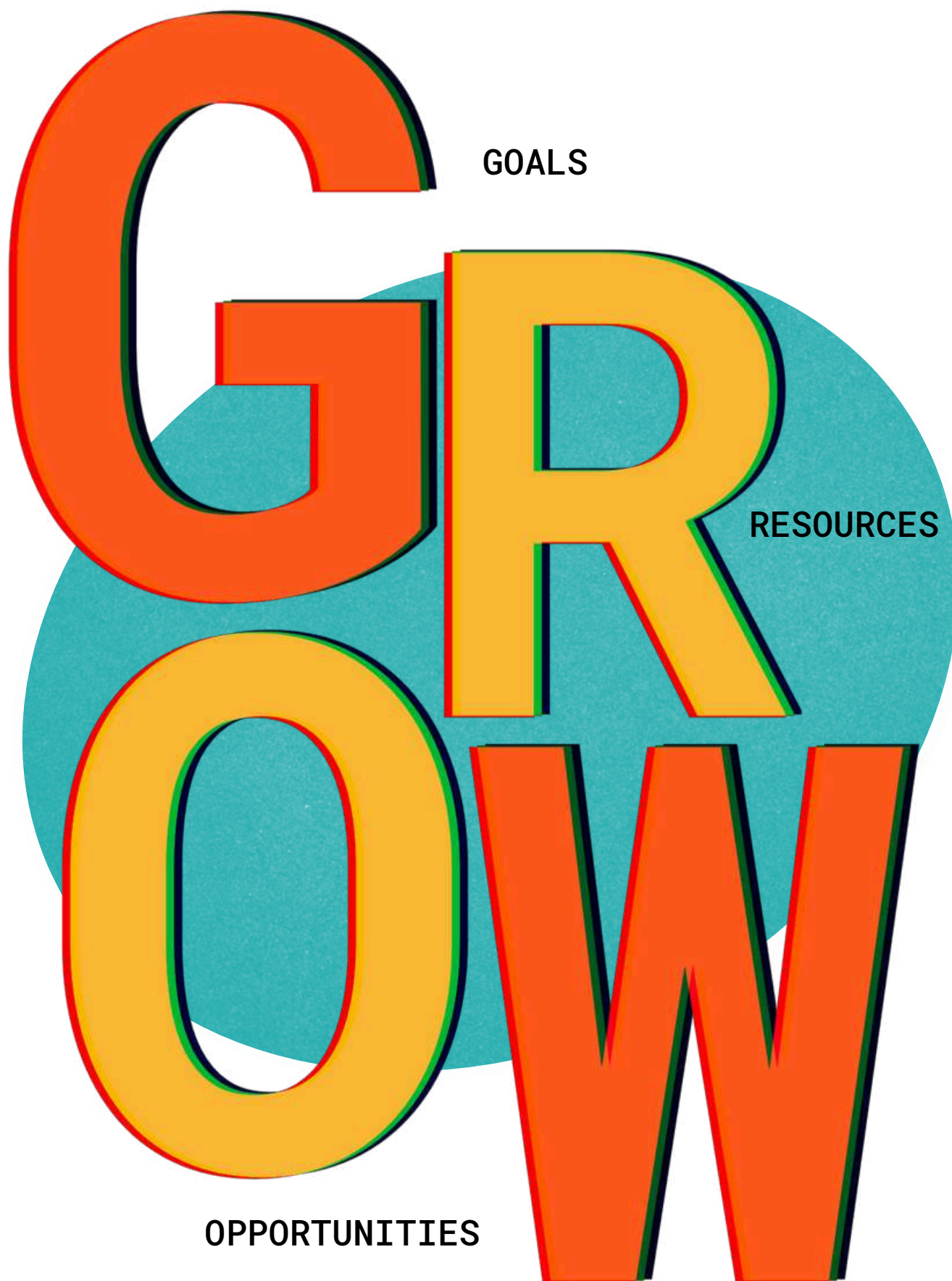




METHODOLOGICAL TOOLKIT

To enhance the expertise of youth camp leaders

G.R.O.W. – Goals, Resources, Opportunities, Wonders

A methodological toolkit to enhance the expertise of youth workers and youth camp leaders.



Learn more about the project:

Scan the QR code to access additional resources and updates.

This publication was developed by the GROW project team, a collaboration between Roter Baum Berlin (Germany), Curba de Cultură (Romania), Strauss APS (Italy), and Društvo Lojtra (Slovenia).

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01

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the GROW Toolkit. If you're a camp leader, volunteer, or youth worker, you already know how rewarding - but also how challenging - running a youth camp can be.

Whether you're organizing a summer camp, a local youth camp, or an international youth exchange, you face many responsibilities: keeping participants engaged, ensuring their safety, creating an inclusive environment, and managing unexpected situations. This is where the GROW Toolkit comes in.

1.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

What is GROW?

GROW stands for **Goals, Resources, Opportunities** and **Wonders** - the core elements of meaningful youth work. This project was created to help you set clear objectives (Goals), access useful tools (Resources), create learning experiences (Opportunities), and inspire curiosity and personal growth (Wonders).

Why was GROW created?

The GROW Toolkit was developed to support youth workers, camp leaders, and volunteers in **enhancing the quality of youth camps**. These camps are great places for learning, growth, and making connections, but they can also be tricky to lead. After talking to youth workers, we found that extra resources and guidance could really make a difference.

The project was supported by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme and coordinated by Roter Baum Berlin (Germany), along with partners Curba de Cultura (Romania), Strauss APS (Italy), and Društvo Lojtra (Slovenia). The toolkit is based on extensive research and feedback from people directly involved in youth camps.

What challenges does the toolkit address?

We found several key challenges that camp leaders face:

Lack of resources

Many youth workers rely on their experience, but there's a need for a clear, practical toolkit that works in different camp settings.

Managing group dynamics

Leading a group requires more than just enthusiasm. It requires specific skills and training, especially when it comes to handling tough situations and making sure everyone feels included.

Engaging camp activities

Camps should be places for learning, growth, and making new friends, not just fun. Without a plan, activities can fall short of providing these meaningful experiences.

The **GROW Toolkit** was designed to fill these gaps by offering easy-to-use methods and tested strategies to help create safe, inclusive, and impactful camp experiences.

How was the Toolkit developed?

The GROW Toolkit was created through a four-step process:

- 1 Needs analysis:**
Youth workers, camp leaders, and young people were interviewed to understand what would be most helpful.
- 2 Toolkit development:**
Based on this feedback, we designed a hands-on, multilingual toolkit with the best practices and methods.
- 3 Testing and improvement:**
The toolkit was tested in Germany and Italy, receiving feedback to make improvements.
- 4 Dissemination:**
Finally, we made the toolkit available in five languages to ensure it's accessible to more organizations across Europe.

In the following chapters, you'll find practical advice on how to use this toolkit before, during, and after your camp.

1.2 PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION

The GROW project was created through the teamwork of four organizations that have extensive experience in youth work, non-formal education, and community involvement. This partnership builds on previous Erasmus+ projects, ensuring that the best ideas, methods, and knowledge are shared.

Who are the partners?

- **Roter Baum (Germany):** Committed to making its services accessible to every young person, this organization carries out various projects for children and youth in Berlin and Dresden, including Erasmus+ and ESC programs, open and mobile youth work initiatives, school social work support, cultural and social events for young people, and youth camps aimed at supporting young people with fewer opportunities. As project leader, **Roter Baum Berlin** coordinated the project's smooth operation, overseeing finances and communication among partners.
- **Curba de Cultură (Romania):** This NGO works with young people in rural areas, offering non-formal education, cultural programs, and participation opportunities. Curba de Cultură led the Needs Analysis phase, talking to youth workers and camp participants to gather important ideas for the toolkit.

