

## Camp Connection 2008

Camp Connection 2008 took place on the weekend of the 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at Myuna Bay, a NSW Department of Sport and Recreation venue that was chosen due to its proximity to Sydney and the facilities and activities offered. Families attending represented countries including Russia, Colombia, USSR, Guatemala, Ireland, Korea, Nicaragua, USA, Malaysia, Germany, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Chile, New Zealand and Australia.

### Buddies

Ten volunteer "buddies" attended the camp. They attended a training/planning day where they planned activities, learnt about child protection issues and talked about their expectations of the camp. Nine of the buddies were intercountry adoptees, some were new to the camp and others had attended in the past. They were of invaluable assistance at the camp, running the activities for the children while the parents attended the adult workshops and in a fun, caring and accepting spirit. Strong attachments were formed with the buddies and the children.



***The Buddies: Gabbie, Andres, Jonathon, Adam, Leah, Jeanette, Joey, Matt, Deepika and Big Andres***

Children attending aged from 10 months to 15 years old and were adopted from all over the world. They quickly bonded with each other and the buddies and formed themselves into groups for the activities on offer.

### Parents Workshops

The parents attended workshops on Saturday morning on:

1. Revisiting birth countries; Adam Brisson gave a thought provoking talk about his personal experience revisiting his birth country. Two families have now planned return visits to Colombia next year after reflecting on the discussions and issues that were

raised at the workshop.

2. A round table discussion on adoption issues. Most of the participants would have liked more time to discuss the issues raised and there is certainly scope for more of these kinds of workshops in the future.

***The parents listening to Adams' talk on revisiting his birth country***



### The Program

Families arrived on Friday afternoon through to the evening and adults and kids quickly formed friendships or renewed acquaintance with people they had met before.

On Saturday morning the children were split into age groups and met up with their buddies. The kite making proved to be a hit with the younger kids and they were soon running around the oval with their multicoloured kites and having a ball. The older kids tried their hand at archery and raft building and even managed to paddle their home made rafts out on to the lake before sinking in despair while close off shore.



***Raft builders about to test out the rafts they had constructed***

After lunch adults, buddies and kids participated in the drumming workshop with Laurie and the sound of jungle drums was heard across the campsite. Some made amazing masks reminiscent of Mardi Gras from feathers, glitter and glue and others helped cook salsa, Vietnamese spring rolls and delicious nachos.

### *Adam helps out one of the children at the drumming workshop*

After all that activity it was chill out time for the little ones who relaxed in front of a dvd while some of the older kids went swimming. The adults all enjoyed the "Happy Hour" which was drinks on the verandah of one of the lodges over the lake and the "child free" time and opportunity to chat over a drink was appreciated by all.

Dinner followed and then our Salsa teacher Atalie arrived to teach us the basics of salsa. Some budding dance champions emerged from the crowd, adults paired up, older kids looked on at their parents in total embarrassment and the younger kids all had a go for a while before deciding that hiding under the tables was much more fun.

Everyone then stocked up on marshmallows and headed for the campfire for a bit of singing and eating yummy burnt marshmallows cooked on sticks over the fire. After a huge day of activity some very tired kids and parents stumbled through the bush with their torches back to their beds for a well earned rest.



Sunday morning it was time to gear up again for the mighty MiniOlympics. Everyone was organised into four teams and Adam organised a great series of events and challenges with the xxx team emerging victorious.



### ***Some mini Olympians prepare for battle***

After lunch it was time to exchange emails and phone numbers, gather up tired and happy kids, pack up the cars and head back onto the highway for home.

### **Evaluation**

At the end of the weekend all participants were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire. Some of the comments that were made included;

#### **From the Children**

*"As soon as I arrived at Myuna Bay everyone was really welcoming and came up and introduced themselves to me. As it was my first time at Camp Connection I enjoyed it A LOT. Many things went on and it was a lot of fun. Interacting with the little kids was very enjoyable and I hope in the future I will have a lot to do with this camp as it's a great organization. My main comment would be "BEST CAMP EVER""*

The childrens' main comments centred around the activities that they had participated in. The most popular activities were archery, raft building, drumming and the campfire.

#### **From the Buddies**

The buddies expressed that the camp is important to them as they get the opportunity to share their experiences with each other as well as with the children. Some mentioned they would like to spend more time with the other adults at the camp as most of the time is spent with the children or themselves when they are off duty. This will be looked at when planning the camp for next year.

*"I joined the camp because in the society that I grew up I felt like there wasn't many adoptees, and wanted to share our similarities in feelings and make myself as well as the kids that we aren't alone, we understand."*

*"I have never been involved in any kind of adoption community so last weekend really opened my eyes up to what I've been missing out on all these years. It was great on so many levels. I really enjoyed being able to not only make friends with the kids and open up to the parents, but also to be able to meet the buddies – whom I think we all share a really special and unique understanding. I*



*feel really fortunate to have been able to 'give something back,' because I know that if I was never adopted then I would not have the incredible life I have now."*

*"Camp Connections means to me that you can unite as an adoption community and in a sense be yourself, appreciate, learn & accept who you are in a fun exciting way with no judgments. I came to Camp Connection to meet other adoptees and parents of adoptees to share life experiences and to get a sense of answers within myself when questioning if I was the only person that felt the way I did through some situations in my life as an adopted child. I made long life friends which for the first time have felt a complete connection with. I gained a sense of closure, relief and acceptance of being an adopted child. Oh and I had so much fun!!"*

Since the camp the buddies have set up their own Camp Connections Facebook page as a way of keeping in touch, sharing photos and exchanging ideas and interests. They are already planning a get-together as a way of keeping up the connections that they made at camp.

## **From the Parents**

Most of the parents agreed their reasons for attending the camp were to give their children the chance to mix in an adoptive friendly environment and meet new friends and to exchange ideas with other adoptive parents and agreed that the camp had more than met their expectations.

*"...give our children the opportunity to get to know other adopted children. Meet other adoptive families, exchange ideas, experiences etc. Have a fun, family weekend."*

*"For my family the camp was a very rewarding and memorable experience. The buddies added to this experience allowing our kids to connect with one another by sharing the one main thing they all have in common, adoption."*

They found the workshops useful and thought provoking, especially the talk on revisiting their children's country of birth told from the perspective of the adoptee.

**Sue Ann Muller**  
**2008 Camp Coordinator**

