Bradley Stanley, liver recipient, Australia and mother Katie 12-19 January, Anzère 2016

It was a surreal moment when Bradley and I were packing our bags on a warm summers day in Canberra, Australia for - a snow trip in Europe!

After a day and a half of travelling we finally arrived in Geneva, Switzerland, where we spent the next 24 hours exploring and recovering from our long haul. The excitement of heading into the Swiss Alps beckoned us the following day with a two hour train trip to Anzère. The TACKERS kids pulled out a deck of cards and got acquainted on the train. It wasn’t long before friendships were being formed, the discovery of who had received which organ and laughter filled the train carriage.

A bus took us high into the Alps as the landscape turned white with snow, arriving at twilight to the sight of a full moon over snow-covered chalets. It was breathtaking and a moment no one will ever forget.

The tired but excited TACKERS kids headed for the Chamossaire Chalet reserved for the young recipients and the amazing transplant professionals (coordinators, doctors and Swisstransplant staff) who volunteer for the event. ‘TACKERS friends’ (parents and supporters) headed to their own accommodation and a well-earned sleep.

Heading up the gondola for the first day, you could feel the excitement and, as the day wore on, the frustrations of skills yet to be mastered emerged - but with smiles and cheers of support. These children are inspiring and supported each other through the skill development.

There were activities each afternoon - arts and crafts, swimming and general relaxation. Bradley enjoyed this time, bonding with teenagers that had been through similar experiences and understood the challenges.

In the evenings, parents and children were able to enjoy activities such as karaoke and a fancy dress disco (complete with fireworks). The karaoke saw some children stand up in front of their peers and sing solo – what an amazing achievement for some who would never have done that in their home country.

By the end of the week the TACKERS campers were skiing/snowboarding confidently down the slopes as though they didn’t have a care in the world. They were ready for the last day, Race Day, so all boarded buses to a nearby village for the "L’Etoile de Gaël", named after a five year old donor. Parents, TACKERS friends, sponsors and supporters were there to cheer. Swisstransplant organised their annual seminar at the same time to give transplant professionals the chance to see the results of the wonderful work they do. They usually only see patients in hospital, not having fun on the slopes!

The whole week was about the kids discovering themselves in a safe environment and just learning how to be a kid without the transplant hanging over them. No one at the
camp was any different, they had all had very different journeys but shared the gift of receiving a life saving transplant.

Bradley's personal story was following the footsteps of his hero, Scott Bellingham, who had attended TACKERS 13 years ago. On reflection, Bradley’s memories of the week demonstrate not only his excellent snowboarding skills but mentoring skills that he didn’t even realise he was displaying. Brad felt at ease with everyone - he wasn’t “the sick kid” and connected with some of those facing some challenges he himself has been through.

For the parents, it was a time to meet other people from around the world and to support each other, also having a little fun letting our hair down. There was adult karaoke and we carved up the dance floor after the kids left the disco.

Bradley and I returned to Australia with new friendships developed and a mission to repeat the trip again next year.

Katie Stanley
Australia