- **Strauss APS (Italy):** A non-profit organization based in Sicily, Strauss APS promotes multiculturalism, European values, and inclusion among youth. They played an important role in testing the toolkit and sharing it with other organizations to ensure it works well in youth work settings.
- **Društvo Lojtra (Slovenia):** A dynamic youth organization committed to empowering young people, fostering critical thinking, and supporting community-driven initiatives. With expertise in mentorship, training, and international mobilities, Lojtra led the development of the toolkit, ensuring it was practical and adaptable in different types of camps and activities.



1.3 WHAT IS A YOUTH CAMP

Youth camps, whether local or international, are vital spaces for the development of young people. As highlighted by the needs analysis conducted in the GROW project, these camps offer essential opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and the creation of inclusive environments where diversity and cross-cultural interaction are celebrated. In this chapter, you will explore the **key elements of a youth camp**, highlighting how they meet the needs identified by youth, staff, and camp leaders.

A break from everyday life

Youth camps offer a unique escape from the pressures of daily life. Away from the expectations of school, family, and society, young people can relax, recharge, and reconnect with themselves. **This "break" allows for self-reflection and personal growth**, enabling participants to discover new interests, develop new skills, and form lasting memories and friendships. It offers the freedom to explore different aspects of their identities and provides an environment to develop confidence and resilience.

Fun and exciting experience

At the heart of every youth camp is the promise of fun and excitement. These camps offer engaging activities, from outdoor sports and adventure to indoor games, ensuring **active participation**.

Camp locations, often surrounded by hiking spots, provide a variety of experiences, and when the weather isn't ideal, there are always indoor spaces for group games. Fun isn't just about entertainment; it's also a way for young people to challenge themselves and explore new horizons while learning and developing.

Building teamwork and group spirit

Teamwork is essential in youth camps. These camps bring together young people from diverse backgrounds, encouraging collaboration through activities that build trust, respect, and communication. **Working on shared goals fosters stronger relationships** and a sense of community. While some tension may arise, these moments often result in stronger bonds, cultivating mutual respect and solidarity.

Promoting self-confidence and self-determination

Many young people are used to decisions being made for them. Youth camps offer the chance to become more autonomous, to better understand and appreciate their own abilities. In a group of peers and away from parental supervision, they have the chance to reinvent themselves, test their skills, push their boundaries, and **take ownership of their choices**.

Connecting with nature

Youth camps provide a unique chance to experience nature in ways that may not be possible in everyday life. Outdoor activities like hikes and field games offer a chance to appreciate the natural world and reflect on its significance. In doing so, participants learn about **environmental sustainability** and develop a sense of responsibility toward the planet, recognizing how interconnected we are with nature.

Social contact and community building

At youth camps, young people find a supportive community where they can reflect on their roles in society and explore their desires, fears, and future goals. Group discussions and shared experiences help develop not only social skills but also a deeper sense of **empathy** and **solidarity**. It's a space where young people from various backgrounds come together and support each other.

Cross-cultural exchange in international camps

In international camps, young people engage with peers from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. This cross-cultural exchange broadens young people's perspectives. Young people not only learn about each other's customs and traditions but also work together on common goals, learning to respect and value **cultural differences**.

1.4 HOW TO USE THE MANUAL

The manual is divided into **five key chapters**, each focusing on a different aspect of youth camps. Here's a quick tour to help you find what you need:

INTRODUCTION

This first section provides essential context: it explains why the GROW Toolkit was created, what challenges it addresses, and who was involved in its development. It also describes what youth camps are and highlights their educational and social value. If you want to understand the background, purpose, and goals behind this resource, this is the place to start.

GOALS

This chapter covers the essential components of a successful camp, from the role of the camp leader to core responsibilities and the ethical principles that guide your work. You'll explore how to enable participation, manage expectations, and ensure a balanced camp experience that combines fun, learning, relaxation, and adventure. Safety is also emphasized, including how to address key issues.

RESOURCES

Here you'll find handouts, checklists, and operational guides covering everything from camp preparation to conflict resolution, medical matters, and activity planning. Whether you need help with travel logistics, daily routines, or team-building activities, this section is your go-to survival kit.

OPPORTUNITIES

This chapter explores how to integrate non-formal education into camp activities. It also covers learning opportunities for camp leaders, the importance of reflection, and how to evaluate both your own experience and that of your participants.

WONDERS

The final chapter dives into the magic of youth camps: the moments of wonder, the transformational experiences, and the stories that stay with you long after camp is over. Here, you'll find powerful tips from project partners, inspiring testimonials, and quotes from past participants and camp leaders.

In order to facilitate the reading and the search of the materials depending on the needs, we have divided each chapter in a different colour.

 INTRODUCTION

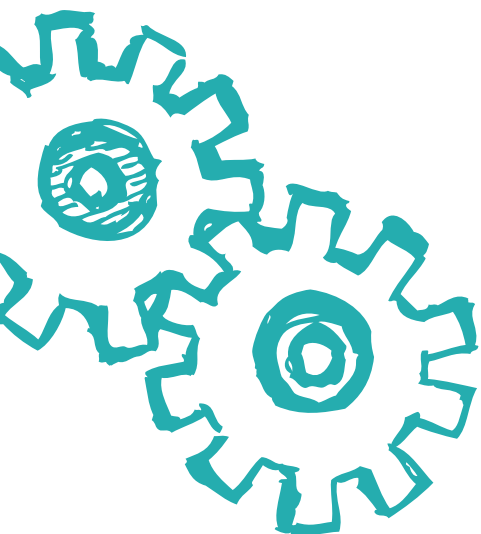
 GOALS

 RESOURCES

 OPPORTUNITIES

 WONDERS

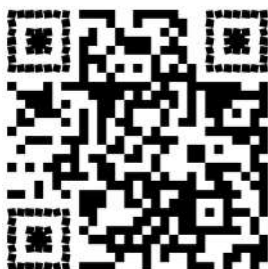
How to get the most out of this manual:



- **Need a complete guide to organizing and leading a youth camp?** Start from the beginning and read through each chapter to get a full understanding of the role, goals, resources, opportunities, and key insights for camp leaders.
- **Skip directly to the sections you need** if you're looking for something specific (use the checklists and handouts for quick solutions).
- **Using it during the camp?** Keep this manual with you. It's a **working tool, not just a reference book**. Use the checklists and handouts to stay organized and prepared for any situation.

The GROW Toolkit was created for you, to support, inspire, and empower you in making every youth camp a safe, inclusive, and memorable experience. Now, grab your backpack and let's make this camp unforgettable!

Scan the QR code to access additional resources and updates:



02

GOALS

You're about to begin an exciting journey – one where you'll guide, support, and grow alongside young people. That's why this chapter is called GOALS: because as a camp leader, having clear goals is what helps you make this experience meaningful – for them, and for you.

This chapter gives you a simple but powerful overview of what your role really means. You'll explore what it takes to be a good leader, how to create a safe and inclusive environment, how to encourage participation, and how to bring fun, learning, rest, and adventure together in a balanced way.

You'll also find guidance on how to manage expectations, face challenges, and take care of both your group and yourself. And because your growth matters too, we'll introduce tools that help you recognise and reflect on the skills you're building along the way.

Whether this is your very first camp or just the first in a new role, this chapter will help you start with clarity, purpose, and confidence – ready to make a real impact and enjoy the journey.

