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Perth Amboy teenager camps it up



Staff photo by Mark R. Sullivan

Sherling Infante, 13, recently attended a summer camp in the Catskill Mountains that allows youth with end-stage kidney disease to experience the outdoors with healthy children.

By **SUZANNE RUSSELL**
Staff Writer

PERTH AMBOY — Most summers, Sherling Infante stays home and watches television.

But this summer, the 13-year-old girl spent two weeks at sleep-away camp, where she shared a cabin with eight other girls, slept out under the stars, helped row a boat onto the lake, helped raid the boys' cabin and learned to eat spaghetti without a fork.

And all the while, she was able to continue her ambulatory peritoneal-dialysis treatments.

Sherling spent June 29 to July 11 at The Children's Kidney Program at the Frost Valley YMCA Camp in the Catskill Mountains, home to a summer program that mainstreams campers with kidney disease. The program allows youth with end-stage kidney disease and those with transplants to participate in the sleep-away camp experience alongside healthy children.

"It was fun," she said.

"It was my first time at camp. I was a little scared," said Sherling, who had never been away from her home or her mother, Fatima Quiles.

The camp was established in 1975. Children and adolescents with kidney disease have attended the resident camp program at Frost Valley YMCA under the supervision of the Ruth Gottscho Dialysis and Children's Kidney Program. The program is based in a full-service, onsite dialysis unit, equipped for hemodialysis, continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis as well as post-transplant and pre-dialysis campers. The unit is staffed by experienced pediatric nephrologists and nephrology nurses, under the supervision of the Children's Hospital at Montefiore in the Bronx, according to the camp Web site.

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Camp

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Infante said her cabinmates were all nice, and they quickly bonded over marshmallows, s'mores and banana boats.

Her favorite memory was being in the cabin with the other girls, listening to music on an iPod when they all started to dance and scream.

"That was the best part," she said.

Sherling, who will attend eighth-grade at the William C. McGinnis Middle School this year, learned about the camp from a social worker at the North Brunswick dialysis center where she receives her treatments.

"(The social worker) asked me if I wanted to go. 'Yes,' I said," said Sherling, who receives daily 10 hour continuous cycling peritoneal dialysis treatments at home. She is awaiting a kidney transplant.

Her kidneys were removed on Friday, Aug. 8, because they were spilling large amounts of protein which would harm a transplanted kidney.

Born in the Dominican Republic, Sherling moved to the United States at age 10. She said her kidney problems were discovered when she was 12.

Because she had a tube in her stomach for dialysis, Sherling said she was not able to swim in the lake at the camp for fear of infection. She could have gone swimming in the camp's pool, but it wasn't working properly.

Infante had to leave camp activities four times a day to undergo dialysis treatments, which meant during free time she got only a few minutes to



Staff photos by Mark R. Sullivan

Sherling Infante recently returned from the Frost Valley YMCA camp in the Catskill Mountains. She said her favorite memory of her sleep-away experience was being in the cabin with other girls, listening to music on an iPod.

play before she had to leave.

She would spend about 30 minutes each time at the dialysis area to drain used peritoneal dialysis fluid out of her abdomen and replace it with fresh sterile dialysis solution, and cap it off. While the solution is in her belly, it removes toxins from her blood, leaving her free to participate in normal camp activities, according to Barbara Calvanelli, registered nurse at Dialysis Center Inc. in North Brunswick.

In between treatments, Sherling said, she got a chance to help row a boat onto the lake; the boat started to rock on the

water, and she got scared, fearing it might tip. Her friends assured her they wouldn't let anything happen to her.

She also enjoyed sleeping out under the stars, but didn't like the bugs, especially the mosquitoes that came with the experience.

Eating spaghetti without a fork was messy but fun, and she also enjoyed riding the golf cart used to transport dialysis patients back to their camp activities.

Sherling said she liked that the other campers didn't treat her differently because she undergoes dialysis.

"Everyone treated me the same," said Sherling, who was one of seven children who received dialysis treatment during her two-week session.

Sherling, who wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up, is hoping to return to the Frost Valley YMCA Camp next summer, perhaps after she's had a kidney transplant.

"This year I had so much fun. I want to go back without having to need to get dialysis," she said.

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