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Case Study -The benefits of camping with year 2 pupils

Thank you to Chris Loynes for Sharing this Case Study from Learning Away, an initiative of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. For more information, resources and case studies visit: <http://learningaway.org.uk>

The benefits of camping with year 2 pupils

The Bulwell EAZ partnership (of six primary schools and one secondary school in North Nottingham) runs a series of progressive camping residentials. These start with a one-night, single-school residential in Year 2, followed by a one-night, two-school shared residential in Year 3/4 and a two-night, two-school shared residential in Year 5. To keep costs down, all of Bulwell's residentials involve camping, are within 30 minutes drive of the schools and are run by



teachers and student leaders.

The Year 2 camps The Year 2 camp takes place annually in the summer term within a secure walled garden at Wollaton Hall, twenty minutes away from Bulwell. Each of the six Primary schools in the partnership takes their Year 2 pupils to camp in tents on the site for one night, where they take part in activities including den building, orienteering, team games, storytelling and toasting marshmallows on the camp fire. They also use the Hall itself for curriculum-related activities.

For many children, the Wollaton Camp is their first taste of life away from home where they look after their own belongings, get themselves ready for bed and dressed in the morning, and deal (with the help of staff and friends) with any problems they come up against in their time away. Food is cooked and brought in from a nearby school kitchen and there is a ready supply of drinking water on site as well as portable toilets.



Overcoming anxieties

Staff work hard to prepare both the children and their parents (who are often more anxious than their children) prior to camp, holding information sessions and talking individually with parents who have particular concerns. The fact that the residential is close to home helps with any anxiety, as does the fact that this is a one-school residential where staff and children are already familiar with each other. Staff keep in touch with parents overnight by text and social media, making phone calls if necessary to more anxious parents. As time has passed, any initial concerns about taking such young children away have decreased and even this first, early residential has come to be seen as part of the entitlement for children in Bulwell. No school has ever had to take a child home from the camp because of distress – those who find it harder are supported by staff and friends and have invariably chosen to stay rather than leave when given the choice.

“They just wanted to try everything and do everything and go everywhere.”

Primary teacher, Bulwell EAZ partnership

The benefits – for children, staff and families

The benefits of taking younger children away has been voiced by Bulwell staff in our research. The overwhelming change in children seen by staff is a boost in their confidence and resilience, particularly for those less confident prior to the residential. Staff put this new confidence down to:

- Being able to try new things in a safe environment (particularly things children may not be allowed to do at home involving fire);
- Staying overnight with friends and away from parents in a tent; and
- Having to be generally more responsible for themselves and each other.

“He came out with his trousers down here, socks over his trousers, two hats, I don’t know how many jumpers because he just thought, ‘I would like to wear that’. He had the biggest grin on his face. That confidence was absolutely brilliant.”

Primary teacher, Bulwell EAZ partnership

Back in school, staff noticed that children were much more willing to have a go at new activities, transfer skills they learned on the residential; and persevere with harder challenges, or as one teacher put it: “They just wanted to try everything and do everything and go everywhere.”

In terms of children’s relationships, staff also noticed significant differences after the residential. They saw friendships deepen, friendship groups widen and antagonism reduce between those children who didn’t get on. One teacher talked about a group of boys who had a volatile relationship prior to the residential that was really disturbing the class, saying: “They will still annoy each other but they don’t seem to react in the same way – they don’t flare up and it doesn’t turn into a big argument.”

As a result the class is calmer, learning doesn’t get disrupted and playtimes are more fun for everyone. Children who staff described as ‘lower status’ within the class pecking order prior to the residential were also experienced differently

by others because they showed skills in practical areas, and therefore gained new respect that lasted back in school.

The additional, informal time on these residentials meant that relationships between staff and children also improved. Staff talked about having the time to talk with children that is lacking in school, which meant they got to know them better and understand them more, and then worked with them differently when they returned to school.

Teachers also noticed changes to their practice, with some describing these as "massive". Staff who had been on residentials said that they were much more likely to take their children out of the class for learning, think more creatively about how learning could happen and make it more experiential for the children. One notable example is a teacher who had the confidence, having been on residential, to challenge her class to build a scale model of Pudding Lane and the surrounding area at the time of the 1666 as part of their learning about the Fire of London, then actually set fire to it so that they could experience, then write about, the fire's effect at first hand.

Finally, staff also talked about benefits for families as a result of this early residential. They talked about children who went home and talked so enthusiastically about Wollaton Hall and camping that their parents took them back there, with some even arranging family camping holidays as a result or getting involved in the local overnight family camps during school holidays. Staff saw this as an important benefit in a community where horizons can be narrow and aspirations can be low.

Bulwell's experience of taking younger children away has been overwhelmingly positive. With the right site, good preparation and a willingness to take well-managed risks, they are making a big difference to children's attitudes early on in life, setting the scene for their longer, larger residentials as children progress through primary school.



Learning Away

The Bullwell partnership were part of the Learning away Initiative of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. For more information, resources and case studies visit: <http://learningaway.org.uk>

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