



## Adventure, activity and safety

For many teachers the highlight of a term can be taking a group away for a residential event. For one thing, pupils react differently when they are away from school. Relationships are enhanced, not just between peers, but between teachers, assistants, support staff and young people. It can change the classroom atmosphere on your return.

But sometimes teachers feel as though there are just too many obstacles to overcome in order to make it happen. The first hurdle, more often than not, involves overcoming the deadweight of 'What if?' scenarios at the forefront of the modern-day, litigation-conscious teacher's mind. What if something goes wrong? What if a student gets lost? What if a student is injured or killed? What if the school is sued? What if I lose my job?

## A breath of fresh air!

The UK government is so convinced that the benefits of such trips outweigh the potential risks, that the topic even made this year's election hustings. Tony Blair and Ruth Kelly promised to cut the red tape and committed themselves to presenting a manifesto on outdoor education later this year.

In an age dominated by paperwork and legislation there need to be many more voices of support and encouragement so that teachers feel empowered and equipped to organise day trips and residential courses for young people. The good news is that nowadays there are many organisations that can fulfil this role; helping teachers ensure that school trips, adventure weeks and activity holidays still happen – and happen safely.

Tens of thousands of young people go away on a residential trip each year, some through school, some via their church, others combining with friends to attend one of the many Christian-run summer holiday programmes. Well over 50,000 young people will have attended a Christian holiday this summer alone. So, why do so many

*Children need to be taught how to deal with risks in life. We will encourage learning outside the classroom and provide protection for teachers worried about school trips* CONSERVATIVE MANIFESTO (2005)

# A breath of fresh air!

Making the case for residential trips

## *To enhance our children's understanding of the environment we will give every school student the opportunity to experience out-of-classroom learning in the natural environment* **LABOUR MANIFESTO (2005)**

parents, children, volunteers and professionals invest time and money in these events? Simply put – they change lives.

### **A different way of living**

So, what are the benefits of a residential trip? Well, here's my list – written from the perspective of a parent, a provider and a volunteer helper:

- They take people out of their normal environment.
- They expose them to new challenges – physically, socially and spiritually.
- They encourage community – in an age where individualism is rampant, here is an opportunity to experience interdependence and togetherness.
- They develop leadership.
- They will often expose participants to Creation in a special way.
- Educationally they provide a new 'classroom setting' that can often provide success to those more used to failing.
- They model a different way of living.

Something strikes me as I look at this list. It's the Jesus model of discipleship. That's how he trained his followers and that's perhaps why Christians have led the field in residential provision for such a long time. CCI is now the largest association of



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residential providers in the UK, using the residential context to gently and sensitively declare Christian truth as well as fulfilling formal, secular educational requirements.

### **School trips made easy**

This still leaves residential event organisers with the logistical challenge of putting together a trip. Thankfully, these days there are plenty of sources of help – many of them available online.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides an excellent new area on their website ([www.hse.gov.uk/schooltrips](http://www.hse.gov.uk/schooltrips)) highlighting the lessons learned from the Glenridding plunge pool accident. Here, in one place, are the links to the main documents provided nationally for teachers, group leaders and educationalists. CCI has a comprehensive website ([www.cci.org.uk](http://www.cci.org.uk)) that does everything from finding you a venue, to providing resources and advice on taking groups away.

### **School trips made safe**

New organisations have emerged to bring balance to the rather alarmist NASUWT stance which discourages its members from organising such events. The Campaign for Adventure ([www.campaignforadventure.org](http://www.campaignforadventure.org)) aims to educate the public about the difference between risk awareness and risk aversion. That's an educational topic in itself and where better to teach it than 'in the field' in a highly controlled environment such as an outdoor activity course?

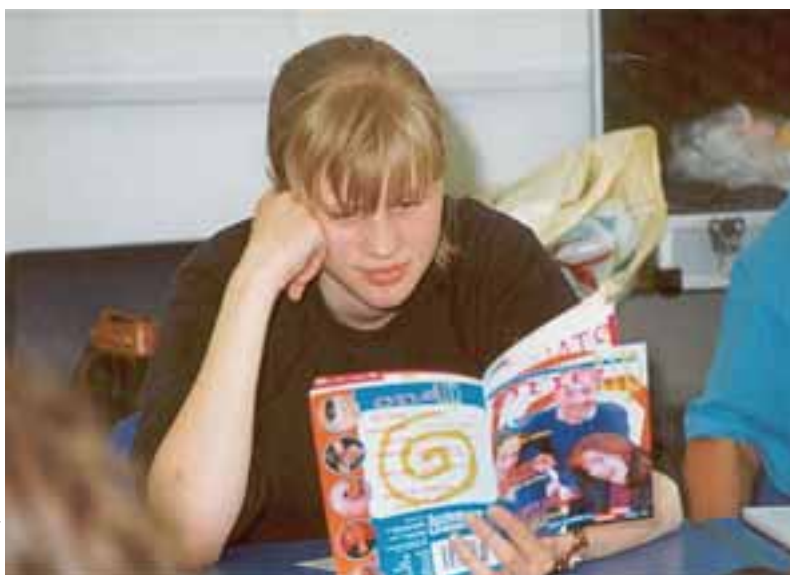
The pendulum had swung wildly to one extreme as a result of a few very rare high profile cases that make the media headlines. Now a more reasonable position is being taken on risk; combining safety with practicality and rejecting the needless 'cotton wooling' of children. HSE states on its website: 'We applaud those teachers and helpers who give



Photo: © Medina Valley Centre, 2005

*We... believe that out-of-classroom learning is a key part of a good education, and will include the quality of out-of-classroom education in the criteria on which schools are inspected*

**LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO (2005)**



their time and energy to follow good practice and do the job properly. Long may well-planned educational visits continue.'

### Modern day parables

So how can Christians help in this area? Christian teachers can support Christian centres and providers by encouraging their schools to attend one of the many professional Christian centres that exist. Christians can revive their churches by suggesting a weekend away – bringing back community and strengthening relationships. Christian educationalists can equip school organisers with access to the simple tools they need to run a trip – risk assessments, planning schedules, templates of letters and forms to use with parents – they are now accessible. Christians can volunteer to help at a holiday in the year ahead. They may be surprised when they get more out of it than they ever put in!

There is always something special about seeing a child achieve a new skill. Yes, outdoor education is about helping children to learn to relate better. But it is about so much more than that. It enables the hesitant youngster to take a 'leap of faith' from a high wire and make it to the other side safely. It introduces smiling dinghy sailors to wind and spray! It allows children to make a new creation out of craft materials. These are modern day parables that should humble and inspire us all. Let us make the most of what outdoor education has to offer to encourage a new generation of disciples for Christ.

■ Jim Hammett

### Contact details

Christian Camping International (CCI) supports, encourages and resources those who organise and run Christian residential events. This includes school trips, Alpha weekends away and church holidays. CCI runs a comprehensive website with an automated venue-finding service for schools, individuals and group leaders. For membership, resources, support and advice contact:



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*The majority of schools already offer a range of outdoor learning including school trips that enrich the curriculum, build confidence and increase skills. However, we know that some schools and staff would like re-assurance about their responsibility for pupil safety. We want to make sure that all school staff have the confidence to continue offering these experiences and that everyone involved in a school trip, including parents, are aware of their rights and responsibilities.*

*RUTH KELLY MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION (15 FEBRUARY 2005)*



Photo: © CCI, 2005

*... something is seriously awry when teachers feel unable to take children on school trips, for fear of being sued*

*TONY BLAIR, UK PRIME MINISTER (26 MAY 2005)*