

FALCON / REALITY EASTER CAMP 2009 REPORT

Developing the Perth Academy Connection

For the past 3 years, Reality, in conjunction with CPAS Falcon has led an Easter camp for young people referred and recruited through the work of the Integration/ Guidance team at Perth Academy. Most of the young people come from the Letham and Tulloch areas of Perth and their home, school, personal or social lives indicate varying degrees of required additional support.

The first camp in 2006, was heavily sponsored by the local churches both financially and with trained personnel (youth workers). The second and third camps received significant donations from the school and due to having done some regular work with some of the young people in the term before, the camp went well. We have also run summer camps in 2007 and 2008 for some of them, in order to improve their activity hard skills, motivation and team skills. All these ventures have been regarded as successful by their families and the reports on each young person were appreciated by the school. CPAS Falcon have continued to underwrite the Easter camps.

For Easter 2009, we were again very fortunate to have the services of Nick Clough who worked part-time at the Academy for the Spring term on our behalf with the same brief of getting to know up to 24 out of 30 young folk referred to us by the school, working with them through a more formal weekly school lunchtime session and a weekly more informal youth club together with regular home visits (up to once a week). From this group 16 young people agreed to attend the Easter camp and half of them attended a 'taster' 24hours away for them to assess how they would cope with the week away.

The financial set up

In 2008 Reality set up Easter camp as part of an 8 month project of making connections with these young people, their families, the school and the community, in total costing £34,500. This project includes 2 residential week long camps at Easter and summer of outdoor pursuits instruction, positive social activities and individual mentoring run by our volunteers, all the preparatory events including training and a youth worker's salary and expenses. (Nick was employed for this period). Whilst almost 2/3rds of the funding had been received from local and national trusts, the school, the local authority, local industry, local churches and individuals, the economic picture had been completely changed by Easter 2009. So a smaller scheme was set up and we are very grateful to CPAS for their trust in this venture by their generous donation. Parents also contributed less than in previous years and we are grateful to the school for their kind assistance in this respect – and for their generous help with directly meeting the camp travel costs. Nick's contract was made possible by a grant received from the Cashback for Communities Fund administered by Youthlink, with the all other expenses being met from other Reality fundraising efforts.



Camp preparations

Although many valuable lessons were learned from running the previous camps, it is recognised that to run any successful camp, maximum preparations have to be undertaken over a considerable period of time. This applies to the camp management, the teams of volunteers and to the young people planning to attend.

The team of adult volunteers came together at a major training day held one Saturday just before the camp. They came from local churches and youth organisations, specialist art teachers including one from the Academy, Reality staff and their 2 Project Scotland volunteers, trainee youth workers on placement from ICC and our contacts in Perth who had been meeting monthly. The job of these volunteers at camp is to accompany/ befriend/ mentor and care for the young people, so all received the necessary Enhanced Disclosure Police checks and training in such matters as Child Protection and Dealing with Challenging Behaviour. Because of some of the conditions and range of complex disadvantage of the majority of these young people, mainly arising out of their home situations, we planned a team on the usual 1:1 ratio with the young people. Of the team of 16, 10 were newly recruited and trained for this camp.

Nick's input was invaluable. Since the New Year he had developed his work with the larger group of disaffected young people in the community as well as the school and with a couple of other Reality volunteers, he took 'semi-mandatory' weekly lunchtime sessions for the young people in the spring term - doing informal lifeskills development by learning through games, exploring the camp ethos and encouraging their own preparation for

camp to get as much as possible out of this experience. Nick also contributed by working alongside other teaching staff in the special PLC Unit.

There was a very successful weekend preparation camp for 8 young people who had been identified as needing this 'taster' opportunity (to deal with homesickness, boundary issues, living in a structured environment etc) held at the Compass Centre, Glenshee which also provided a very good 'learning by experience time' for a couple of Reality Junior Leaders.

The Academy helped Nick to liaise with parents / carers of the young people. He met each family on at least 5 occasions in their homes in order to deal with the necessary paperwork, organise and prepare them and their children for camp. A very successful 'Families Evening' pre-camp event was held at North Church in the fortnight preceding the camp when everybody had the chance to meet, eat and enjoy a good time together – and to deal with any last minute issues.

As a result of all this work, 16 young people finally agreed to attend although 2 subsequently changed their minds with 1 week to go and we subsequently had to recruit suitable replacements very quickly.

The final numbers were 11 boys, 5 girls with a junior leaders team of 2 males and an adult team of 8 male and 6 female leaders (including the 2 male overall camp leaders).

