

Camp Simba - Giving Kids the Opportunity to Be Kids

At the mention of cancer support, what usually comes to mind would be support given to cancer patients. Rarely does one think of providing support to the children of patients, much less organize a camp for them. The emotional needs of these children often go unnoticed as their peers and teachers are usually unaware of their situation at home.

First organized in 2009, Camp Simba is an annual retreat which seeks to cater to the emotional needs of these children by providing them with “a chance to relax, have fun and just be kids”. Organized by students from Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School (DGMS) and the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM), in collaboration with HCA Hospice Care, the camp provides an avenue for the children to meet others with similar experiences. Organizers hope that the bonds formed will help boost the children’s confidence and self-esteem, which will in turn empower them to face their situation with courage and resilience.

This year, the camp was carried out on 3-5 June at Sentosa Costa Sands and involved a total of 45 participants and 114 volunteers. Revolving around the theme of Magic & Harry Potter, campers were treated to a magical experience filled with games and activities ranging from a 4D Magix show and riding the Luge to numerous entertaining skits. Split into three groups which were aptly named ‘wisdom’ ‘strength’ and ‘courage’, campers were also taught the importance of values such as teamwork and perseverance. In line with the main aim of providing emotional support, campers were given exclusive attention, with 1 facilitator being attached to 2 children each.



Guest-of-Honor, Prof Tan Ser Kiat, Group CEO of SingHealth, remarked that the camp had achieved its aim of helping the children as it provided them with “hope and mentors and friends, and reminds them (that) they are not alone”. Another invited guest, Prof Marie Clement, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the Yong Loo Lin School of

Medicine, further emphasized that the positive impact of the retreat went beyond just helping the children, but rather “it was a very sweet celebration of our love for the kids and indirectly our patients”.

Furthermore, the benefit of the camp also extended to the volunteers as well. Isabelle Jang, a student with Duke-NUS reflected that “interaction with both the parents and their children during the camp gave me a new heart of compassion, reminding me of the need to care for the patient as a whole being, fully aware of how the illness affects their family”.

Perhaps, what is most encouraging about Camp Simba is that the impact it has made is not just short-term. In the words of Soh Hsiu Hsien, a medical student from the YLLSoM, “the ever present smiles on the children’s faces throughout the camp, the frequent SMS conversations I have with my children now and the many upcoming reunions tell me that Camp Simba will be a lifelong experience for the children”. Although the camp lasted for just three days, the friendships and support groups that were formed as well as the differences which were made in each and every individual’s lives will surely last for a lifetime.