2.1 WHAT MAKES A GOOD CAMP LEADER

A camp leader plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of the participants. A great camp leader doesn't need a cape like a superhero (unless they're into it), but they must possess a big heart, a **positive mindset**, and an exceptional **ability to make every participant feel welcome and valued**. This chapter explores the key qualities, skills, and competencies that define a great camp leader, helping you lead with confidence and inspire growth.

● Three core areas

- **Guide:**

A great camp leader is, above all, a guide. Whether it's navigating through unexpected challenges, helping participants deal with difficult situations, or adjusting plans due to changing circumstances, a camp leader is a **steady hand** that keeps the group on track. They ensure the focus remains on the big picture, ensuring that everyone continues to learn, grow, and enjoy the experience, no matter what happens.

- **Support:**

Supporting participants and staff is another crucial aspect of leadership. A great camp leader provides both emotional and practical support. Whether it's offering a listening ear or **providing guidance in a hands-on way**, the leader creates a safe **space for everyone**. This support builds trust and ensures that participants feel heard, valued, and cared for, helping them flourish during their time at camp.

- **Inspire:**

Finally, a great camp leader serves as an **inspiration**. They motivate everyone, whether participants or staff, to give their best effort, try new things, and approach challenges with a positive attitude. **Their energy and enthusiasm inspire participants** to push their limits and take risks in a safe, supportive environment. Through their actions, they model the values of teamwork, resilience, and adventure, making every camp activity an opportunity for growth.

● Competencies of a good camp leader

- **Communication and active listening:**

Clear, respectful communication is essential for good leadership. **Camp leaders must be able to express instructions and feedback clearly** while also practicing **active listening**, giving full attention, responding thoughtfully, and fostering open dialogue. This two-way communication builds trust, prevents misunderstandings, and encourages openness among participants and staff.

- **Conflict resolution:**

Disagreements are natural in a diverse group, and camp leaders must be able **to think critically**. Effective leaders manage conflicts with empathy and neutrality, listening to all sides and guiding participants toward respectful, peaceful solutions through dialogue and mediation, whether it's dealing with an unexpected incident or finding creative ways to engage participants. A good leader approaches challenges with a **solutions-oriented mindset** and remains calm under pressure.

- **Time management and teamwork:**

Camp life is fast-paced, so **time management is key**. Leaders plan and prioritize efficiently while staying adaptable. They balance structured activities with free time, keeping participants engaged without overwhelming them. Equally important is **teamwork**. Leaders collaborate with colleagues, coordinate tasks, and share responsibilities.

- **Emotional intelligence:**

Emotional intelligence refers to the **ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others**. Camp leaders with high emotional intelligence can better support youth through difficult emotions, de-escalate tense situations, and create a positive atmosphere in which everyone feels understood and valued.

- **Decision-making and confidence:**

Camp leaders must make **quick, thoughtful decisions**, whether adjusting plans, addressing issues, or choosing activities. Doing so effectively requires confidence, which reassures participants and fosters trust. A confident, decisive leader helps the group feel safe, stay engaged, and follow with enthusiasm.

- **Stress management and patience:**

Camp leaders face high-pressure situations, from sudden changes to managing participants' emotions. **Patience** and **stress management** are crucial: a composed leader navigates challenges with clarity and empathy, creating a sense of stability for the group. Whether comforting a homesick participant or managing a chaotic moment, these skills set a strong example for participants and staff alike.

- **Cultural sensitivity:**

Camps often attract participants from diverse backgrounds, and a camp leader must be aware of and **sensitive to these cultural differences**. Recognizing and respecting cultural diversity fosters an inclusive environment where all participants feel valued and respected. Cultural sensitivity also means **being mindful of different languages, customs, and expectations**, ensuring that every child is treated fairly.

- **Creativity:**

Creativity is what sets a camp leader apart. They **turn ordinary moments into extraordinary ones**, whether it's transforming a hike into a treasure hunt or turning a quiet afternoon into an impromptu game. Their creativity keeps the camp experience fresh, exciting, and engaging, sparking enthusiasm in everyone around them.

- **Leadership:**

At the heart of being a camp leader is the ability to lead effectively. Leadership is not about being authoritarian but about **guiding, inspiring, and motivating** participants to actively participate in camp activities. A strong leader fosters a sense of community, builds confidence, and encourages participants to step outside their comfort zones. Leadership also involves setting clear expectations, modeling behavior, and handling challenges with confidence and composure.

- **Problem-solving:**

Camp leaders must be able to **think critically** and solve problems as they arise. Whether it's dealing with an unexpected incident, managing a situation with limited resources, or finding creative ways to engage participants, problem-solving is essential.

COMPETENCIES OF A GOOD CAMP LEADER



COMMUNICATION AND ACTIVE LISTENING
CONFLICT RESOLUTION
TIME MANAGEMENT AND TEAMWORK
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
DECISION-MAKING AND CONFIDENCE
STRESS MANAGEMENT AND PATIENCE
CULTURAL SENSITIVITY
CREATIVITY
LEADERSHIP
PROBLEM-SOLVING

● Training and development

- **Training:**

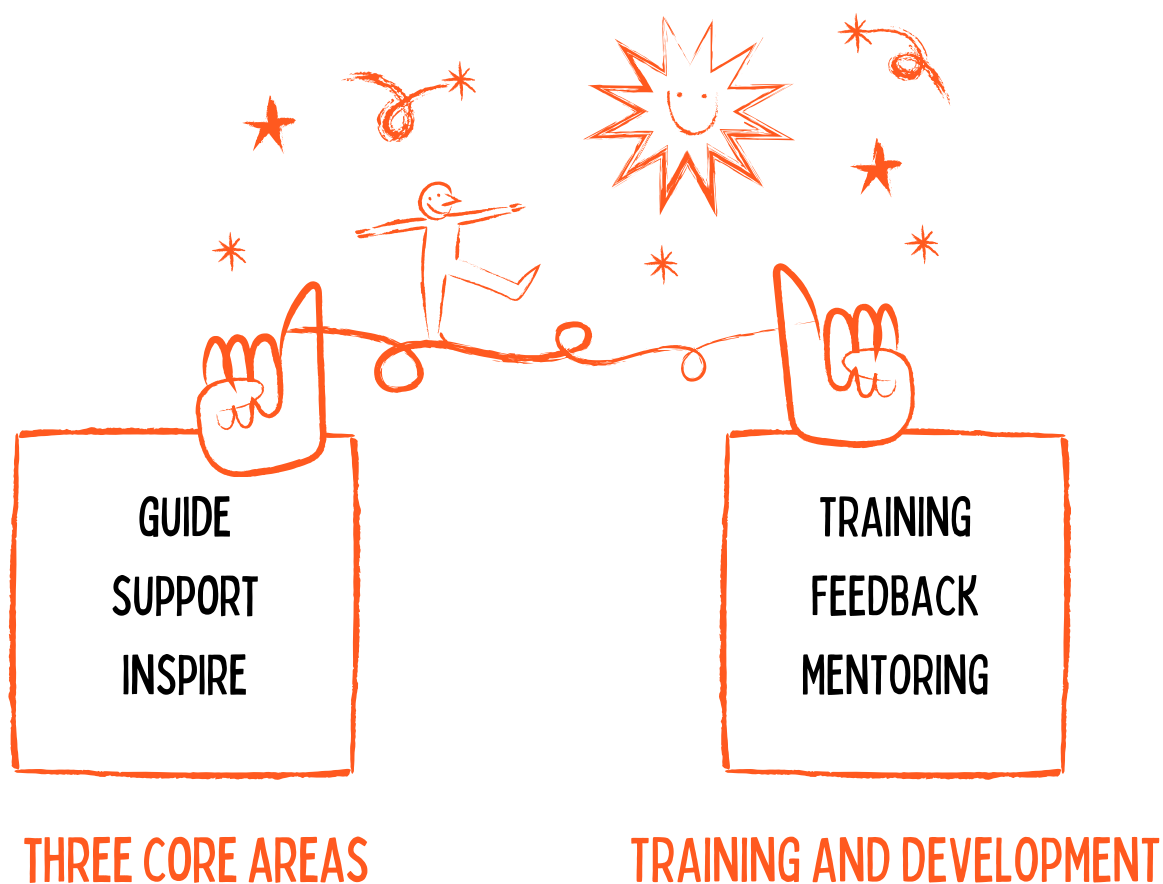
To be an effective camp leader, it's important to **continue learning**. This might include attending training on child development, safety protocols, emergency procedures, or first aid. Additionally, workshops on specific activities, such as team-building games or arts and crafts, can help leaders gain new skills to enhance the camp experience.

