more information on Camp Footloose visit <https://arthritisnsw.org.au/camp-footloose/>

To learn about arthritis and the work of ANSW, visit <https://arthritisnsw.org.au/>

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### **About ANSW**

Arthritis NSW (ANSW) is a member-based health charity founded in 1967 to help improve the lives of people suffering from arthritis and related musculoskeletal conditions. As a peak body for arthritis support in NSW, the organisation works to empower people to manage their condition and health towards achieving their personal meaning of ANSW's vision Freedom from Arthritis.