

Approved by Fiona Baines and Tim Diggle

Aiming High for Young People case study – Do it 4 Real

Star Performers

Plate-spinning, juggling, acting, dancing and body art... just some of the activities on offer to young people at one of the residential Do it 4 Real centres across the UK.

The idea is to give young people a break from their normal lives and get them to mix with people from different areas and backgrounds in a week-long residential programme. Exciting, adventurous and sometimes challenging activities create an unforgettable holiday experience that can, quite literally, change lives.

Fiona Baines is head team leader at Ilam Hall, a gothic mansion in the Derbyshire Peak District. Last year, the centre ran a programme of activities with a performing arts theme called “Live like a Star”. Up to 100 young people each week, aged between 10 and 17-years, came to Ilam Hall from all over the UK. Many of them were from disadvantaged backgrounds and some had never been away from home before.

Fiona comments: “Do it 4 Real gives kids an opportunity to try things that they wouldn’t normally be able to do. Sometimes, they would be crying on the first day because they didn’t want to be here. By the end of the week, the same young people would be crying because they didn’t want to leave. It is an amazing journey of personal discovery for many.”

Fiona cites the example of one 17-year-old young man with Asperger’s Syndrome and learning difficulties who came along to the camp with his carer. “He could easily have been picked on by the other kids, but, in actual fact, he became a really popular member of the team. This young man had an amazing attitude to everything he did. No matter what the activity, he was excited and enthusiastic about it. This attitude affected all the others around him. One of the highlights of the week at Ilam Hall is

the talent show on Wednesday night. This young man performed some of the plate-spinning circus skills he had learned at the camp during the week. The cheer he got from the crowd when he managed to spin the plate and transfer it to his finger was unreal.”

Being away from home can also throw a spotlight onto behavioural problems. In the case of one young woman who came to Ilam Hall, anger management and behavioural issues nearly resulted in her being sent home from the camp. A warning from the hostel manager led to an improvement in the young woman’s behaviour and, by the end of the week, she was surrounded by girls hugging her and crying as they said goodbye. Fiona points out: “They were probably some of the first real friends she had ever made. It was a huge change from the girl we had seen at the beginning of the week.”

Do it 4 Real is now in its fourth year. To date over 32,000 young people have taken part in the programme. Seventy-six per cent of parents who were questioned in research* said their children were more confident following their week away. Forty-one percent believed their children were performing better at school and 19% felt their children were less likely to get into trouble.

The diary of one young person sums up the response of many to their week away: “Could you survive for a week at a youth hostel in the middle of Derbyshire? There was no-one to clean up your mess so you had to do it yourself – Do it 4 Real! Yellow, our team colour was yellow. We had to think up a song about yellow but nothing much rhymes with yellow. So, we discussed and came up with “We’re yellow, we’re bright. We’re yellow, we’re bright, we’re dynamite. Go yellow, go, go, go yellow!!” We sung it day and night – team spirit the counsellors called it.”

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* Evaluation conducted by GEN Consulting in July 2004