- **Feedback:**

Leaders should regularly seek feedback from their colleagues. Peer feedback provides insights into how well the camp is functioning, and it offers opportunities for personal growth. **Open communication** among staff members helps improve camp dynamics and ensures everyone is working toward the same goals.

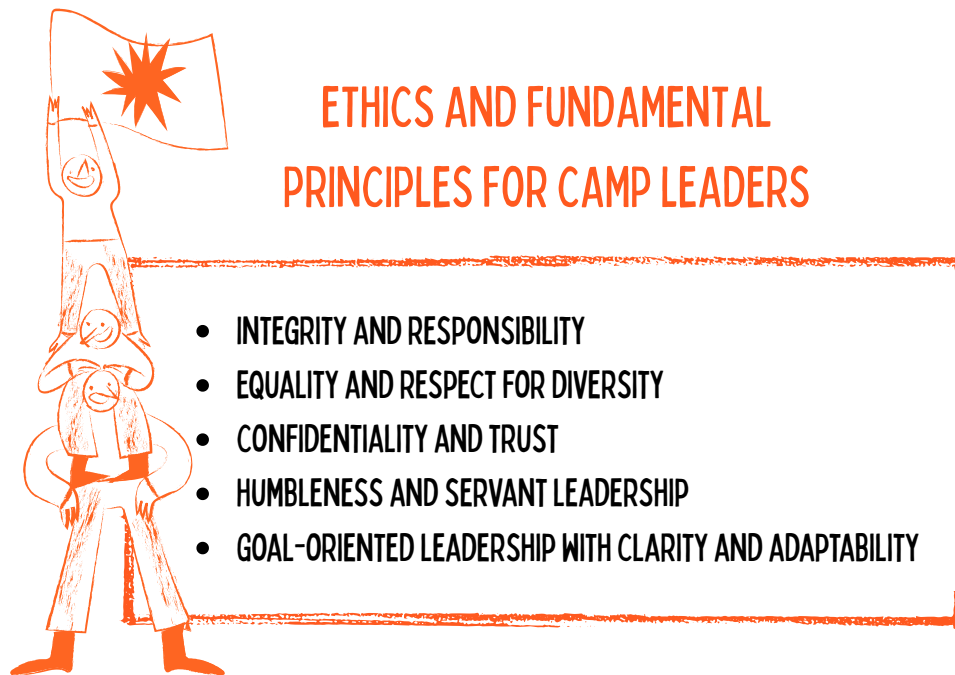
- **Mentoring:**

New camp leaders benefit greatly from the guidance of more experienced colleagues. Mentoring provides the chance to learn from others' experiences, ask questions, and receive constructive feedback. It also fosters a supportive staff culture where **all members are committed to each other's growth**.



2.2 ETHICS AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR CAMP LEADERS

Being a leader at a youth camp is not just about organizing fun activities; it's about embodying core values that create a safe and stimulating environment for all participants. Every decision and interaction reflects a **leader's ethics**, shaping the group's experience. To succeed in this role, it is crucial for the leader to act based on principles that foster trust, respect, and growth for everyone involved.



Integrity and responsibility

Integrity forms the bedrock of effective leadership. A leader's actions must **consistently reflect honesty, reliability, and accountability**. As a role model, a camp leader's integrity builds trust with participants and sets the tone for their entire experience. Leaders should take responsibility for their decisions, and when things go wrong, they must own up to their mistakes, showing young people that it's okay to learn from them.

Equality and respect for diversity

Creating an inclusive environment is crucial for fostering a **sense of belonging**. Every participant should feel valued and heard, regardless of their background, ability, or personality. Leaders should celebrate diversity, promote mutual respect, and ensure that everyone has the same opportunities to grow. It's about recognizing and embracing differences, creating a supportive community where everyone can thrive.

Confidentiality and trust

Confidentiality is essential for building trust with participants. Leaders must respect the privacy of individuals and handle sensitive information with care. By upholding confidentiality, leaders create a safe space where youth feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. **Trust is reciprocal**, and when leaders respect personal boundaries, they foster an environment where participants can express themselves without fear of judgment.

Humbleness and servant leadership

Humility is a powerful yet often overlooked trait in leadership. Humble leaders are approachable, attentive listeners **who value the contributions of others**. Leadership is not about commanding authority but about empowering others. By helping young people discover their strengths, humble leaders inspire collaboration and foster a sense of community within the camp.

Goal-oriented leadership with clarity and adaptability

While leadership should be goal-oriented, sometimes, the best outcome emerges from spontaneous decisions or creative solutions to unforeseen challenges, to which leaders must be able to adapt quickly. Leaders must be clear about the camp's purpose, yet flexible in how they achieve it. This **balance of clarity and spontaneity** creates a dynamic and meaningful environment where every participant can contribute and embrace challenges as opportunities for growth.

By embracing these ethical principles, camp leaders inspire personal growth and meaningful experiences. As you move forward in your leadership journey, how will you incorporate these values to build a camp environment where every participant thrives?

2.3 CORE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CAMP LEADERS

In the previous chapter, we explored the essential qualities that make an effective camp leader, such as integrity, adaptability, and inclusivity. Now, we delve into the **core responsibilities** of a camp leader, whose role extends far beyond mere supervision. The following responsibilities are essential to ensuring smooth camp operations, safeguarding participants' well-being, and creating an enriching experience for all.



PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- COORDINATING THE LEADERSHIP TEAM
- UNDERSTANDING KEY ROLES AND ENSURING CLARITY

PEOPLE AND TEAM CARE

- FOSTERING TEAMWORK AND PROMOTING COHESION
- CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT
- PROMOTING CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND FACILITATING CULTURAL EXCHANGE

RUNNING THE CAMP DAILY

- MANAGING DAILY CAMP OPERATIONS
- ENSURING THE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF PARTICIPANTS
- RESOLVING CONFLICTS CONSTRUCTIVELY
- DEMONSTRATING RELIABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

REFLECTION AND GROWTH

- REFLECTING ON DAILY ACTIVITIES AND ADJUSTING THE PROGRAM

●) Planning and preparation

COORDINATING THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Before the camp begins, the leadership team must meet to prepare for the experience. This includes program planning, task distribution, and understanding each other's strengths and weaknesses. Strong communication is vital, especially if the team is working together for the first time. Leaders should agree on the team structure (e.g., team leader or shared leadership) to ensure clear responsibilities and smooth cooperation.

