

SUMMER CANADA REPORT '86 THE YORK SUMMER GET-TOGETHER

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What is the York Summer Get-Together ?

The Summer Get-Together is a learning enrichment program that emphasizes the formation of a close-knit community of people with a broad range of ages and abilities. It brings together people of diverse experience and interests and allows them to live and work as a community for two months. The core staff consisted of six adults. The two leaders had worked in previous years in successful Get-Together programs. The other staff came from a variety of educational backgrounds. Staff had many skills to share with children, such as dance, art, music, drama, and co-operative games. From time to time guest teachers, including music and dance specialists contributed to the program.

Our director is Dr. Marsha Forest, Visiting Scholar at the Canadian Association for Community Living. The Get-Together concept was originated by Dr. Forest. This unique non-profit concept is simple; its mandate is to create an enriched learning program that emphasizes the formation of a close-knit community of children with a broad range of ages and abilities. The community itself is created by placing ^{from 10} five children who have been labelled physically and ^{or} mentally handicapped into a typical creative day-camp, amongst a group of twenty ^{to 25} "non-handicapped" children. All the boys and girls are between five and twelve years old. In this environment the children with challenging needs are able to develop more ^{naturally} normally by modeling the behavior of their peers.

Objectives

Our fundamental aim was to establish a community ⁱⁿ to which everybody, staff and children, contributed - a place where everybody felt secure. ^{and happy.} Within this community educational, social, recreational and cultural programs were planned.

Training and Orientation

Dr. Marsha Forest of the Canadian Association for Community Living's ^{G. Allan Roeher} ~~Roeher~~ Institute hired Alexander Dickman and Rachel Warden as Program Directors. They in turn hired four students whose collective interests included music, theatre, computers, and art. Orientation began as of June 2nd. The first week was spent exploring the staff's resources, obtaining supplies and getting to know the camp concept and locale. The second week involved an intensive workshop on integration. ^{its values + practice} The staff also attended lectures on problem solving, planning and communication. Home visits were made to some of the campers' homes so that staff could be comfortable dealing with any challenging needs. Further time was spent in group meetings, discussing strengths and needs, delegating responsibilities, and planning the general day to day program.

The children attending the program came from different backgrounds - most live in the Jane - Finch area, a few are children of York staff or students. Children with special needs were selected by Dr. Forest. Some children were returning to the program for their second or third summer. Most children were recruited by staff visits to local schools. The staff went from classroom to classroom putting on a small show and giving out applications. In these applications it was explicitly stated that no child would be refused for financial reasons.

About our location

Our home room and camp base was in room 321 of Bethune College, otherwise known as the Art Gallery. There was also storage space and a small kitchen available. An office was shared with another day camp, The York Youth Connection. The Master of Bethune College, ^{DR DAVID CUMSDEN,} is to be thanked for both his College's space and his time. The camp also made the most of York's expansive fields and resources such as Central Square, The Department of Instructional Aids and Resources, The York Pond, Gym and Art Galleries.

The Circle

The " circle " concept was crucial to our being able to keep order and accomplish our objectives. The circle represents the focus of the Summer Get-Together community: The circle is used for discussion, discipline, games, music, organizing and sharing. Anybody can call a circle at any time. When a person calls " circle ! " everybody stops what they are doing and sits in a circle. Then an orderly discussion unfolds. Within the circle everybody is expected to contribute to whatever is happening. A circle might be called in order to get everybody calmed down before lunch, to delegate clean up tasks or to make camp rules. Often a circle was called to discuss problems and challenges. Typical problems involved fights between campers, breaking of the camp's rules or dissatisfaction at a counselors decisions or behavior.

It was the children who solved the problems - staff ^{were} careful that they not become too draconian or lax. In this way the staff were not seen exclusively as authority figures. The children soon became adept at solving problems in a surprisingly just and democratic manner. The circle taught the children and staff that a problem is a challenge to be overcome by group work - not by individual authority: be it bossy adult or vengeful child. This positive peer pressure worked surprisingly well on one or two children who would have been ejected by any typical day camp because they could make themselves immune to an adults displeasure.

The circle was also a forum for the discussion of relevant issues such as friendship, nuclear war, challenging needs and apartheid. The discussion on apartheid inspired a group of children to write to the President of South Africa expressing their feelings on apartheid. *the injustice of*

Program Format

Program scheduling was flexible, allowing children the opportunity to choose daily activities and trips. Children were consulted about what they wanted to do. Every effort was made to accommodate and encourage their preferences. For example Jay, one of the oldest campers, expressed an interest in building a model rocket. He went with a few other interested campers and a staff person to purchase a rocket book and materials. Thus the rocket club, The Jr. Rocketeers™, was formed. In the same way a Ghost Stories Club was formed.

