

Summer Canada Report

The York University Summer-Get-Together

Summer 1984

The most fundamental aspect of the Get-Together program is its bringing together of people of diverse experience and interests to live and work as a community for three months. On the one hand, the staff come from a variety of educational backgrounds, each bringing with him/her his/her own expertise and ideas. On the other hand the children, ranging in age from 6 to 12 years, some of whom have been labelled "handicapped" either physically or mentally, and coming from a variety of cultures.

Our aim was to provide an educational, social, recreational and cultural enrichment summer program within a caring, community atmosphere. Converting theory into practice was probably as demanding a task as any person involved had ever undertaken. The rewards were great, however, and these three months will not be soon, if ever forgotten.

A. OBJECTIVES IMPLEMENTATION

I Program Set-Up

1. Hiring

Dr. Marsha Forest of NIMR, program supervisor, hired Ron Ballentine as project manager. Mr. Ballentine interviewed applicants directed to him from Manpower and sought other

suitable individuals from the University population. Eventually, seven students were hired, two males and five females, whose collective talents included physical education, singing, guitar and piano playing, theatre, sign language, arts and crafts, computers and education. All persons hired were enthusiastic about the program's goals and ideas and eager to be a part of it.

2. Training

Training included an intensive week-long session, on methods, value, resource material, and problem solving. The staff also attended lectures given by various experts and visited schools and parents. Many hours were spent in group meetings discussing individual strengths and needs, allocating responsibility for certain aspects of the program and activities, trips, etc for the summer.

3. Space

Bethune College generously granted us use of their Art Gallery, storage space and a kitchen. We enjoyed the full support of the Bethune College community led by David Lumsden, master of the college and Joyce Thompson, his assistant.

The Physical Education Department allowed us several hours use of their swimming pool, charging us only for the life-guard. As well, York Youth Connection gave us their pool time when they were away on trips. We were also permitted use of the games field adjacent to Bethune College.

4. Supplies

We had use of a piano courtesy of Bethune College.

Commodore loaned us 2 PET computers and a printer for the entire summer.

NIMR took care of the majority of our photocopying, typing and accounting needs.

5. Recruiting Children

A total of 20 children attended the program for both July and August; an additional nine registered for July only and 12 for August only. Some who had intended to stay only for July, decided to stay for August as well.

About 65% of the children were returning to the program for the second or third summer or had come to it from the program's Winter Saturday session.

A few children came to the program on the recommendation of friends, counsellors or teachers. Other children were recruited by staff visits to local schools and the distribution of information therein.

New children with special needs were selected from a waiting list held by Dr. Marsha Forest.

II. PROGRAM

1. Format

The program was organized under weekly themes with corresponding daily sub-themes. For example, the theme for one week was "The Future" and during that week we had a day on computers,

a day where we imagined it was the year 2004 and we visited the Science Centre. Activities and discussion were all oriented toward the general or particular theme.

A typical day ran as follows:

- 9:30 Hello/Announcements/Jokes/Sign Language
- 9:45 Exercises
- 10:00 Circle discussion on a daily theme
- 10:20 Outdoor games
- 11:30 Reading
- 11:50 Relaxation
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Outdoor or indoor games
- 1:30 Small group activities: Arts and Crafts. Newsletter, Drama, Dance, computers, etc...
- 3:00 Circle: Sum up the day's activities; exhibit finished work
- 3:10 Music
- 3:30 Good Bye Song

In addition on Mondays we split into three groups for off-campus trips via TTC and Thursdays we went on whole group trips, often via TTC as well. We had swimming times fairly frequently which took the place of one of the games periods.

2. Representative Activities

a) Language Arts

- Reading - We read two children's novels aloud over the summer. There were also opportunities for quiet reading and for children to read to each other. Children were also permitted to borrow books from our library.
- Writing - We produced a newsletter every two weeks composed of trips reports, interviews, poetry and pictures. Every effort was made to ensure that every child contributed something - hence, its pot-pourri character.
- Speaking/listening - Circle discussions of values, events and ideas were designed not only to exchange information and stimulate through listening to others and expressing his or her own opinions on the topic. Some of our discussion topics were racism, sex role stereotyping, pictorial artwork, computers and dreams. Some discussions were carried out in conjunction with films.

b) Arts and Crafts

Some of our projects included thumbprint silhouettes, futuristic models, homemade musical instruments and cloth puppets.

c) Exercises

Exercises were theatrically oriented. For example, we did robotic type exercises during Future week, different types of dance.

d) Games

Outside games were co-operative and geared toward maximum active participation for everybody - this took some creative adjusting on the part of both staff and children especially with regards to children with special needs.

e) Lunch

Under the supervision of two teachers, groups of children took turns preparing, serving and cleaning up after lunch. Each group's turn would come up about once every six days entailing missing out on reading for that day. Most children were very enthusiastic about this experience. Lunch consisted of a wide variety of healthy foods, including whole wheat breads, fresh fruits and vegetables. Special meals included tacos, curried chicken and spaghetti.

f) Music

We liked to end the day with singing from our big song book accompanied by piano or guitar. The children composed their own good-bye song and taught it to the group.

g) Sign Language

Each day we learned a new letter of the alphabet and several words beginning with that letter. We also learned many common phrases and short sentences. Learning was stimulated by the presence in August of a deaf child.

h) Theatre

Short improvisations proved very popular - each child acted out a small skit or action alone or with others for the rest of the group to interpret. We also did mime and puppetry. Dance demonstrations were also a popular activity.

i) Trips

- Ontario Place
- Kensington Market
- Harbourfront
- Scarborough Bluffs
- Private Swimming Pools
- Science Centre
- Niagara Falls
- Sleepover at Bethune College
- 3-day Camping trips

B. CONCLUSIONS

The 1984 Summer Get-Together at York University was an astounding success. It was a success first of all in providing eight students with the kind of experience that inspires ideas, fires ambition and molds character - the program was nothing if not challenging in terms of working very hard at work that was demanding.

The program was also a success in that it gave forty one children a summer they will not soon forget. In fact, for some of them

it may very well last a lifetime. Aside from the fun and stimulation of our many trips, games and activities of all kinds, these children learned about respect, responsibility, and even love spending two months in a community which prized such values. For some of the handicapped children, summer at the Get-Together is their only chance to be with their "normal" peers and the growth - physical, emotional and mental - which such contact stimulated was amazing to witness. The non-handicapped children, in their turn, were relieved of the ignorance which previously made them fear or avoid people with handicaps. Such happenings deeply enrich our society.

The turn-out of parents, brothers, sisters and friends of children, laden with food and compliments, for our open house on our last day is testimony to the extent to which this program is appreciated. We sincerely hope that our program will soon be only one of many such programs so that more children, handicapped and non-handicapped, and more future educators may have an experience such as ours.

For the staff of the York University Summer Get-Together

Sally Barrow

ADDENDUM

Excerpts from unsolicited letter received this summer.

"I have had a good time with you.... I wished I could stay for ever.... Thank you for having me at camp. I think that camp is a good idea for kids." Karen Wetherald, age 9

"Wayne and I would like to thank you and your staff for putting together such a beautiful program. The quality of the relationships between the children is fantastic! Both Peter and Paul are having a wonderful time! We thank you for your energy, the skill and the commitment you have brought to the program." Donna Bracewell and Wayne Tebb

" Just to say we are very pleased and very grateful too.... Thanks for a very enjoyable summer. Carol & Tami Sweeney