

# PLAYING THRU

CHRIS DUDLEY FOUNDATION MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

## Día Vida Diabetes Youth Camp: Educating and Empowering Youth with Diabetes in Costa Rica



### Daniela Rojas & Día Vida Association

Daniela Rojas is a psychologist who works with people living with chronic conditions and a type one diabetes advocate and blogger for Costa Rica and Latin América. In 2013 she became a board member of Día Vida Association (the first and only patient organization here in Costa Rica). Día Vida looks on educating and accompany people living with diabetes and their families, seeking to minimize

the appearance of complications both emotional and physical as well as empowering them to understand it is possible to have a healthy, happy long lasting life with diabetes. Hand in hand with Día Vida Association, Daniela became part of the founding and organization team for the first and only youth diabetes camp here in Costa Rica in 2014. The Chris Dudley Foundation had the pleasure of talking to Daniela about her experience growing up with T1D in Costa Rica and working with others who are facing the same challenges. The work of Día Vida Association is inspiring to say the least!



### Día Vida Diabetes Youth Camp

The Día Vida Diabetes Youth Camp, works with approximately 75 campers between the ages of 10 to 17, we work with kids and teens from all around the country. The camp is 3 days long and we work with a staff that includes endocrinologists, nutritionists, psychologists, nurses and team leaders. Our camp looks, to educate, empower and accompany each participant in their personal process dealing

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with their type one. We look to educate through sports, games, challenges and fun activities which will allow them to learn and respect their body instead of feeling fearful and will enable them to develop a healthy relationship with their condition.

The Dia Vida Camp, has been a wonderful process for all of those involved in it, and part of our biggest successes is being able to see the improvement it has brought to lives of the campers. We have had kids that come in ashamed, sad and frustrated about living with type one, that have later grown into becoming assistants to the team leaders as they want to empower others the they were the first time they participated. Being able to witness how the peer to peer support, being part of a team and share their lives with others living with the condition helps them grow, accept their condition and feel comfortable in their own skin. Throughout the years, thanks to the feedback obtained from medical staff at the Children's hospital and the parents, we have learned how participating in the camp and learning about their condition through games, sports and recreational activities has help improve their personal relationship with their condition and has allowed them to make use of their acquired knowledge in their everyday life, therefore improving their daily glycemic management. Through the past 5 years we have also had testimonials from the attendees and their parents on how being part of the camp helped

them in the process of acceptance of their condition, how it has also allowed them to improve their family dynamic and the relationship with their physician, nutritionist and health staff. Without a doubt, today I can say one of the best and most fulfilling parts of our camp is being able to see each kid grow to love their own self, understand that they don't need to feel scared or paralyzed about their



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condition that in the contrary they can have a healthy, active, happy life filled with the adventures they set their minds to.

## Daniela's Motivation

I have lived with type one diabetes for 26 years. Back then, here in Costa Rica we had no diabetes association or support groups of any kind, so I spent quite a few years feeling like the only person living with type one in the entire world. Today, 26 years later I am able to understand the importance and what a tremendous difference it made when I had the chance to share my life and diabetes experiences with others living with the condition, how much this helped me grow to accept and learn about my condition. Being able to understand how much of a difference this made in my life together with my profession made me want to change the way people diagnosed with type one and type two diabetes here in Costa Rica were treated. It made me want to make sure they were understood as a whole, and most importantly acknowledge the fact that the most important part of diabetes is the person living with the condition, that we need to work to make sure their condition can fit into their lifestyles in a way that may bring them health and happiness instead of fear and worry.



## Diabetes in Costa Rica

Like most countries around the world, Costa Rica has a lot of room to grow and improve; that said I am very proud to say here in my country everyone who gets diagnosed has access to insulin, test strips, glucometers and endocrinology appointments when it comes to type one diabetes, no matter where you live, our social security system will make sure you have everything you need to manage your type one. That said, we do need more access to technology as we don't get any CGM providers on their own and we only have one insulin pump in our market that is not affordable to a vast



majority of our population. The biggest need we have, not only for the diabetes community but specially for the non diabetes one, is the lack of knowledge about the condition and the myths around it often make those living with the condition feel the need to hide their condition and sadly due to the lack of information many still get discriminated in the school and workplace, We created a project for

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the association specially designed to educate teachers, classmates and coworkers about what diabetes really is, their types, forms of treatment etc, to help prevent discrimination towards the diabetes community here in Costa Rica.

## **Daniela's message to people living with Diabetes**

You can do this!!! It is ok to be scared but not paralysed, diabetes is not an obstacle on the contrary it can very much be a daily life motivation. Allow yourselves to learn from every situation, good or bad we can always use it to get to know our body better and grow stronger from it. It is absolutely possible to live a happy, healthy life with type one diabetes!