UNDERSTANDING KEY ROLES AND ENSURING CLARITY

Three key roles should be assigned before the camp begins:

- **Person responsible for the Cash Box:** Manages all camp finances, tracks expenses, distributes pocket money (if necessary), and settles accounts with project management.
- **Person responsible for health:** Ensures all health protocols are followed. While not required to administer medical treatment, they manage medications, ensure participant safety, coordinate doctor visits, and maintain a log of health-related incidents.
- **Main contact person:** Acts as the main liaison between the camp and project management, handling urgent communication and providing necessary updates.

●) Running the camp daily

- **Managing daily camp operations**

Camp leaders oversee the daily operations of the camp, managing schedules, activities, and logistical arrangements. They ensure that activities run smoothly and that the schedule remains flexible enough to accommodate any unforeseen circumstances. Leaders must be proactive, ready to make quick decisions and adapt the schedule as needed to keep activities engaging and responsive to the group's energy.

- **Ensuring the safety and well-being of participants**

Ensuring participants' physical and emotional safety is a top priority. Leaders must remain vigilant, monitoring the physical environment for potential hazards and also being attuned to the emotional atmosphere. This ensures that all participants feel secure, supported, and able to thrive. The leader's emotional intelligence is crucial here, as it allows them to sense and address any underlying tensions or distress among participants before they escalate.

- **Resolving conflicts constructively**

Conflicts can arise naturally in any group environment. Camp leaders must be equipped to address these conflicts constructively. It is their responsibility to handle disagreements promptly and fairly, creating an atmosphere where open communication is encouraged, and resolutions are reached through collaboration.

Preventing conflicts begins with setting clear expectations and fostering an environment of mutual respect. When challenges occur, leaders should approach them with **empathy**, focusing on long-term solutions that benefit all involved.

- **Demonstrating reliability and flexibility**

Camp leaders must be adaptable and energetic, capable of handling unforeseen challenges and making decisions on the spot. Maintaining both **mental and physical resilience** is crucial for staying focused and providing consistent support, especially during demanding situations. Leaders should be well-rested and mentally prepared to face the unexpected. They must also remain flexible, ready to shift priorities as the situation demands.

●) **People and team care**

- **Fostering teamwork and promoting cohesion**

Effective leadership relies on strong teamwork. Camp leaders should create an environment where responsibilities are shared, and clear communication is prioritized. This ensures a well-functioning team that avoids misunderstandings and collaborates effectively to cover all necessary tasks. A **cohesive team** supports one another, offering both professional and emotional support, fostering a positive and collaborative environment for both staff and participants.

- **Creating a supportive and inclusive environment**

Camp leaders serve as role models for integrity, responsibility, and accountability. Their actions should inspire a positive, inclusive atmosphere where all participants feel valued and respected. **By leading through example**, leaders set the tone for a community built on trust and mutual respect, where everyone feels comfortable contributing and expressing themselves.

- **Promoting cross-cultural understanding and facilitating cultural exchange**

In international camps, leaders play a crucial role in facilitating **cross-cultural interactions**. They help bridge gaps in understanding by supporting young people as they navigate language barriers, cultural differences, and new social dynamics. By fostering an open, welcoming atmosphere, camp leaders ensure that every participant feels included and empowered to share their experiences. This is further supported by organizing activities that encourage participants to share traditions, stories, and experiences, fostering a deeper understanding and respect for diversity.

●) **Reflection and growth**

- **Reflecting on daily activities and adjusting the program**

An important activity for camp leaders is daily reflection. At the end of each day, the leadership team should come together to evaluate the day's events. This reflection helps identify what went well, what could be improved, and allows the program to be adjusted accordingly. Leaders should approach this process with an open mind and a **readiness to adapt**, ensuring that the camp remains engaging, responsive, and impactful for all participants.

2.4 ENABLING PARTICIPATION

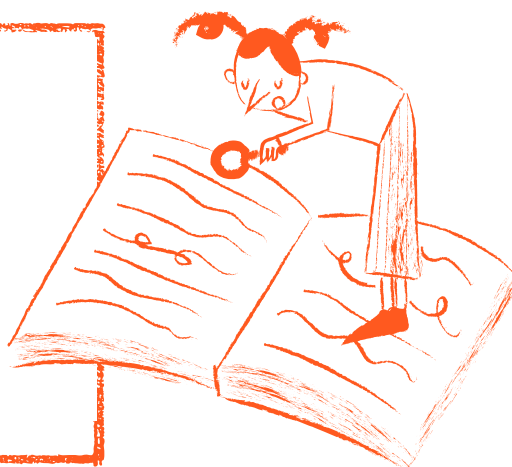
"Participation means sharing decisions that affect one's own life and the life of the community, and finding solutions to problems together." (Schröder, 1996)

In this chapter, we focus on one of the most important roles of a camp leader: **enabling participation**. While managing logistics and ensuring safety are key responsibilities, the real value lies in creating an environment where everyone feels empowered to engage and contribute. Participation is more than just being involved. It's about **creating a shared responsibility where everyone has a say**, a role, and feels important. This is especially crucial in a youth camp, where the environment is ideal for promoting active involvement.

Next, we'll explore the key elements that help camp leaders ensure that every participant has the opportunity to engage meaningfully.

KEY ELEMENTS

- CORE PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION
- STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE: SUPPORT VS. AUTONOMY
- PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO ENABLE PARTICIPATION
- TECHNIQUES TO SUSTAIN INTEREST
- INVOLVING YOUTH AND CHILDREN IN DECISION-MAKING
- OVERCOMING CHALLENGES
- TOOLS AND RESOURCES



● Core principles of participation

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Voluntary participation means that everyone joins in because they want to, not because they have to. When participants choose to be involved, they care more about the activities and the solutions that come from working together. This way, **every decision reflects the ideas of the whole group**, making the camp experience more enjoyable for everyone.

Example: If a participant initially resists joining group activities, a leader might invite them into smaller, low-pressure tasks, like helping to organize an art supplies table or taking photos of the group during an activity. Gradually, as the participant becomes more comfortable, they may feel encouraged to join larger group discussions or creative projects.

OPENNESS AND MUTUAL RESPECT

In any group, some individuals naturally take the lead, while others may be quieter or less inclined to speak up. It's crucial to create an environment where **everyone can participate equally**, regardless of their confidence level. Encourage quieter participants to get involved, but gently, without overwhelming them. Also, guide those who tend to dominate discussions, allowing space for others to speak. This creates a culture of respect, where everyone feels empowered to contribute.

Example: During group discussions, if some participants dominate the conversation, a leader might say, "Let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet," gently encouraging quieter voices without forcing them. Alternatively, a leader could implement a 'talking stick' system where each participant takes turns speaking, ensuring equal participation.

EQUALITY

A key part of participation is equality. At a youth camp, it's important to treat both participants and leaders as equals. When everyone, whether child, adolescent, or adult, is treated equally, it fosters a balanced, inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This creates a stronger **sense of belonging** for all.

Example: Ask the participants to vote on which activity to do next or have them share their thoughts on how to improve the camp schedule. This gives everyone a stake in the camp's success.

TRANSPARENCY AND COMPREHENSIBILITY

For participation to be meaningful, processes must be clear and understandable for everyone. **Discussions, decisions, and activities should be accessible to all.** It's important to communicate the results of group decisions transparently, making sure everyone knows what was decided and why. Transparency builds **trust** and ensures that everyone's input is valued, and decisions are made collectively.

