

Lost? Try heading to camp

HERE'S THE BACKGROUND. IN THE US, THERE IS A HUGE INDUSTRY BASED AROUND CAMPS – THEY ARE PLACES WHERE MANY PARENTS SEND THEIR KIDS DURING PART OF THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS. CAMPS PROVIDE DIFFERENT ADVENTURES THAT ARE OFTEN FOCUSED ON OUTDOORS ACTIVITIES, AND SOME CAMPS ARE SPECIALISED MUSIC OR SPORTS CAMPS. PARENTS DO THIS BECAUSE KIDS TEND TO LOVE THESE THINGS AND, OF COURSE, PARENTS WANT TO GET THEIR KIDS OUT OF THEIR HAIR FOR A WHILE. ANYWAY, MANY OF THE COUNSELLORS WHO HELP RUN THE ACTIVITIES AT THE CAMPS ARE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD. THEY ARE THERE FOR THE EXPERIENCE, AND THE AMERICAN KIDS BENEFIT FROM HAVING CONTACT WITH FOREIGNERS.



This Debbie Ker's own story. She is from Western Australia, hooked up with an outfit called CCUSA and headed off to the US. Over to you, Deb ...

I'm 21 years old but began camp counsellors when I was 19. I sat my TEE at school studying physics, English literature, drama, foundations, phys-ed studies and human biology. I didn't study as hard as I should have at school and ended up getting a really low TER.

I needed a change, to re-group and work out what I wanted to do and where I was going. I thought travelling would be the answer so I looked into working holidays. I found an organisation which offered short-term working holidays at a reasonable price and it looked to be exactly what I needed to help me choose what path I wanted to take.

I went to a camp in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It is a lower income camp and children who usually would not have the chance to attend camp could be sponsored by outside companies and attend Camp Tanager for a week. I've just returned from my second year at camp and will be returning for my third year, hopefully as an assistant director.

My days were spent as a resident counsellor and head lifeguard. Activities included swimming, hiking, dance, fishing in the creek, arts and crafts and archery. I was able to spend my days running around with a Braveheart-style painted face, army-crawling the fields, and competing in camp-wide games of capture the flag. Camp's an amazing experience. There was never a dull moment and the hundred of friendships I made with both camp staff and the kids boosted my confidence.

I currently work in a childcare centre (back in WA) as a senior carer and part-time for CCUSA hoping to give people the same opportunities that I was able to have. I hope to continue travelling this huge world we live in and hopefully will be heading to Canada for six months through another program. Camp has changed my focuses in life – it's given me the chance to see and do things I never would have. I hope to continue working with children and travelling for now and seeing where life takes me.

Editor's note: Americans spell 'counsellors' with one 'L'. *Smart Start* spells it with two.



DEB'S COUNSELOR TOP 3

1. The life-long friendships I have made.
2. The cultural differences I have seen. I loved being able to swap and enjoy life experiences with other people.
3. Working with children for such an extended period of time. The long days tested my patience and strengthened me as a person as I had to step out of my comfort zone and meet a challenge.

YET ANOTHER TOP 2 STORIES

1. Being a first-year counsellor, I had told campers that I might not be able to return next year. When I did arrive back, I had kids who had returned too crying and running up to their parents shouting 'Mom, Mom, Dingo (my camp name) is here. Dingo came back!' It made me feel that I had really made an impact on these kids' lives.
2. The constant dressing up, dancing and singing. We all participated in *Americamp Idol*, which involved singing (lip-syncing) each night and the kids voting us off. I being the 'amazing performer' that I am and having an 80s theme to everything I did, got voted out first on most occasions.