

## COME AS YOU ARE, WELCOMING FAMILIES WITH DISABILITY TO CHURCH



**Fri 30 September 2016**

Camp Pelican is a place where lifelong friendships and discipleship starts for many young people. But what happens when your child has a disability?

**Spring** is an initiative to help kids with a range of disabilities have their own Camp Pelican experience in a format that works for them. 'This program is important because it's the first opportunity for children with disabilities to explore faith in the Canberra region,' said the Revd Andrea de Vaal Horciu, the initiator and director of the holiday program.



Andrea is a deacon and chaplain who has worked with special needs kids in Canberra but also in Romania and the UK. Andrea works closely with **Luke 14** to help congregations become welcoming places for people and families living with disabilities.

No congregation intentionally excludes people with disabilities. Many churches have hearing loops and large print resources for the hearing and visually impaired. Yet Christian families with cerebral palsy and autism can find just going to church a struggle for simple reasons. Often it's because the doorways are too narrow, the service is too loud or the people too unfamiliar. Consequently, many Christian families simply stop going.

'A lot of families who live with disability have very little space for spirituality in their lives,' said Andrea. 'When kids have things like autism, where they make noise and can't always control their behaviour, it can be really hard going to church because being quiet and still is

expected. Some disabilities can appear scary but simply talking with the parents can help everyone communicate.'

**Spring is a holiday program** that will run from 3 to 7 October. Kids will be picked up from home in the morning and dropped off at night. A highlight will not only be the circus performers but using a multi-sensory approach to learning bible stories.

Kids learn in many different ways. Including things that they can touch, smell or taste makes the story memorable. Water and sand are often used to help people understand Jesus' crossing the lake in a storm or his time in the desert. Flowers help kids learn about creation. Pictures help kids work through not only emotions but the daily schedule.

Participants will be helped by youth mentors, students from Years 11 and 12 who will assist each child with the program. Many of these mentors have come from Trinity Christian School. It is hoped that such experience will help young adults learn about disabilities and assist their churches become more inclusive of families living with disability.

A skilled team of qualified volunteers who have expertise caring for people with various disabilities has been drawn together. The program is offered at no cost to parents, who often have to spend much of their income on therapies and other care services not covered by NDIS. Andrea hopes to follow up the program with retreats for parents and families.

The program has received support from several generous sponsors. Many of these supporters are people who experienced friendship with Jesus and others through Camp Pelican.

'We're all one body together who just come as we are,' said Andrea. Making churches easier for families with disability isn't hard. It takes eyes to see the obstacles, hands to overcome them and hearts that are open to all of God's children.