

**Andrew
Children's Holiday 2007**



My son, Andrew, who has autism, went on the SSAFA Forces Help holiday for disabled children for the first time this year - in fact it was his first stay away from the family ever. We were very nervous about allowing him to go, as he likes his own routine and things done the way he understands, but is not always able to make his needs understood. Andrew is lucky enough to be educated in a mainstream school, which has given him some wonderful opportunities, but puts unbelievable pressure on him to conform constantly. No matter how hard Andrew tries, his starting block is always three miles behind everyone else's. No matter how much effort he puts in, the race is not an equal one. Consequently Andrew has had a real crisis of confidence recently. We wanted Andrew to have an experience which would allow him to be himself and to achieve on his own terms. I felt Andrew had this opportunity during the holiday.

From the minute we arrived I felt that Andrew's best interests were at the heart of things. Andrew's volunteer coach was so interested in him as an individual. She had done her homework and asked sensible questions about his needs and diet. She connected with Andrew immediately and he felt safe in her care. They

developed a lovely relationship which, I feel, was pivotal to Andrew enjoying his holiday. She also kept a detailed and thoughtful holiday diary which has allowed us to share Andrew's experiences with him.

Respite care is not available in our area when children are in mainstream schools, so with nearest family 175 miles away, this is the first break for all of us, especially important as my husband is in Afghanistan at the moment. Andrew's absence gave his sister and I some special time together where we didn't have to plan everything around what Andrew could or couldn't cope with. This was her opportunity for her needs to come first!

Andrew is very proud of his experiences and time will tell if this has more lasting effects. We are very grateful that Andrew had this wonderful holiday and would certainly recommend the experience to other families.

August 2007