General Activities which occurred two or three times a week included music, computers, theatre and newsletter. As interests increased these became clubs. Specific activities and small group excursions were decided among the club members.

The Daily Agenda: An example

9:00 - 9:30	FREE TIME
9:30 - 9:45	EXERCISE
9:45 - 10:00	CIRCLE: BALLOONS AGAINST APARTHEID
10:00 - 11:00	ACTIVITIES AGAINST APARTHEID SET UP WITH RACHEL NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION ALEX COLLAGE & PRINTING ANTHONY
11:00 - 12:00	LUNCH GROUP WITH MICHELLE AND CINDY ROCKET CLUB ANTHONY AND ALEX I WILL THINK OF SOMETHING: RACHEL
12:00 - 1:00	LUNCH: YUM YUM
1:00 - 2:45	SWIMMING: TOUS LES AUTRES GHOST STORIES: ALEX TELLING TIME WITH ANTHONY
2:45 - 3:00	CLOSING CIRCLE

The Art Program

The art program was our most extensive activity. It included a great variety of art projects using diverse media. Many of the projects were suggested by campers. Some of the art projects were entire camp activities or else done in small groups.

Some of the things we did:

- paper maché**
- painting T- shirts**
- candle making**
- Tie - dying**
- a nature mural**
- making plaster of paris masks**
- cutting and pasting**
- costume making**
- small graphic art projects**

Art time was often the most challenging moment for integrating. We had to encourage the children to help each other out by doing hand over hand art work or else by involving the children with challenging needs in another artistic fashion. A good example of " another artistic fashion " took place when the camp was doing paper folding (Origami) with giant pieces of paper, about four feet squared. One of the children with challenging needs was enjoying crumpling, tearing and scratching the paper, rather than folding it. Alex (the co-leader) started doing the same thing and soon all the kids were having a heyday ripping, scrunching and scratching away. The girl who had inspired this creative mess making was very happy to be the center of attention. These sorts of spontaneous happenings took place all summer, not only in the art program but everywhere.

Music

Music played an important part in the program. It accompanied activities such as exercise and cleanup. Our main musical instrument was a Yamaha synthesizer, rented for the summer. This machine interested all the kids, especially those who being unable to play or read music could still produce very interesting tones and tunes. One of the most eagerly anticipated musical events was the occasional visit by " pianist extraordinaire " Paul Casino. Mr Casino played all the kids requests, to which they sang, danced and accompanied with their home made musical instruments. There was also a music club, whose activities included making instruments, singing, playing games, going on musical scavenger hunts and giving mini-concerts.

Theatre

Theatre was one of the most popular activities. Many facets of drama were explored including improvisation, mime, puppetry and rehearsed skits. Occasionally theatre was combined with music and dance resulting in some very unique (to say the least) performances. The preferred activity in theatre had to be the theatre exercises where the campers would practice mirror movement, and some other games based on movement and mime. The theatre club enabled the children to share their ideas and fire up their imaginations.

Co-operative Games

In the non competitive spirit of our program, co-operative rather than competitive games were encouraged. In this way no one felt excluded because he or she was considered un-athletic. Favorite games were Amoeba Tag, Hug Tag, The laughing game, Imaginary ball and lots of other indoor and outdoor games.

Computers

The computers proved to be a true asset to the camp. Three Apple IIe computers with monitors and disc drives were lent to the York Summer Get-Together by Tabor Park Vocational School. The campers had fun using educational software on the Apples. The most popular piece of software was the Koala Pad sketching program. The campers could 'draw' on the Koala graphics tablet and have their picture show up on the computer. They could then use several functions for changing colors, magnifying and coloring in sections and creating mirror images. This program was especially helpful because it allowed children who couldn't read or who lacked the manual dexterity to use a keyboard to use the easy to hold Koala Pad and thus become involved in computer games.

Field Trips

At least once a week the entire group would go on an excursion. Most of the trips were picked by the children in a planning circle. When we had a theme week an appropriate trip was taken: during history week we went to the museum: science week we went to the Science Center. Major trips included:

The Ontario Science Center
The Art Gallery of Ontario Hands On Workshop
Kensington Market and China Town
Harborfront
Pioneer Village

Our final week party included a trip to Canada's Wonderland and a sleep over at Bethune College where we saw Mars and Jupiter from the York University observatory.

