

# Profile: Carla Strang

**Tell us in a few hundred words which Camp you were at and what you got up to at camp?**

I was lucky enough to be placed at Camp Hidden Valley, which is part of the Fresh Air Fund. This camp was in Fishkill New York and was around 2 hours from New York City. The children were both male and female aged between 8 – 12 with and without special needs, and these children were from underprivileged areas of New York City.

No day was ever the same at camp. Your day could start with a morning swim, an afternoon on the ropes course or an evening by the campfire. Other activities that I got up to included treks, arts and craft, music, photography, trivia, talent contests, going to the farm, boating, journalism, drama, outdoor adventure and of course a lot of cheering!

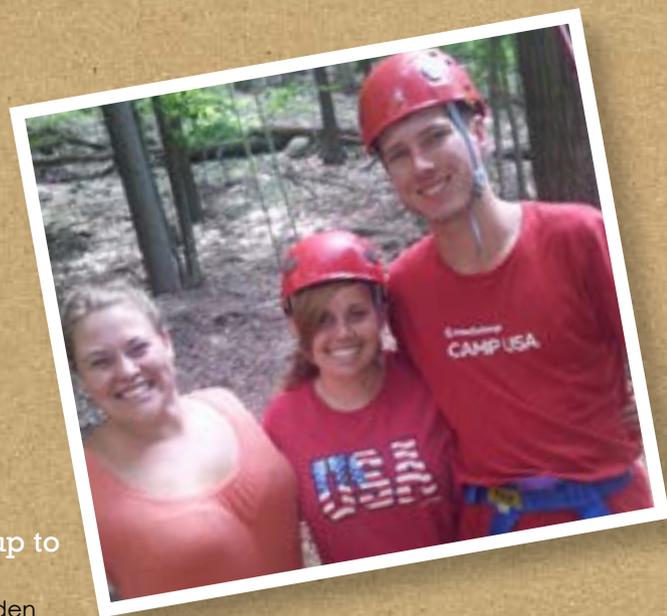
I had two roles at camp. During the day I was a Ropes Facilitator working on the high and low ropes course and in the evenings I was a General Counselor where I spent the rest of my day living with 12 children and 5 other counselors.

## **Top 3 memories of Summer Camp?**

1. Training week. Before all the children arrived we had a week where we learnt everything that we needed to know about camp and how to deal in certain situations. The best thing about this week was getting to know all of the other staff members that would soon become close friends. A lot of this time was spent next to campfires, swimming in the pool, eating a lot of s'mores, listening and dancing around in the dining hall, playing a lot of games and sport.

2. Experiencing 4th of July for the first time. My camp put together a great carnival. On the day there were water activities, a massive water slide, snow cones, movies, arts and crafts activities, a show, Kool-Aid (which was a treat since we only ever drank water!) and finished with yummy food and a carnival with different games and competitions where all the children won prizes. Plus it was a perfect opportunity for Jodie my New Zealand friend and myself to get dressed up in our American attire!

3. Working on the ropes course every day allowed me to see loads of children overcome their fears. I would see a lot of children scared to climb over a 2-meter wall, through a fire, cross a small wire or log 13 feet in the air, or jump off a log to grab a trapeze. It was a great feeling being able to push these children to try and see how far they could push themselves and once they completed the whole activity, the smile on their face, made my whole camping experience.



**Was there a camper that stands out in your mind? If so why?**

Yes her name was Angely. As I wouldn't see her for half the day, when I returned to my group she would always give me a hug and tell me how much she missed me. For some reason we just bonded really well. She was given the opportunity to come visit me on the ropes course. For the week prior she would tell me how scared she was and I kept telling her to give it ago and push herself. The day came and she climbed half way up the tree and was too scared, so she climbed back down. On her third try she had completed the whole activity. When I returned back to camp that night she gave me a big hug and told me about how happy she was that she completed it and cannot wait till next year when she comes back to camp and does it again.

**What are some of the experiences that you had which made an impact on you?**

The whole camping experience had a major impact on me. It's not everyday that you are looking after 12 children, becoming a role model and having to adjust to different situations. It also allowed me to come out of my shell and not be so shy. I even got up on stage and performed an iconic Australian song in front of everyone, and all my friends know that I wouldn't have done that before going to camp.



### Were there any times that were hard?

Yes. Sometimes there were children who wouldn't listen to anything that we would say, so we had to come up with ways to overcome this. There were also times where fatigue kicked in. Getting up 6 am every morning, working with ropes all day and not going to sleep until after midnight on some nights did take a toll on my body, but my other co-counselors were always there to help.

### Did you travel after camp? Tell us about your adventures – where did you go?

Yes! I traveled for two weeks with a group of friends after camp. We were always booking our accommodation/bus trips the night before but that was what made it fun! We ended up traveling the East Coast and saw the whole of New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Atlantic City and Washington DC. I also traveled to a friend's college in Canton and experienced the American college life for a few days.

### How was the camp food?

Camp food was better than expected. There would always be different options each encampment and there was always fruit and a salad bar that all the counselors would rush to. We also had desert every night and on special event days we had a more formal dinner.

### What was your accommodation like?

My cabins were great. Each cabin was split into half with a counselor's section in the middle. The children were never allowed into the counselor's section so we always had our personal space. There were also two bathrooms in each cabin, electricity, but unfortunately no fans. Each cabin also had a loft (upstairs area) and that was where I slept with 3 other counselors. I also experienced sleeping in tents and outside on rocks in a sleeping bag when we went on our hikes. Accommodation was great and my bed was actually very comfortable.

### What is something unexpected/different/strange about USA compared to home?

I was not expecting Americans to be so welcoming. One of the lovely girls that I was working with on the ropes course ended up letting me and two others stay at her house during our encampment breaks. She treated us like family and took us everywhere around the entire town. She even bought us bacon and egg rolls when she could see that we were getting over the camp food! Everyone was so welcoming and friendly. Oh and also the tipping and driving on the opposite side of the road was strange, but easy to get use to.

### Do you have any advice for someone who wants a Summer Camp adventure?

DO IT! Don't be scared to apply or nervous to start the journey in America by yourself. Everyone is so lovely and friendly and there is help everywhere you go and you are definitely going to meet new people who will become your friends. I nearly didn't apply last year because two years ago I applied very late

in the application process and didn't get accepted at any camps. I'm so glad that a friend pushed me to apply last year and I was lucky enough to get placed and I never look back. You learn so much about different cultures and yourself while creating thousands of memories. I can't wait to do it again!

### Did you have a good experience going on Summer Camp with IEP?

IEP was great to work with. From a friendly interview with Chris to begin with, to both Chris and Tim answering every single email that I bombarded them with, it was such an easy process to go through. When you are placed you are provided with so much information about the USA and what to expect and there is always someone to speak to. After camp I also received emails to see how camp went! IEP were fantastic, so thank you :)

### What did you value about going to Summer Camp with IEP?

The easy application process and having support all the time. I also loved how they provided me with contact details for others who were working at the same camp as me, so I was lucky enough to meet/speak to people before I left for camp.

### Would you do it again?

110%

### Did you gain anything from Camp that will benefit you in what you do next?

This experience helped me realise that I can do anything that I put my mind to. It might be scary or the future of that experience is unknown, but no matter what everything will be okay. I also learnt to not be so shy because it only hinders your experience.



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