The camp

This took place again at the Abernethy Trust Centre, Ardeonaig, which is a large house, set out with various outdoor activities in its own grounds, on the southern bank of Loch Tay, and which provides excellent accommodation (small dorms for 4/5), a good healthy eating menu (no fizzy drinks nor high sugar / salt content meals), a welcome tuckshop (chocolates, juices and souvenirs up to £1.50 per day) and a range of activities to a very high standard. All are run by the team of registered and AALA accredited instructors who really welcome us and encouraged and supported the groups – young and old – throughout the camp. The centre provided a full daytime programme of a range of instructed outdoor activities which are designed to be appropriate for this group, taking into account their ages, experience, fitness and abilities levels. After a good welcome and exploration of the centre, the first afternoon was spent with the four teams working through a carousel of challenges including the wonderful low ropes course and a bleep test. Later that evening, we set off in minibuses for the night walk over the hill with hot drinks and cakes, arriving back too tired to do anything else but sleep. During the next 2 days, the teams each tasted / tried sessions of gorge walking (very very wet), canoeing and the high ropes course (very scary but with amazing results). The planned sailing was changed at the last moment when it was discovered that the boat was leaking very badly but the replacement kayaking was readily accepted, proving very successful by the quality of instruction received. On Day 4, each team spent the day away from the centre on a fairly strenuous hill walk with canoeing – all of which took place in the pouring rain. The raft building and armada on the last day was therefore replaced at our request, as we concluded that the young people were so tired (drained?) that it would not be enjoyed and we wanted to leave them with very positive memories. So there was a different carousel of challenges and exercises for the teams round the Centre, all of which were a great laugh. All in all throughout the week, there were so many brilliant opportunities for self development in such vital soft skills as communication, team building, decision making through growth in self esteem and self confidence – and we all found such levels of enjoyment and fun.

In the evenings the Reality team set other social activities in the sports hall, (an amazing hour long session of apparently non-stop running and avoiding each other!) in the games room with table tennis, in the main lounge (no TV but some computer games on a big screen, a highly charged karaoke sing song and conga session, and there were also some board and group games eg giant Jenga and something which looked like 'five a side UNO'). On the final evening, there was a big DVD screen, popcorn and supper night. At the start of each evening there was a presentation and led-discussion session (TTI – Time To Imagine) in which all took part. These provided the young people the opportunity to explore and reflect more about their lives and aspirations. These were based on the themes of communication, reputation, conflict and negotiation. There were some very memorable moments including a leader getting a makeover haircut, a CSI style presentation of the story of the Prodigal Son, the individual Blog books everyone received (see the DVD 'Freedom Writers' for this idea), a very inspiring personal story from Hayley and some very challenging question and answer sessions (mainly about sex!) Probably the most exciting development was the art /craft session which immediately followed TTI and which provided the means of expressing something significant and worth remembering from each TTI session (to be taken home). Amazingly both boys and girls joined in with determination and great humour, increasing in their enthusiasm each evening.

The young people were divided into 4 teams (each with a mascot which had to turn up and be photographed at every possible occasion) from the start, each with 4 volunteers to work through each activity of the daily programme. The teams were carefully chosen to provide good (self) supportive relationships, opportunities for some to really develop skills and for some to be able to proceed at a more suitable pace. The programme was

very full - each day started with a wake-up call (after the team meeting) at 7.30am and finally was completed at lights out for sleep (which arrived sometime about 11.00pm) with limited unsupervised 'free time' only before and after lunch and before dinner – and that was mainly taken up with having showers, sorting out wet clothing, playing UNO, doodling in their Blog books or completing an unfinished piece of art/craft work from the night before or simply 'hanging out'.

During the day, every person had opportunities to win valuable stickers by their approach to the challenging activities, their positive behaviour and individual and team successes during the day –and these contributed to their team's other points gained from anything such as all turning up for their turn (and marked performance) on the washing up rota, the state of their bedrooms or the in/abilities of their leaders! At the end of the week, after trailing throughout the competition, the winning team was Red team – with less than 50 points separating them from the 4th placed Blue team.

Some conclusions

This has been a very successful week which has passed without incident or accident, for which we are extremely grateful. Nobody left early (despite some of the girls' early misgivings about being able to live with the smoking rules) and everybody had a great albeit, tiring time.

There were some notable successes including several folk (including team) who overcame their fear of water, heights and eating new foods. The integration of the young people with each other and the team was remarkably good. New skills and interest were discovered and some developed to quite significant new levels. Some young people amazed us (and themselves) with their energy and motivation, perseverance and desire to beat their own low self esteem with their successes. Not everybody succeeded at everything but the ability to support, care and encourage each other in the hard times was inspiring. The opportunity to engage with adults safely, to learn together with mutual respect and have such fun was a welcome break for all. Furthermore, this temporary Christian community has provided for some, an exciting and qualitative model of how life can be. This is evidenced by the individual and team points-earned system, the daily monitoring of the young people which the team members undertook and the immediate post-camp evaluations which everybody has completed. Subsequent visits to homes will also track any further positive overall changes (recognising that Rome wasn't built in a day either) in attitudes, communication and learning. The major benefits for the young people and team (adult and junior leaders) were perceived as having been part of a worthwhile, enjoyable and life-changing experience, because each person was valued by all, with gratitude and a wish for the experiences to be repeated as soon as possible!!

There are 4 major considerations which have made this camp so successful :

- 1. it was part of a medium to long term piece of work with a specific group of people.**
- 2. the quality of preparation, especially with the young people, through the ongoing relationships established by Nick, various helpers and supported by the school**
- 3. the very high quality of the team prepared to demonstrate patience, a constant positive attitude and a determination to give their best to the young people and each other**
- 4. simply, the many answers to prayers of the many.**

All these reflect the Reality strap-line: "we hold the ropes whilst they learn to succeed".