We used the Toronto Transit Commission (T.T.C.) for most of our trips. This worked very well and helped familiarize the campers with the public transport. They were taught not to go up down-ward moving escalators and other bits of transit courtesy. They became aware of problems regarding wheelchair accesibility.

Lunches

Lunch was prepared by a group of four or five campers and two counselors. With some help, the children chose a menu for the week and the counselors then prepared a list and did the actual shopping after work.

The key to achieving participation from all the children was to find their strengths. For example, Jason was responsible and loved to cut so he was asked to do jobs involving cutting. Mathew could stir well so he was asked to mix cookie dough or stir juice.

The campers were encouraged to think of creative recipes and to read cookbooks. Some of our fantastic meals included: cheese fondu, shish kebab, ceasar salad, a medieval feast, submarine sandwiches, fried chicken and much more. We tried to make lunch both nutritious and enjoyable, and we succeeded.

Newsletter

The campers and staff of the York Summer Get-Together regularly worked on the Newsletter. The newsletter was a forum for the camp where trips, activities, up coming events and a pot pourri of other kid stuff was printed. Each newsletter was seen as a community effort. For each issue two campers were chosen to be editors. All the other campers were encouraged to contribute, whether it be by drawing a picture, writing a story or pretending to be a roving reporter. Some campers wrote joint articles with the campers who didn't speak, expressing what they thought their friend might want to say.

Newsletter: An Excerpt

The Kids In Our Camp

Some kids in our camp can't speak, but if they could they would probably say that they like this camp and that the counselors and the children are very nice people! For one trip we went to Ontario Place. For example one of our kids "Mathew" went on the air mattress and Mathew loved it, but even though he can't talk we can tell that he's happy through his actions!

By Joanne Dudley

Dealing with challenging needs

The best way we found to deal with people with challenging needs was to treat an individual as a person according to their own strengths and needs. A good way to find out these strengths and needs was through home visits. A group of three counselors visited with a family and discussed, in the child's presence, any special needs as well as likes and dislikes that the child may have.

In the camp, we had circles in which all the children discussed their own strengths and needs. The children helped each other to discuss their needs. For example, one child helped a non verbal child say that her strength was swimming. We also had circles regarding labelling and regarding any questions a child might have had about any other child. A great deal of effort was given to making sure that the children with challenging needs were treated age appropriately.

When planning activities we planned for all children, and then decided how to accommodate the needs of individuals. We didn't plan around the needs of any one person, although not one person was excluded. We tried to make games co-operative to ensure total participation as well as fun.

Recommendations

Hiring

This summer the two leaders were only hired as of May 12th. This is unacceptable considering that we need much more time to interview prospective staff, visit schools, arrange orientation month as well as work on multitudes of other small jobs. We urge Those at Challenge '86 to begin our employ as of May 1st.

Counselors in Training (C.I.T.s)

By chance this summer we had a sixteen year old student help out in the camp. We found that his presence was very helpful. Some of his duties were helping the staff get activities organized and being an extra person on trips. From our experience this summer we have no doubt that an effective C.I.T. program should be instituted. In this program young people within one or two years of sixteen would be given an honorarium of \$250.00 for working at the camp for two months. We could even have a C.I.T. with challenging needs. The group of C.I.T.s would then be an excellent example and role model to the campers on how people with different needs can effectively work together. A benefit of this program would be for the C.I.T. who would obtain very valuable work and life experience rather than possibly waste a summer. The major benefit of such a program is that the camp could then, having more responsible hands about, accept a larger number of campers.

Final remarks

The summer has ended, before Rachel and Alexander the directors lie stacks of photographs, papers with names of children and their O.H.I.P. numbers. Art work: some dizzying displays of color, others simple, hang from the walls. We reminisce about the first day of camp: Twenty five unknown children, six apprehensive staff. Then we think to the last day: campers dancing and singing together, staff and parents and kids exchanging tears or smiles. Somewhere within two months we became a community.

Our community arose through a common dedication: a dedication to hard work beyond the call of a summer camp instructor or an summer camper. The unity in the York Summer Get-Together gave each person a sense of belonging as well as a sense of uniqueness. Boys and girls who had never been appreciated for their unique differences or for their common sensitivities found these things given positive value. Because of this the campers and staff have all gained a renewed sense of value and identity.

The campers leave having learned, through play, discussion, experimentation and creation. Most important they have learned that their peers with challenging needs have the same feelings and sensitivities as themselves. In the future we hope they will be advocates for such peers and thereby create a better communities everywhere.