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# Camping Just For Kicks?

by Jim Punton

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## THE BEGINNINGS OF FYT

"Across the U.K. in the late 60's there was a burgeoning concern to provide clubs and other centres for youngsters at loose and at odds with society. It was essentially a leisure programme when it started. What in fact happened was that the largest bulk of the kids didn't use that leisure provision and were not interested in it, and it's still true to say that the bulk of young people in Britain are not interested in the official provisions of the youth service.

F.Y.T. started linking up people across the country who found themselves doing what were suddenly quite different areas of work to what they had done before; they were at a loose end, they were lost in it, they were constantly befuddled about how to go about things, constantly making mistakes, constantly hurting the kids and losing relationships, constantly coming into the work and going out of it because they hadn't the skills; they hadn't the staying power. They were from a different culture from the youngsters and they didn't know how to cross the culture divide. F.Y.T. grew out of that kind of mess and it was to try to be a network that gave support to people who were struggling to make a really genuine provision for the youngsters in the country.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF F.Y.T. CAMPING

It is only recently, in 1978, that we embarked on a programme of camping. We did this, after having thought for quite a long time that it was something we were needing.

Our context in camping was Scripture Union, whose camps have generally catered for the academic youngsters in the mainstream of the schools; the ones who are being educated, not the ones who are being schooled. They can read and are keen on stuff that comes in printed form; they can live comfortably in tents without setting them on fire. When they come to a camp and they are told at the beginning that there is no smoking, you can expect that there won't be any smoking. These are the kind of kids who have a respect for a particular kind of authority, and if the authority lays that down as the conditions of their camp, that's fair enough by them.

S.U. is decidedly uncomfortable when it finds kids for whom that's an impossible kind of thing to suggest - that some how their language has got to be different when they come into a camping context from what it is everyday — and, that somehow, long established smoking patterns have to change when they come into a campsite.

## CROSS CULTURAL PROBLEMS

Other patterns of behaviour present difficulties. For example - kids that FYT would work with most of the time have a particular way of handling conflict. They've had to stand firm and handle it in a way that uses their body. Some people on the other side would call that violence. However, these kids actually experience violence in verbal terms from teachers at school. They would experience sarcasm as violence because they don't know how to handle it. They would also experience being put down and made to feel small as violence.

In middle class circles, that wouldn't be violence. That would be a quite appropriate way for an adult to discipline as a child. So there are two different patterns of handling conflict - and that's one of the challenges. If you've been brought up one way, chances are you'll have real problems when you come across kids handling their conflict in a quite different way, especially if the conflict is between you and the kid.

We are working cross-culturally. We must be in touch with the fact that we don't belong to the culture of the kids and, if we're to work with them, it's their culture that matters, not ours. A sensitivity, an openness and a caring for them in their cultural setting is absolutely paramount. We have to affirm the kids within their own culture and not negate it, because they're returning to it. We relate to them in terms of their codes as far as we can, recognizing that these kids have a whole series of other priorities to deal with, way before they come to the things we may not like.

At camp, of all things the kids have got to work through, smoking is a way down that list for me. I get a kick out of seeing a kid who is able to lose his hardness and begin to relate to another kid, to see a kid beginning

to care for another kid, beginning to take responsibility. Those kind of things are way up the list for me. If a kid can begin to make relationships, begin to show trust, and not have that trust cause him to fall flat on his face, but actually find that when he trusts it works; those kind of tentative steps in human relationships are way up for me. If the price that we've got to pay is to cough a little bit in the presence of smoke, I'm prepared to do that.

I know it's important to help kids to see that some people are offended by certain words, therefore we have a duty to the kids to help them understand that if they don't want to hurt and offend, there are certain words they don't use in certain places with certain people. That's important. But, I think it's a strange thing if they can only have our **friendship** and our **love** on those kind of terms.

## THE USE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE

One or two of us, who were running camps, decided that we would concentrate on those youngsters and that they would be central to the programme. We started to use a whole approach to camping and to programming

## THE RESULTS

We found that the kids who came from what were branded **difficult homes** had, in fact, a greater maturity at the emotional level. The stories that they could bring forward, and the way that they could relate them, actually intimidated some of the kids who came from the more secure home. In this context, there was a breaking down of the barriers and, for once in their lives, these particular youngsters suddenly found that they were the ones who had something really significant to contribute to the others.

One of the excitements is to find how keen these kids are to meet one another after camp. They organised their own rallies; they organised their own discos! Camp reunions are quite a new scene!

For kids who've lived in inner-city back streets to actually be in a field surrounded by trees can be a frightening experience, as well as an exhilarating one. They are scared to cross a few yards across a dark field . . . a whole new experience . . . opportunity for opening new horizons to whole new emotions, or to a sharing that they're scared and why they're scared. The sense of awe at actually being able to see stars above, gives a sense of wonder. These experiences open up possibilities for a

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that was brought across from F.Y.T. club work. That meant that we used a great deal of the approach known as personal development. We used a whole lot of sensitivity exercises, of simulation, of role play and of experiential exercises of one kind or another. These place minimal emphasis on the ability to read, or conceptualise and to work in that kind of way, and maximum emphasis on experience, on sharing, on emotion, on life situations, on stories that had come from the kids' own background, their own experience. To our astonishment, and delight, this actually touched the other kids equally well. These literate, articulate kids were equally excited and equally moved when we worked from the experiential and from the gut-reaction kind of approach.

There are ways in which we can encourage kids to realise, early on, that part of what this camping community exists for is to allow us trust and to allow us to share things. It's possible to do structured trust exercises, to do fun things in which we share emotion. We don't spend any time in depth. We move quickly on to something else, at the end of which kids really have begun to know each other and to really realise that this is the kind of place where people can be honest. Folk actually say what they feel here. We can confront each other. A climate of openness and honesty and trust can be established right from the word go.

life time to some of our kids - to say nothing about what shared living means when they've actually got space to live, and many of our kids don't normally have space to live, the way they do at camp.

Not all our camps are under canvas. Tents do present problems; we have had some set on fire. Kids don't treat tents very well. Clear discipline, with a minimum number of rules but clear boundaries, is important for the kids.

This **invasion** of the kids' lives, through camping, can mean a whole redirection of their lives. It certainly can mean the possibility of that. If it's followed through, kids can become motivated to become the persons that they're made to be, and can begin to open up and move towards their own wholeness, as a result of camping.

It's not simply the kids whose lives are enriched. It seems to me that there is almost nobody who gives themselves, as an adult, to a camping programme who doesn't come out an enriched person as a result of it. What the kids demand of us opens up areas of our own personality that need healing, challenges bits of our own personality that have become too sterile and fixed and set. People who do frontier camping, in particular, are going to be younger and more enriched people as a result of it.