

EDMUND RICE ACTION CAMP

Young Adults are role models for children.

The first Edmund Rice Camp took place in Cork in August 1998. Young leaders from Colaiste an Spioraid Naoimh, Mt. Mercy College and other schools in the City provide summer camps (aged 7 - 10 years)and recreational opportunities for children who need a break for one reason or another.

The leaders are chosen by the teachers in the schools and they attend a leadership programme. These young people have an innate sense of generosity and goodness and a desire to "live life to the full !". They are committed to the pursuit of justice and seem to get a great sense of fulfilment in doing something to help others. The programme helps them to recognise their leadership qualities and it empowers them to take responsibility for running the camp. Every year a number of experienced leaders help with the training of the new leaders. This is an essential part of the programme as they are great role models for the incoming leaders.

Most of the training sessions are practical sessions in which leaders get a chance to work with others as a team. Team building is an essential part of the process as we have to continue to work together in the weeks to come. Training also involves working in small groups, acquiring facilitation skills, taking feedback, looking at conflict management, decision making and planning.

The second part of the training is based on the actual organising of the activities for the children. The experienced leaders offer workshops on art and crafts, drama and indoor and outdoor games. They share their own experiences and peak experiences during the camp and, in particular, they give tips on how to encourage all the children to get involved and stay involved in activities. The new leaders are made aware of the child-centred approach in the camp and reminded that the children's needs must always be paramount.

Reflection is central to the whole training process. It is important to take time to reflect on what we are doing. The greatest need we see today is the need for the young children we work with in summer camp to have positive role-models. This is what our young adult leaders provide. Through their work in the Edmund Rice Camps they are taking a stand against selfishness and injustice. They have to take risks when they are involved in this programme. We remind them of the advice given by Leo F Buscaglia:

"But risk we must, because the greatest hazard to life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing,
You may avoid suffering, but you cannot learn, feel, change, grow,
love or live. Only the person who risks can be called FREE".

There are many events and activities organised for the children but what seems to stand out most for them, is that young adults have given them so much time. They have listened to them and affirmed them. The last day of camp is a great day of celebration but is also tinged with sadness. The children don't want to leave and the leaders don't like to see them go. Some of the children say it was the best week of their lives. They have grown in confidence even in that short length of time.

ERAC work for the children is inspired by much the same sentiments as are expressed by Dorothy Law Nolte (1924-2005) in her poem, 'Children Learn What They Live' (1998):

'If a child lives with encouragement,
They learn confidence.
If a child lives with praise,

They learn to appreciate !"

Sincere thanks to all the amazing leaders who have worked with us from the Parish over the past 12 years.

Anne Cleary, Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh.