

Camp Footlose

Freedom from arthritis for young people



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MEDIA RELEASE

CAMP FOOTLOOSE LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD FOR KIDS WITH ARTHRITIS

For a child with juvenile arthritis, taking part in sports or active fun with friends can bring not only physical challenges, but also emotions such as anxiety and doubt.

At Camp Footlose however, kids needn't worry that they are letting themselves or their team down because of their condition, because juvenile arthritis is the one thing they all have in common.

Arthritis affects one in five people in New South Wales and does not discriminate. The latest statistics show that juvenile arthritis now affects one in every 800 Australian children, currently 3000 in NSW.

Camp Footlose is a five-day event run by Arthritis & Osteoporosis NSW (AONSW) each year as a parent-free experience that gives children aged 9–18 the chance to play and challenge each other on a level playing field, without fear of judgement.

AONSW CEO Sandra Vincent said that studies had shown social events such as Camp Footlose helped young people living with arthritis to learn coping skills and fostered a sense of belonging.

'Parents send their kids to Camp Footlose year after year for good reason,' said Sandra. 'Its success is backed by academic research which found that the feeling of community, with support from other young people who share the same experience, helps these children regain a sense of normality as they face the daily challenges of life with juvenile arthritis.'

AONSW also runs Camp Twinkletoes, an annual education weekend for families of children up to 9 years old who are living with arthritis. While the parents attend presentations from health professionals and network with each other, their children are supervised with fun activities.

The children who attend Camp Twinkletoes often return every year and go on to attend Camp Footlose, such as Annaliese Roache, 15, who even returned to Camp Twinkletoes 2018 as a volunteer.

'Annaliese developed oligoarthritis as a toddler. When she was 22 months old, she suddenly stopped walking and wasn't bearing weight,' recalled her mother Alex.

For media enquiries or images, contact **Lindy Sivyer** on **02 9857 3300**, **mob: 0408 730 446** or lsivyer@arthritisnsw.org.au.

Annaliese's rheumatologist put her on medication and drained fluid from the two-year-old's knees, ankle, wrist and fingers, enabling her to function again. Medication improved the condition in her joints and she started pre-school. 'I noticed that when the other kids were running about, Annaliese would stand back so she wouldn't be knocked over because she knew it would hurt if she fell,' said Alex.

Annaliese first went to Camp Twinkletoes when she was six and has been to every Camp Footloose to date. 'She looks forward to it every year and has made great friends there,' said Alex.

Annaliese can't recall not having juvenile arthritis, so the camps have given her much needed experiences of having the same physical abilities as her peers. 'These days I understand my limits. Some days are bad and it's difficult to walk. It's unpredictable and hard for others to understand. I always feel like I'm being judged by others because of the unpredictability,' she said.

'Camp Footloose is more fun than school camps because I'm doing the activities with people who are going through what I'm going through, and the info sessions let us talk about ways to deal with the arthritis and how to cope at school.'

Camp Footloose 2018 will be held from October 8–12 at the Sydney Academy of Sport and Recreation, Narrabeen. The event will include sessions on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing supervised activities such as archery, canoeing and rock climbing. For a look at Camp Footloose 2016 in action go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeXeZQOSow>

Early bird registration is \$150 and will close on 31 July. Registration for the event will close on 31 August. To register online go to: <https://arthritisnsw.org.au/camp-footloose/> or contact AONSW on 02 9857 3300.

Our children's camps are invaluable to families living with juvenile arthritis and we rely on donations to run them each year. If you would like to support this worthy cause, go to <https://arthritisnsw.org.au/support-us/tax-appeal-2018-help-ease-the-pain-isolation-of-jia/> or contact AONSW on 02 9857 3300. The more donations we receive, the more families we can support.

Images available: Fun is the focus at Camp Footloose 2017 with activities such as kayaking, archery and zip lining.

Arthritis & Osteoporosis NSW (AONSW) is a member-based health charity founded in 1967 to help improve the lives of people suffering from arthritis and related musculoskeletal conditions. As a peak body for arthritis support in NSW, the organisation works to empower people to manage their condition and health towards achieving their personal meaning of AONSW's vision *Freedom from Arthritis*.



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