

Review from a Volunteer Perspective- Holiday 2007
(Registered Nurse)



Summer 2007 was my eleventh year of working with SSAFA Forces Help on their children's holiday. In fact I have attended over 20 holidays for disabled children and five siblings/young carers' holidays. I was initially recruited by applying to work as a volunteer coach but was swiftly asked to attend in my capacity of being a Registered Nurse. This year was no different.

When I arrived at the Calvert Trust, Exmoor for the first time I had no preconceived ideas but it was a truly remarkable facility. The centre is built with a traditional setting in mind and yet has every facility imaginable to accommodate individuals with special needs. I was impressed.

The holiday followed a similar pattern to previous with the eternal theme 'kids first'. The children are always dependants of service families, which to me is important. I feel I am giving something back to the families and the Services to enable a good time for the children and respite where very much needed. Some families survive all year with no respite, coping with some very challenging situations with their special children.

The holiday is challenging for me as an individual in so many ways. As the nurse, I assume the safe keeping and administration of all the children's medications. This year my medicine chest was so full I could not even shut the lid, it was simply overflowing. The children do not just arrive with a bottle of 'Calpol' but often with plastic boxes brimming with different combinations of many drugs. My door is almost broken down by some of the children requiring 'Ritalin' for ADHD first thing in the morning.

Although I do not coach an individual child, I am often with coaches and children who may need extra support, specialised techniques or simply just for fun. The children know I am the nurse and often come to me if they feel unwell and I have been known to sit up all night with a child struggling to settle with an earache.

Thankfully, accidents are rare. My plaster application skills are now excellent and I have learnt that cartoon or picture plasters are by far the best to help a child recover! (Okay, they are simply more fun). The children (and sometimes the grown ups) keep me on my toes and my rucksack of necessary daily kit grows every year.

SSAFA Forces Help offer fantastic holidays to the children, many of whom grow in confidence and self- esteem with what they can achieve. For the volunteers, well we grow also. This opportunity offers me a completely different angle of working as a nurse. I work within a fantastic team of volunteers and many of us stay in touch throughout the year. Everyday is different from breakfast through to bedtime. The activities such as kayaking, abseiling, horse riding, archery and our unforgettable day at the beach or the Milkyway stretch the children and the volunteer team.

The holiday, for me, has a dynamic quality, which I enjoy. They are fun and tiring but also child- friendly with full safety constantly in mind. I often think I have gained as much as the children when it is time to go home. I have never attended a holiday where I have not learnt something new. I hope they continue to offer a challenge to children and volunteers alike for many years to come.