

What We Have Been Up To...

June 2010

A pizza party with other kids your age and your brothers and sisters too. Your parents are nearby and it's all free: the perfect kid scenario. That was Friday night – the introduction to the 7th annual Carolyn's Camp at Kidpower, a private therapy business. Saturday was a carnival of fun for the kids. They were grouped according to age with a mix of children with special needs, siblings, and therapists' children. Each child with special needs had their own therapist in their group to escort them through the activities as they rotated through various rooms.

Some of the activities included creating a caterpillar using recycled material, a frog puppet made with a paper sack while a real frog served as a model and hopped around staring at the children. Sunflower seeds were planted in a large pot along with wiggle worms. Turtle banks were painted an array of colors and games and fun were available to all!

One of the many highlights of the camp was the visit from the therapy dogs of Dogwood Therapy. The children followed the dogs through an obstacle course, made human bridges for the dogs to go through or around and in general petted and loved them. Dogs can so often make connections that people can't.

How do you describe a day filled with joy, emotions, play, food, companionship, friends, pets, kids, parents, therapists, learning, volunteers, siblings, water balloons, puppets, frogs, turtles, and much more? Perhaps pictures really are worth a thousand words.

The day ended with a puppet show put on by the older kids. The title of the show was "It's So Hot." Various puppets (coyote, jackrabbit, mouse, frog, etc.) made appearances and told about themselves and how they avoided the heat. The puppets told jokes like "It's so hot the chickens are laying hard boiled eggs." The kids finished off the show by trying out their own handmade frog puppets.

A great ending to a great weekend! Thank you all!

Carolyn's Camp 2009

Friday night, I looked out at the large, round tables with red and white checkered tablecloths and at the many adults and children happily eating pizza and I smiled. The 6th annual Carolyn's Camp for children with disabilities and their families was beginning. Two of the professors from the graduate school of occupational therapy were there also. It meant we could continue our collaboration with the University Of New Mexico School Of Occupational Therapy. At least ten OT students were there as volunteers to do the cleanup, assist in activities and help the children.

Carolyn, my daughter, was an occupational therapist trained at UNM. She was murdered in 2003 and I have learned it is best not to dwell on her death but as my other daughter said, "I want to remember the way Carolyn lived, not how she died." Carolyn's Camp is a living memorial to Carolyn Thurman Rustvold 1974-2003.

Saturday is the heart of the day camp. The parents retreat to a large, comfortable room for a seminar on the "Out of Sync Child." It is led by Carla, the owner of Kidpower which is a private therapy business where Carolyn worked. Carla has presented her seminar in Ireland, England and all over the U.S. She is a dynamic presenter and a wonderful role model. She puts the parent in the role of a child who has disabilities and the parents are not only enlightened but they bond and become a support group for each other. Meanwhile they know their children are having a great time nearby as they participate in therapy that looks and feels like play.

The children are ages 3-8 years of age and we group them according to age. Each child with a disability (campers) is with the therapist who sponsored them. As they rotate through the activities the therapist takes notes to share with the parent later.

The first sets of activities involve the therapy dogs from a therapy business called Dogwood. Four beautiful yellow labs, golden retrievers and a goofy looking sweetheart that is a labra-doodle enticed the children through obstacle courses. Who wouldn't want to brush, feed and cuddle up to these affectionate dogs?

A second set of activities involve large muscle movement and the Kidpower gym is full of equipment such as a climbing rope wall, a trampoline, swings, balls, scooters, jumping loft etc. It is a scene to behold.

I have fun with my nature room. I try to explain to the tadpoles, frogs and turtles that their brief interlude from the farm serves a good cause. The children love to see real wildlife. This year I brought earthworms for them to hold as well. Many of these children have sensory issues and there is nothing like a wiggle worm to overcome their fears. The nature room allows me to be the tomboy I always have been.

While the younger children are rotating through these stations, older siblings and therapist kids are practicing for an interactive play. This year the title of the play was: *Some of My Best Friends Are Galumphs*. Galumphs were hand puppets the kids made including the special needs children. My grandson, Cameron, insisted the play wouldn't be funny without a whoopee cushion and Alice, the volunteer who oversaw the play provided one to make the sound effect during transitions in the play. Alice has a son and since 80% of the campers are boys, she thought they would appreciate it. As each of the puppets appeared for their brief role in the play and then disappeared one 6 year old autistic boy would repeat over and over: Hello, good bye. Hello, good bye. Hello, good bye.

In my reflections after the camp I thought, "that is almost a philosophy of life. Hello, goodbye." Then I felt my sweet Carolyn's spirit near me saying, "no Mom. You don't have to say good bye. Transitions are inevitable but just like ice melts to water and then changes to vapor, death just means the spirit changes to a different form."

Carolyn's camp ended with water play outside: kiddy pools, water balloons, bubbles, and popsicles. Cameron hit my leg with a water balloon and as the cool water hit the hot pavement and changed to steam, I thought, "Carolyn is smiling."

Thank you Carla, volunteers, therapists, families, children, therapy dogs and frogs, turtles and tadpoles for making this 6th year a success. See you next year.

Winter 2004

At a recent board meeting, we made progress on the planning of the camp. It will be held at Kid Power- (a venue that exists to offer children occupational therapy) in mid-July. The camp will be three days long and will incorporate the therapy for the children as well as classes for their guardians and parents.

We are also planning off site events like horse therapy or swimming. We are in the process of coming up with forms for volunteers and applications for participants in the camp.

Another project we are working on:

Before Carolyn died she had been working with an organization that caters to battered families and provides them shelter and help, recently the director of this program got in touch with us and we are working with them to sponsor through Kid Power classes and training for their staff and therapy for the children in their care.

Our September Auction was a huge success- Over 10,000 dollars raised.

April 2004

The Petroglyph playground will be dedicated and opened on May 12th. This is that playground the occupational therapists choose equipment for and it will be a prototype of a disabled children's playground.

March 2004

The playground at one of the elementary schools Carolyn worked at is now under construction. This playground is special in that it is designated and designed for the children with disabilities she worked with. A committee of occupational therapists chose the equipment based on the children's needs and they will use it as a therapy tool as well as a learning tool. It should be done in 6 weeks. We are going to have a ceremony where we will release ladybugs, plant sunflowers and we are working on an idea that will incorporate tiles drawn on by the students - a bench, a wall etc...

Also in the works - A plaque in a memorial rose garden at the Botanical Garden.

Fall 2003

Our first goal is to start a camp for disabled children and their parents in the summer of 2004. This camp will include classes for the children as well as their parents so we can maximize the impact the camp will have on the children involved. We have occupational, speech and physical therapists as well as teachers who have already volunteered their time and support to help us realize this goal.

We would like to offer scholarships for children in need of therapy, but are currently unable to afford it.

Our Work: We are setting up scholarships with various therapy organizations for children in need.