

A Day in the Life of a Wonderland Camp Counselor

There is absolutely no “typical” day at camp, which is what many of us love the most! We often describe summer as “the longest days of the shortest summer of your life.” When you work with people and serve others especially in a special needs/recreational setting, there are no two days alike. Another reason this is true is because every week we get new campers. One week you could be working with 6-12 year olds (boys or girls) and the next week you are with 50-70 year olds! Sometimes campers want to do every scheduled activity, and sometimes they are more interested in catching bugs or stomping in puddles! Sometimes we have rainy day back-ups, and others it’s sunny and beautiful.

We wrote this piece so you could get a glimpse into a (not so) typical day.

GOOOOOOD MOOORRRNNNINNGG!!!!

Its 7:00am, and you are the first one up with your guys. You hurry up to try and get your teeth brushed and hair pulled back before your guys wake up (maybe you will even put on some makeup today!..... nope).

You hear a camper calling you from their bed, and they need help getting up to use the bathroom. You wake up another counselor to help you lift them into their wheelchair and then assist them onto the toilet. Over the next half hour or so you help two other campers use the bathroom, brush one guy’s teeth and shave another’s face (none of these things had you ever done prior to this summer!)

Finally everyone is up and ready to go. You get out of the cabin in time for 8:00 AM meds at the clinic. This takes some time because one of your campers is refusing to take his meds! The rest of your cabin heads to the Dining Hall for breakfast, but you stay behind trying to haggle with the camper, assisting the nurse, to take his meds. It takes about 15 minutes of explaining he cannot drive the med team’s golf cart, when your camper takes his meds. The camper only took them because the nurse promised to give him a golf cart ride to breakfast (20 yards away).

Breakfast today is biscuits and gravy with sausage, but you are sort of sick of that so you go for cereal and fruit instead. This morning your cabin has pontoon rides scheduled, and you are stoked! One of your campers has never been on the water. He is so excited and the million questions come like gunfire throughout breakfast, and you must swear to sit next to him on the boat.

The fresh breeze on the boat ride is nice on your face. Your campers seem to be enjoying the boat and being out on the water. It’s due to lack of sleep and the rhythm of the boat you are doing your best to keep from nodding off!

After the boat ride you head back up for lunch. While helping cut food for one of your guys, another camper gets upset and throws down his silverware standing up because “another camper laughed at him.” Your cabin leader leads him outside to chat and calm down while you jump in and help feed the camper she was with.

Before rest hour you help change a camper who had an accident (these things happen), and then finally get a break (which you spend at a picnic table chatting with your mom with your limited cell service).

Returning to the cabin you find half your guys asleep and the other half watching *The Avengers* on a staff's laptop. After some bathroom assistance and shoe tying assistance, you and your cabin are off to Archery! Most of your campers have never tried this before, so they are pumped. But at the range you keep on being eaten by mosquitos, and it's driving you nuts!

After archery it is a long walk to arts and crafts so a couple of your older campers need a golf cart ride there. While waiting for the cart you crack them up with a couple jokes you have been telling all summer, and they teach you a new one as well. At arts and crafts your hands have been dyed blue while helping a camper with their masterpiece of a T-shirt. Now that the shirts are done your guys really just want to shoot some hoops outside before dinner.

After dinner (cheeseburger, a salad and, let's be honest, one too many brownies) you head back to the cabin briefly before evening program. Sitting on the porch waiting for the talent show, everyone discusses some deep issues and conversations about how Elvis may still be alive and he is living on a house boat in Tennessee. One of your guys is inside practicing his routine (Grease Lighting) for the talent show.

At the talent show there are some amazing performances from Jonny Cash to Beyoncé. There is even a young lady reading a poem she wrote about her time at camp. Talent show is your favorite evening program because you really get to see the campers shine as individuals. It almost brings you to tears watching the campers receive the much deserved applause and standing ovations!

8:00 PM med time goes much more smoothly, then the AM one, but inside the cabin you are trying to comfort a camper who is missing home. Through his sobs you try to explain there is only one more day of camp and his friends back home will be so proud of all of his accomplishments at Wonderland Camp. As you are talking with him, the rest of the cabin counselors are helping campers shower, brush teeth and get ready for bed.

Finally around 9:45 everyone is in bed and lights are out. All the cabin staff dip into the bathroom for a quick cabin meeting to talk about the day and any issues. There's a lot of giggles and snacking on someone's glorious box of cheddar goldfish. After a quick Facebook check to see what's going on in your world outside of camp (with your one bar of service that you get only on this one particular bench outside), it's off to arts and crafts building to finish making an breathtaking zip line award for a camper.

It's about midnight as you climb into your bunk bed, exhausted in every way possible and barely able to remember what you ate for breakfast. Only one full day left with these campers before you have a bitter-sweet goodbye. It's always sad to see them go, but you know you're in need of a full weekends rest and excited for the next camp as well! At last you drift off to sleep to the rhythmic sounds of your amazing campers' snores in the beds all around you....