

Splashing good times with Star PALS

By HCA Hospice Care Community Relations Team
HCA Hospice Care

It was sweltering at the prawning ponds and Mdm Tan* furiously fanned herself and her son, whose limp body she held close.

"Jin jua! (very hot)" she said, smiling nonetheless as she glanced at her husband and older daughter, who were engrossed waiting for prawns to bite.

A splash, shout, and squeal later, a thrashing prawn was pulled from the pond. "Photo! We must take a photo!" Mdm Tan said excitedly, and volunteer photographer Lawrence appeared on cue to snap a shot of the happy family with their catch.

A day out with the family may not seem like such a big deal to many of us. But for the Star PALS families, an outing is a complicated affair.

First, there is the condition of the child to take into account. Then, there is the logistical feat of arranging for bulky equipment to be transported, or sourcing for affordable portable equipment. Finally, the possibility that an emergency can happen with no immediate access to medical help weighs as a constant worry.

This is where Star PALS came in, to organise an event that the families could enjoy while addressing their concerns – the Family Camp 2015.

After all, the welfare of not just the patient, but the entire family, is crucial in paediatric palliative care. "As far as possible, we want to make it possible for our patients to enjoy opportunities with their families, just like any other child," said Dr Chong Poh Heng, programme director of Star PALS and deputy medical director of HCA.

There were activities for the children and the others in the family. One of the activities was prawning which was a more sedentary activity in which many of the patients could participate with their

About Star PALS

Star PALS, a programme by HCA Hospice Care, is a paediatric palliative care service that provides holistic home care for young patients aged 19 years and below, and extends support to their families.

Multidisciplinary care is provided by doctors, nurses, medical social workers, counsellors and allied health specialists like art therapists.

Star PALS also actively engages the help of trained respite caregivers, known as Medi Minders.

Find out more on www.starpals.sg

families while the more active children went *longkang* fishing. After lunch, the families made their way to the Upper Peirce Reservoir for kayaking and dragon boating while the children rested in their Orchid Country Club hotel rooms. During dinner there were balloonists, magicians and a line-dancing performance to entertain the children.

In the morning on the second day of the camp, some of the patients tried hydrotherapy while their parents were treated to a head and shoulder massage.

Through it all, a team of volunteer nurses, Star PALS Medi Minders (trained volunteers offering respite care), and doctors were kept busy in the hotel rooms. By standing in to provide respite care for the Star PALS children who weren't able to join in the activities at any point in the event, these volunteers allowed the children's parents to relax with the rest of their family, with peace of mind.

The volunteer minders also followed the children who were able to participate in activities, like the prawning session, to take care of their needs as far as possible.

"Wherever I look, there's a nurse or doctor," one of the Star PALS fathers said. "It's rare for us to be able to feel so secure... to know that if we need the help, it's just a shout away."

Star PALS would like to thank all volunteers and sponsors who made the event possible. ❤️

