

2011 Youth Rally Summary

From: Renee Visser RN, BSN, CWON, CCCN

It's a beautiful Saturday morning in southern California and I am driving my father's pickup toward the San Diego International Airport . An adventure awaits me. I will be meeting at least 50 people in the next 12 hours and over 100 two days from now. How did I get into this situation? I am a Certified Wound Ostomy Continence Nurse and I volunteered.

Every summer people come together to organize a camp for kids aged 11 to 17. Directors make plans well in advance to find a location, set up activities and arrange for speakers. This year the camp was held at the San Diego State University campus. Applications for counselors, nurses, trainees and campers are received and sorted into groups. This year we had 15 groups. My group had three councilors, one trainee, seven campers and me. I considered myself a trainee as well.

The Rally4 Youth is specifically organized to provide a week of fun and education for teenagers living with bowel and/or bladder dysfunction. They come from all over the United States , Canada and even one from Britain . They have a wide variety of diagnoses including Crohn's, Colitis, Extorphy, Herspung's and Spina Bifida. There are a few that have very rare conditions. Some have very complication medical regimens while others are like any other teenager. The main goal of the week is to provide motivation to be independent and to find ways to achieve their goals.

The councilors all have diagnoses similar to the campers. Some of them were campers in the past. There was also a group of "councilors in training" who may have graduated from the rally or were there for the first time. Their main focus was learning how to serve the campers. There are two ways a nurse may qualify for camp. They may have a diagnosis or they are certified in ostomy and/or continence care. Several of the nurses had been campers in the past.

Each day had a different focus. Saturday was introductions for the staff. We enjoyed an evening out in Old Town San Diego with dinner and a little shopping. Sunday was staff orientation to our rolls to aid the campers. The nurses had demonstrations by product representatives and orientation to our supply room.

Monday the campers arrived and met their groups. They had to find their room, identify their groups and visit with the nurse in charge of their care for the week. Of course, they are teenagers and they want to see their friends. Getting all of them checked in was challenge. In the evening there were Survivor Games to bond the group together. Our group did well finding ping pong balls in the sand volleyball court and in the mixed relay. We had a hard time balancing balls on the ping pong paddle.

Tuesday morning the speaker was a man who had his career goals redirected when he was paralyzed. He spoke in a motivational way that the kids really absorbed. His main point was that goals can be achieved saying "You just have to find a way to get it done." That evening was Western Night and most of us got our duds on and learned a little line dancing. Some of the counselors were dressed as bandits and the kids had fun arresting them.

Wednesday was Physical Fitness Day. We walked to the University Athletics Center and had classes taught by the Aztec Staff. Choices included: Pilates, Swimming, Kick Boxing, Rock Wall Climbing, Yoga, Spinning and more. Being able to sample some new sports motivated everyone to try something. We saw some very inspirational efforts. That afternoon we split up into groups according to diagnosis. My group comprised of people who were born with Spina Bifida. We had a lively discussion about how to cope with wheelchairs, accessibility and how others view them. In the evening, we had movie night to see "Despicable Me".

Thursday was class in the morning and then to the beach. Busses took all of us to Mission Beach . A canopy had been set up for us and a section of the beach was claimed. "All Terrain" wheelchairs were available to take kids to the water if they could not navigate through the sand on their own. The campers also received armbands to the adjacent

amusement park where they could play in an arcade, ride the rollercoaster or enjoy many other activities. Boutique shops were also available, so many purchased souvenirs. As the sun set, a bonfire was built so to end the day with roasted marshmallows and s'mores.

Friday morning was a talent show and a fashion show. There are a lot of talented kids and they were not afraid to show off a little bit. The fashion show had some comedy outfits and others were very attractive. Free time in the afternoon included a beauty shop for hair and nails. A big annual event is graduation. All the campers who are 17 are recognized individually and receive "Diplomas". After the ceremony, the party continues with a DJ, snacks and video clips from the week. This evening things turned out a little different as there was a full grid power outage that affected the campus. We shepherded the campers back to their dorms using flashlights and glow sticks! It shortened the fun but brought in a whole other adventure.

Saturday morning came and almost everyone had to leave. There were tearful farewells and promises to stay in contact via Facebook or email. Many Campers and Staff promised they would come back. Many graduates plan to return as "Councilors in Training" next year. Much was shared and much was learned.

I had some difficult times during the week. I felt overwhelmed during the day the campers arrived. I sympathized with the campers when they had problems with their ostomy care. But, I had even more positive growing times. I met many great people doing wonderful things for the campers. I enjoyed the company of a lot of fun kids. Through it all, I had to remember the main thing "You can do it; you just have to find a way!"

For more information go to <http://rally4youth.org/>

There is also a link to photos and videos from current and past Rallies at <http://youthrallyphotos.smugmug.com>