Example: After a group activity, the leader should take time to explain what was decided and why, such as, "We chose to do an arts and crafts session because many of you said you enjoy creative activities. Next time, we'll try something new, based on your feedback!"

SPONTANEITY AND CREATIVITY

While planning is important, one of the unique aspects of a youth camp is the freedom to embrace spontaneity and creativity. The camp's temporary, structured nature allows **space for experimentation**. Encourage participants to come up with new activities and ideas, and turn unexpected situations into fun, collaborative challenges.

Example: If the group planned a cooking activity, but the weather changed and they cannot cook outdoors, the camp leader can brainstorm alternatives with the group. "It looks like it's going to rain, but that's okay! How about we organize an indoor cooking challenge instead, where you have to work with whatever ingredients we have in the kitchen?"

●) Striking the right balance: support vs. autonomy

While creativity can spark innovation and engagement, it is equally important for leaders to strike a balance between supporting these creative ideas and allowing participants the **autonomy** to lead their own initiatives. This balance ensures that creativity thrives without overstepping into overcontrol.

Effective participation requires a careful balance of support and autonomy. As a leader, your role is to provide guidance without overcontrolling the process. Offer as much assistance as is needed, but allow participants **the freedom to take initiative** and make decisions. When the focus is on the journey itself - on learning, experimenting, and collaborating - everyone grows. Your role is to guide and support, but you must avoid taking over. This keeps the group focused on their shared goals while fostering creativity.

Example: Camp leaders can give participants the possibility to decide which activity to do next, giving them the autonomy to choose.

●) Practical strategies to enable participation

KNOW THE GROUP:

- **Age and developmental stage:** Tailor activities to suit the cognitive and emotional capabilities of different age groups.
- **Interests and preferences:** Observe or ask participants about their interests, whether it's sports, arts, or adventure.
- **Cultural background:** Be aware of cultural norms to ensure **inclusivity**. In a multicultural environment, it's crucial to adapt activities so that they are respectful and engaging for all participants, regardless of their cultural background. For example, if some participants are unfamiliar with team sports or prefer activities with minimal physical contact, you could introduce cooperative games that foster teamwork without physical confrontation, such as problem-solving challenges or collaborative art projects. By considering these differences, you ensure that all participants feel valued and included in the camp's experience.
- **Individual and group dynamics:** Observe group behavior to identify natural leaders and quieter participants. Design activities that appeal to both types.

DESIGNING ENGAGING PROGRAMS

- **Variety is key:** Offer a mix of activities that combine physical, creative, and social elements. Such as:
 - *Physical: Sports, obstacle courses, or outdoor adventures;*
 - *Creative: Arts and crafts, storytelling, or music sessions;*
 - *Social: Team-building games or discussion circles;*
 - *Logical: Science experiments, coding, or math games to foster problem-solving and critical thinking.*

- **Interactive formats:** Use **gamification** like point systems or challenges. Incorporate hands-on activities like cooking, building, or role-playing games. Foster connection with nature and exploration of the environment.
- **Flexibility in planning:** Allow participants to help shape the program by choosing activities or suggesting their own ideas. Prepare for unexpected situations (weather, space issues, or resource shortages) by having a Plan B.
- **Foster connection with nature:** Include **outdoor activities** that encourage group cohesion through adventure and challenges. Make time for self-care and breaks to help participants relax in a new environment.

ENCOURAGING ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

- **Assigning roles and responsibilities:** Give participants small roles, like group leaders or timekeepers. Rotate roles to let everyone contribute and develop leadership skills.
- **Fostering collaboration:** Plan team projects or challenges to encourage cooperation. Icebreaker activities can help build trust and familiarity.
- **Celebrating contributions:** Recognize individual and group efforts with praise, awards, or showcasing their work (e.g., art displays or short performances).

●) Techniques to sustain interest

- **Element of surprise:** Introduce unexpected activities or special guests to keep things exciting.
- **Theme days:** Plan fun theme days (e.g., Pirate Day or Science Adventure) to add variety.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Use rewards like stickers or badges to motivate participants. Provide feedback to encourage participation.
- **Breaks and downtime:** Schedule short breaks to avoid burnout. Provide unstructured playtime where participants can pursue their own interests.

●) Involving youth and children in decision-making

- **Co-creation of activities:** At the start of the camp, hold a brainstorming session where participants can suggest or vote on activities. Adjust the program periodically based on their feedback.
- **Peer-led sessions (for older participants):** Allow older participants to lead activities for their peers, helping them take ownership of the camp experience.

●) Overcoming challenges

- **Handling disengaged participants:** Pair them with more enthusiastic peers to boost involvement. Offer quieter alternatives to high-energy activities.
- **Dealing with conflicts:** Use moments of disagreement as teaching opportunities for empathy and conflict resolution.



●) Tools and resources

- **Program templates:** Use pre-designed activity schedules that can be customized based on the group's needs.
- **Resource materials:** Find guides for interactive games, team-building exercises, and creative projects to facilitate participation.

Active participation is a cornerstone of a successful camp experience. When participants are engaged, they learn more effectively, build stronger connections, and leave with lasting memories. By implementing these strategies and reflecting on how you can balance guidance with autonomy, you will foster an environment where participation thrives. So, how will you ensure that each participant in your next camp experience feels **empowered to contribute, collaborate, and take ownership?**

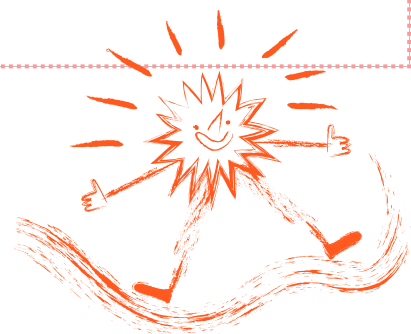
2.5 UNDERSTANDING EXPECTATIONS

As a camp leader, your role extends beyond organizing activities. It's about **managing different expectations** from various groups. By understanding these expectations, you can ensure the camp is successful, enjoyable, and meaningful for everyone involved.

What participants expect

Participants in youth camps range in age from 6 to 17 years, each with different needs and expectations. While their age, background, and experiences may vary, there are common desires shared across the group.

WHAT THEY EXPECT	HOW TO MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS
Fun and excitement	Plan engaging and dynamic activities that create memorable experiences.
A safe, trusted environment	Ensure physical and emotional safety with clear rules, trained staff, and a supportive atmosphere.
Social interaction and friendship	Organize team games, campfires, and social events to encourage bonding.
Connection with nature	Offer outdoor activities such as hiking, wildlife observation, and environmental conservation projects.
Choice and autonomy in activities	Provide a variety of activity options, allowing participants to choose based on their interests.
Opportunities for self-expression and positive group dynamics	Encourage creative activities and teamwork to foster a sense of belonging.
Recreational and leisure time	Balance structured activities with free time for relaxation and personal exploration.
Comfort and accommodations	Maintain clean, comfortable sleeping arrangements and essential amenities.
Technology access	Provide limited, supervised access to Wi-Fi or devices to stay connected with family.



What camp leaders expect

Camp leaders play an important role in delivering a meaningful and enjoyable youth camp experience. Their expectations reflect their desire for **personal and professional growth**, as well as their commitment to creating a positive environment for participants. Many of these insights have been gathered through the **Needs Analysis Report**, highlighting their essential expectations for a youth camp experience.

