

# Take the "Puzzle" out of Mid-Summer

Simple = Powerful!

Mid-Summer Program Ideas (Vol. 5): Quick + Easy + FUN!

Dear Camp Friends,

This year's mid-summer newsletter was inspired by my recent staff training travels; it was a good lesson for me to remember how some of the SIMPLEST activities can be the most POWERFUL! I threw several 100 piece jig-saw puzzles in my bag at the last minute for the first training I did in late April because there was about 30 minutes while folks trickled in, and I was trying to make use of that awkward time when things haven't officially started and staff don't know each other well enough yet to engage in a conversation. So, I put a puzzle on each table (without the box - to make it a little more challenging and FUN!) and gave the instructions that when finished each group was to tell me how the picture that was created related to camp in some way.

It was fun to watch how quickly people got busy working and several mentioned to me that they LOVE doing puzzles. As more folks arrived, it was easy for them to join a table and be part of the group effort to put the puzzle together. I then took a photo of each completed puzzle and a group picture so that we could later tie in the activity to the theme of the training for that day by importing the photos into my PowerPoint presentation.

Little did I know that when we "unpacked" this exercise at the close of the training, the following POWERFUL points would surface:

- Folks liked having something to do immediately when they walked in, and this was a good example to staff to show how important it is to have something engaging and fun for the campers to do the moment they arrive at camp. Puzzles can be done by people of all ages and are a familiar activity to most.
- Staff also liked the element of "surprise" of not knowing what the finished product would be. This related to how the new staff were feeling about their job this summer - they would learn more about the "big picture" during training and were excited to see what camp was all about! When you have done something multiple times (such as putting a puzzle together), there was also a new level of challenge to do it without the picture to guide the group along. This was a good way to show how staff will need to keep activities "fresh" and challenging for those campers who have been to camp before or who have prior experience with a particular activity.
- Even the "cheesiest" of pictures found on the final product led to amazing metaphorical relationships to camp. Ex: a picture of a cat and a dog showed how friendships can form at camp between kids who might not normally come together, a picture of a fox was a reminder to staff to be on alert in order to keep the campers in their care safe, a puzzle having a basket with two puppies was a good example of how important it is to use the "buddy system" at camp.

Kim Aycock \* Camp 2 Campus Learning Solutions  
601-832-6223 \* info@kimaycock.com \* www.kimaycock.com



- Discussions about the **PROCESS** of putting a puzzle together also became great tools for showing staff the give and take of working with a group. It is interesting for them to reflect on the individual contributions of each member and determine if everyone was chipping in equally or if some staff took over the leadership role while others followed.
- I also liked to ask each group about their **STRATEGY** of putting the puzzle together (most will put the border together first and then start sorting out the pieces by color). This can be tied into the different approaches staff use to solve problems or challenges.
- Each person also had a different **PERSPECTIVE** of the final product since not everyone is able to look at the puzzle right side up; depending on the picture, it is possible for the group not to know the orientation of the puzzle until the very end. Just like at camp, not everyone is coming with the same perspective or will have the same perspective when faced with the challenges and problem solving aspects of the job.

Needless to say, I found myself stopping at various Walmart and Target stores on my travels this summer to pick up jigsaw puzzles to use for various staff training exercises. I was amazed at how “into” this activity staff were, and I am now sharing this with you mid-summer, so that you, too, may take advantage of all the teachable moments this activity can provide! This is a GREAT time for giving staff the opportunity to reflect on their experience thus far and refocus their energy so that they can finish strong.

I wish you all the best in the remaining days of the summer of 2012!

*Kim Aycock*

p.s. If you would like to take the puzzle activity to a new level, it would be fun to challenge groups to put one together with all pieces upside down so that it would be impossible to sort them by color or some other meaningful way. Another idea would be to have staff/camper groups make their own puzzle...what about an all-camp puzzle?!

