

## **What parents think**

In February 1995, within a month of that summer's camps, we surveyed parents of the young people who had been at camp. We asked about the aspects of camp that were not good experiences for their son or daughter, whether there were parts of the program or organisation they would like us to consider changing, and what they considered were the best aspects of the experience for their daughter or son.

There were a few negative things that we have since worked on. For a few campers some of the expedition trips were too long and therefore too tiring. Selfish or annoying behaviour by a few campers made the experience less enjoyable for other young people. Food quantities on expeditions were not always sufficient for energetic teenagers with large appetites.

Most responses concentrated on what parents considered were the best aspects of the experience for their son or daughter. There was a high level of appreciation for the planning, leadership and values at the core of the Cooinda program. The best aspects of the experience they identified included the following:

*“The chance to feel both independent and responsible for themselves and their patrol”.*

*“Experience of a range of activities beyond what we as a family have been able to provide”.*

*“People-centred – the delight and excitement in the eyes when talking about camp experiences”.*

*“The experience of planning activities within a group – rather than everything being imposed from a higher authority”.*

*“The challenge of finding new spots, breaking distance records”.*

*“The level of care provided while allowing ample scope for initiative”.*

*“I appreciate the underlying values on which this camp is based”.*

*“Exposure to good role models – the leaders have impressed”.*

*“The chance to mix with children from many other places who have no pre-conceived ideas about him and allowed him to be himself, also to learn from others”.*

*“Sense of independence within a safe environment”.*

*“Learning to set and achieve goals”.*

*“Companionship and adventure”.*

*“The encouragement of responsibility”.*

*“Variety of outdoor activities – interesting and challenging and healthy”*

*“The people involved – leaders and campers”.*

## **What campers think**

Our most recent survey of campers who had been to Camp Cooina over the past three summers was in March 2000. Their responses suggest that the experiences the camp has offered for 40 years are still significant for young people today.

When asked, “What are the things you remember best about camp?” the aspects of camp that were selected from a long list of positives and negatives by more than two thirds of those who responded anonymously were:

- Paddling canoes / kayaks
- Making new friends
- Sleeping under the stars
- Swimming and being on the beach
- My patrol leaders
- Good food
- Going to new places
- Sailing
- The lantern walk
- The concert on the last night.

Leaders were described as “fun to be with, friendly, supportive, funny, good at keeping a patrol happy, energetic, patient, reliable, confident.” One camper wrote about leaders: “The age difference disappeared and I became good friends with all of them. They were adults when they needed to be, but treated us on equal terms the rest of the time.”

Another camper would recommend the camp to friends because “It is a camp good for developing leadership, self confidence and caring values. Also, washing dishes can actually be fun!”

## **Growing inside**

Having fun, making friends and doing interesting things, are great objectives for any stage of life. Making it possible for young people to achieve them is a worthwhile goal for youth organisations. However, even more satisfying are shared experiences through which we discover what is important to us, develop our own sense of values and grow in self esteem and capacity to care for other people.