WHAT THEY EXPECT	HOW TO MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS
Opportunities to express their creativity	Leaders value opportunities to express their creativity and contribute innovative ideas to camp activities. This fosters a vibrant and engaging atmosphere for participants and staff alike. Allow leaders to design and implement unique, engaging activities.
Meaningful responsibilities	Leading activities or managing groups allows them to feel empowered and integral to the camp's success.
Respect and trust	Open communication and recognition of their efforts help to create a collaborative and supportive working environment.
Personal and professional growth	Leaders aim to develop critical skills such as empathy, communication and flexibility. Provide leadership training, first aid certification, and skill-building opportunities.
Creating an inclusive environment	Promoting diversity is a core expectation. Leaders strive to foster a sense of belonging through team-building exercises and thematic activities.
Connection with nature	Encourage environmental education and sustainability practices.
Ensuring safety and well-being	Offer proper training, clear emergency protocols, and well-maintained facilities. Well-being can also be guaranteed by providing diverse, healthy food options.
Personal fulfillment	Leaders find satisfaction in positively influencing young people's growth and development. They also cherish opportunities to collaborate with a diverse team and build meaningful relationships. Highlight the impact of their role in youth development and team collaboration.

●) What the organizers expect

The organization behind the camp bears ultimate responsibility for the camp's success and sets the overall expectations for the camp and its leaders.

WHAT THEY EXPECT	HOW TO MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS
Responsible planning and implementation	The organizer expects careful planning and execution of all activities. As a leader, it's your responsibility to ensure everything runs smoothly, from preparing the camp schedule to managing the day-to-day operations.
Protecting the organizer's reputation	The organizer relies on leaders to uphold the camp's integrity and ensure that all activities are conducted properly. Maintain professionalism, follow guidelines, and address concerns proactively.
Problem-solving	Minor challenges are inevitable, and leaders are expected to manage them efficiently. In emergencies, the project management team must be contacted promptly.
Ensuring safety and well-being	Organizational leaders place a high priority on safety. This includes the provision of clear emergency protocols, proper health and safety measures, supervision and collection of participants' medical information.

●) What Parents expect

Parents entrust their children to the camp, so their primary concern is naturally the safety and well-being of their child. As a camp leader, it is essential to foster trust with parents by communicating clearly and consistently caring for the children.

WHAT THEY EXPECT	HOW TO MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS
Well-being	Parents want reassurance that their child is in a safe and nurturing environment. This includes both physical safety and emotional support.
Fun and enjoyment	Parents also want their children to have an enjoyable experience, full of excitement and new adventures. Offer diverse activities that promote adventure, creativity, and personal growth.

Communication

Parents expect to be informed about their child's participation and any significant updates during the camp. Regular communication, either directly or through project management, helps address concerns and keeps them informed.

● What the Law expects

The law plays an essential role in shaping the camp experience, ensuring that all activities are compliant with regulations protecting minors. Camp leaders must follow these regulations to ensure a safe and legally compliant camp environment.

WHAT THEY EXPECT	HOW TO MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS
Compliance	It's important to follow all legal requirements, from child protection laws to health and safety standards. The safety and well-being of participants must always come first.
Legal boundaries	Leaders need to be aware of and adhere to guidelines regarding supervision, appropriate behavior, and any other legal standards that apply to minors in a camp setting.

2.6 A BALANCED CAMP EXPERIENCE: FUN, LEARNING, RELAXATION, AND ADVENTURE

A successful camp experience should blend **fun, education, relaxation, and adventure**. Balancing these aspects will help make the camp both memorable and meaningful. These four elements ensure that the camp is not only enjoyable but also fulfilling and enriching for everyone involved. Here's how to incorporate these principles:

● Fun

Fun is at the heart of any successful camp experience. It keeps participants engaged and motivated, helping to create a positive, **lively atmosphere**. Fun activities can encourage teamwork, creativity, and spontaneity.

Tip for camp leaders: Incorporate games, sports, arts, and music into the daily schedule. Make sure to create moments where participants can laugh, relax, and bond.

● Educational aspect

Camp should be a place where learning happens in both **formal and informal ways**. Educational activities allow participants to develop new skills, gain knowledge, and explore their interests in a hands-on, experiential way.

Tip for camp leaders: Plan activities that allow for discovery and growth. Use the camp setting to teach new concepts or skills, such as nature exploration, cooking, or team-building exercises. Encourage young people to ask questions and reflect on their experiences.

● Relaxation

Relaxation is essential to help participants unwind and recharge. It provides an opportunity to rest, reflect, and enjoy the camp experience at a slower pace. Including **moments of calm and relaxation** helps maintain energy levels and promotes well-being.

Tip for camp leaders: Schedule quiet time, such as reading, journaling, or listening to music. Consider activities like mindfulness or yoga to help participants relax and focus their minds.

● Adventure

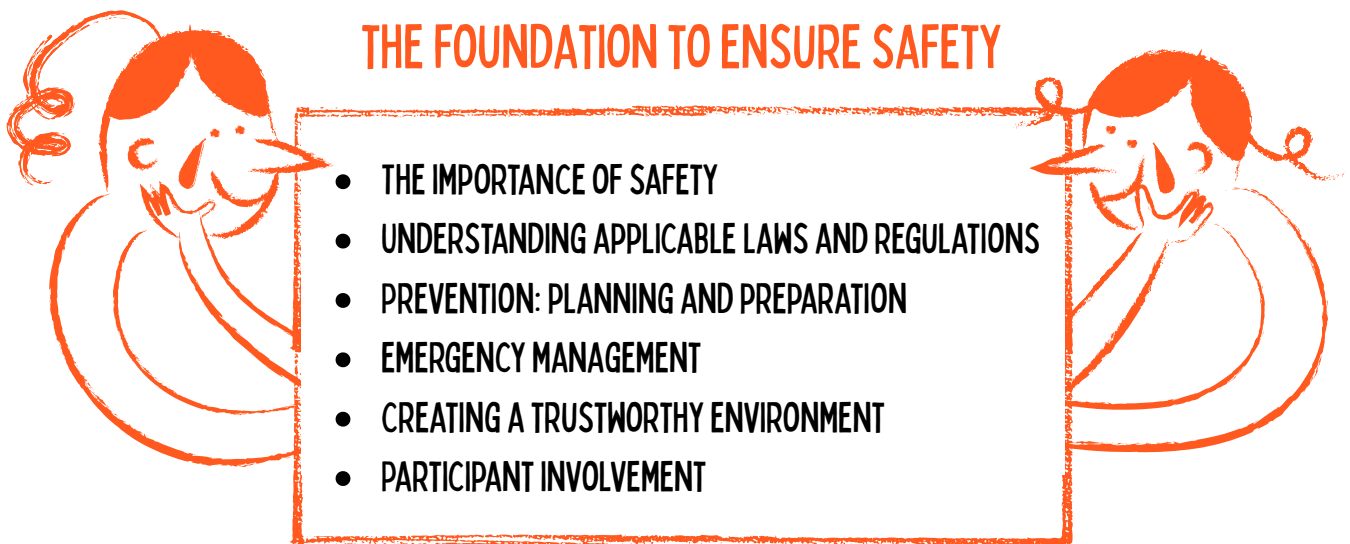
Adventure sparks curiosity and encourages participants to step out of their comfort zones. It promotes risk-taking, problem-solving, and resilience, while allowing young people to experience the thrill of new challenges.

Tip for camp leaders: Include outdoor adventures like hiking, treasure hunts, or team-building challenges. Motivate them to try new activities that push their boundaries and help them grow in confidence.



