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MDA camp gives Marines opportunity to give back

Lance Cpl. Gregory Aalto

[Hi-Res Photo]



Photo by Lance Cpl. Gregory Aalto

Lance Cpl. Whitney Harris, station air traffic controller, attempts to hold a spoon on her nose longer than Luda Gogolushko, a student at Cal State Northridge who has muscular dystrophy, June 25 at Camp Cuyamaca in California. Harris and five other station Marines volunteered for the camp, located east of San Diego in the Viejas Mountains.

DESCANSO, Calif. - Six station Marines volunteered their time for a summer camp here June 23-28 to help young people with muscular dystrophy.

Volunteers were each matched with a camper to assist in daily activities at Camp Cuyamaca, operated by the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

An average day at camp was filled with events like hide-and-seek, football, making movies, building pinewood derby cars and swimming.

"Normal days go from 7 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.," said Cpl. Raymond Castro, station financial clerk.

Castro's camper, Ethan Kai, a 9-year-old from San Diego, was able to move normally most of the time.

Kai's disease was relatively unnoticeable besides morning leg cramps that needed to be massaged, said Castro.

Both Castro and Kai's favorite activity through the third day of camp was the hide-and-seek game.

"Getting my face all cammie painted and hiding from (the campers) was awesome," said Castro.

One of the campers, Corey Gibson, who has myotonic dystrophy, cannot move without assistance. Cpl. Christopher Gozo, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 13 maintenance administration clerk, took care of Gibson.

Gozo had to change Gibson's clothes, push his wheelchair, bathe him and take him to be fed through a tube directly to his stomach.

Gozo was teamed with Nathan Hayes, a Cal State Northridge student, because of the difficulty in Gibson's care.

While making their pinewood derby cars, Gozo and Hayes would point to a variety of colors and allow Gibson to signal them to his selection by grunting.

For most of the Marines here this was the first time volunteering. However, Staff Sgt. Linda Williams, a Marine Attack Squadron 211 avionics technician, returned for her ninth summer camp here.

Williams answer to why she began doing it was simple: "I wanted to help out people."

After the camp ended, it gave a chance for a first-time volunteer to reflect.

"I will never forget my camper. We laughed, argued and cried together during the week," said Lance Cpl. Whitney Harris, air traffic controller.

At a graduation ceremony for 14 campers who would not be returning because of their age, things began to get emotional for Harris.

"Everyone was crying at the end. We got very close to the (campers) there," said Harris.

Even the "macho" guys at camp were crying after the graduation, said Harris.

Weather



Current Conditions:

Fair, 107 F

Forecast:

Thu - Sunny. High: 110 Low: 83

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There are 90 of these types of camps nationwide, said Danielle Valenciano, MDA camp director.

The camps host 5,000 people with neuromuscular diseases across the U.S. at no charge.

The classification of muscular dystrophy encompasses more than 40 genetic diseases that cause progressive muscle weakness.

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