2.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY IN A CAMP

Safety is the top priority for any camp leader. A secure environment allows participants to enjoy meaningful experiences without worries. This chapter provides the foundations to ensure compliance with local and international regulations, prevent risks, and respond effectively to emergencies. **Prioritizing safety in camp management** is not just about complying with the law, but about protecting lives and creating an environment where participants can grow, learn, and have fun without concerns. Preparation, prevention, and training are the most powerful tools a camp leader can have



THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY

- **Participant protection:** Children and young people are particularly vulnerable. It is essential to safeguard them from physical, emotional, and social dangers.
- **Legal obligations:** Every camp leader must follow local laws and specific regulations for camps (e.g., fire safety, child protection).
- **Building team trust:** A safe environment builds trust in the staff and the organization.

UNDERSTANDING APPLICABLE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- **Local regulations:** Familiarize yourself with rules on safety, child protection, and requirements for outdoor activities.
- **Health and safety:** Know the health protocols (e.g., allergy management, access to medical care).
- **Data protection:** If collecting personal information, comply with privacy laws (e.g., GDPR in Europe).
- **Useful resources:** Include additional materials with links to local regulations, youth work laws, and health guidelines.

PREVENTION: PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- **Plan ahead:** Conduct a site inspection to identify risks (e.g., hazardous areas, weather conditions). Make sure an emergency kit is available, complete with basic medical supplies, contact numbers, and first aid tools. Ensure every team member knows the emergency protocol.
- **Staff training:** Organize training sessions on safety, first aid, and crisis management. Assign a safety officer to regularly monitor the environment.
- **Continuous supervision:** Ensure that staff are always supervising participants. Supervise high-risk activities, such as sports or hiking.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- **Evacuation:** Be aware of the evacuation plan for fires, floods, or other emergencies.
- **Incidents:** Establish protocols for handling injuries, illnesses, or critical situations (e.g., a lost child).
- **Communication:** Maintain direct lines to emergency services, parents, and local authorities.
- **Post-Incident reporting:** After an incident, document the event thoroughly to improve future protocols and maintain transparency with your organization, parents, and relevant authorities.

CREATING A TRUSTWORTHY ENVIRONMENT

- **Explain safety rules** to participants in a simple and understandable way.
- **Use practical examples** to convey risks (e.g., why avoiding dangerous areas is crucial).
- **Accessibility:** Make materials and tools accessible for participants to use freely and responsibly.

PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT

- Encourage participants to report potential hazards.
- Recognize and reward safe behaviors.
- Ensure inclusion and mutual respect among participants.

03

RESOURCES

The Resources chapter provides practical tools for every stage of the youth camp journey, from preparation to closing. Whether you're organizing activities, managing operations, or handling unexpected issues, you'll find essential support to plan and run a successful camp.

The tools are useful both during planning and on-site, helping you stay organized, prepared, and focused on creating a meaningful experience for participants. To make navigation easier, resources are divided into two categories:

- Checklists – Task-oriented lists for logistics, safety, and planning.
- Handouts – Practical guides on key topics like program design, team coordination, and problem-solving.



Scan the QR Code to access to the Booklet of Resources.

3.1 RESOURCES OVERVIEW

The Annexes Toolkit provides **checklists and handouts** grouped into five key areas, making it easy to find exactly what you need at any stage of the camp:

●) Planning and preparation

Tools to organize the camp before departure, define schedules, and prepare logistics.

- **Handout:** Camp Cycle - Preparation, execution, and reflection
- **Handout:** Program planning for a youth camp
- **Checklist:** Camp preparation

●) Operations and logistics management

Tools to coordinate travel, logistics operations, and camp closure.

- **Checklist:** Pre-departure
- **Checklist:** Travel to the youth camp
- **Checklist:** Arrival day
- **Checklist:** Departure day
- **Checklist:** After arrival back home

●) Daily camp management

Guides for the practical aspects of day-to-day camp management.

- **Checklist:** Daily camp routine
- **Checklist:** Shopping and cooking

●) Safety and well-being

Tools to ensure participant safety, manage emergencies, and resolve conflicts.

- **Handout:** Handling group conflicts
- **Checklist:** Medical matters
- **Checklist:** Swimming rules

●) Activities and group dynamics

Materials to manage participant interactions and encourage learning through games and experiences.

- **Handout:** Team-Building activities and group dynamics
- **Handout:** Outdoor activities
- **Checklist:** Evaluation activities in non-formal education

The Resources chapter is provided as a separate attachment. Use the QR Code to download it.

04

OPPORTUNITIES

In the Opportunities chapter, you will explore the learning potential of summer camps. It presents non-formal education as an educational approach that can enhance learning during activities with and for young people.

The chapter explains what non-formal education is and explores ways to best integrate non-formal education into camp activities. It emphasises the potential of experiential learning and the power of reflection and evaluation. Furthermore, the chapter presents theories, approaches and tools which enhance understanding of the topics and also their transferability to real-life situations in summer camps.

4.1 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." (Nelson Mandela, 1990)

The authors of this manual believe that when there are activities with and for young people there is an opportunity for learning, and it would be a great pity not to take advantage of it. **It is learning that enables participants to see and understand the world around them and find their place in it.** If we look into learning as a process which makes people more autonomous, then as camp leaders we hold this chance to empower young people and make them more **self-confident, independent and connected human beings** and also more active members of their communities. That is a potential we believe is an honour and absolute benefit to seize and realize during the activities we organize. But, what kind of learning and education can happen during the camp activities?

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

We can distinguish between **formal education, non-formal education** and **informal learning**. This kind of understanding is most common in the Erasmus+ program of the European Union. While we all know formal education from schools and while informal learning is all about new information that we can receive at any given time and place, we will focus on the characteristics of non-formal education.

What is the difference between education and learning? The simplest explanation would be that education involves the process of educating and this process is pre-designed to enhance learning. However, learning can also happen without a pre-designed process and in that case, it's just learning and we cannot really call it education. **Non-formal education is present in many forms**, very commonly also when working with and for young people. The most common characteristics include:

Learner-centred

It focuses on the **learner's needs**, interests, and issues. The learning process is often more personalized and tailored to individual learners.

Structured curriculum

As in formal education, the curriculum is structured and **set in advance**. However, it's designed by the people delivering the educational process and it's based on the needs, issues and interests of the present target group.

Informal setting

Non-formal education typically takes place **outside** of traditional educational institutions, such as in community centres, youth clubs, or online platforms.

Voluntary participation

Participation in non-formal education is **voluntary**, allowing learners to choose the programs that interest them.

Diverse methods

It employs a variety of **teaching methods**, including workshops, seminars, group activities, and experiential learning.

Recognition of learning

While non-formal education may not always lead to formal certification, it often provides learners with skills and knowledge that are **recognized** and valued by employers and society.

Inclusivity

Non-formal education aims to be **inclusive** and **accessible** to all individuals, regardless of their background or previous educational experiences.

Collaborative learning

Non-formal education often encourages **collaborative learning** and peer-to-peer interaction, fostering a sense of community and shared learning.

Continuous learning

It promotes **lifelong learning** and encourages individuals to continuously develop their skills and knowledge throughout their lives. However, most of the time there are no grade levels or stages and it's up to the learners how to navigate their further educational steps.

Participatory

Non-formal education is all about participation, meaning that learners are **active co-creators** of the learning process. They influence and shape it. Frontal presentations and solo talks (most known from formal education) are rare and limited.

Non-certified teachers

People implementing non-formal education **do not need to hold** a certificate or diploma.

4.3 HOW CAN WE INTEGRATE NON-FORMAL EDUCATION INTO CAMP ACTIVITIES?

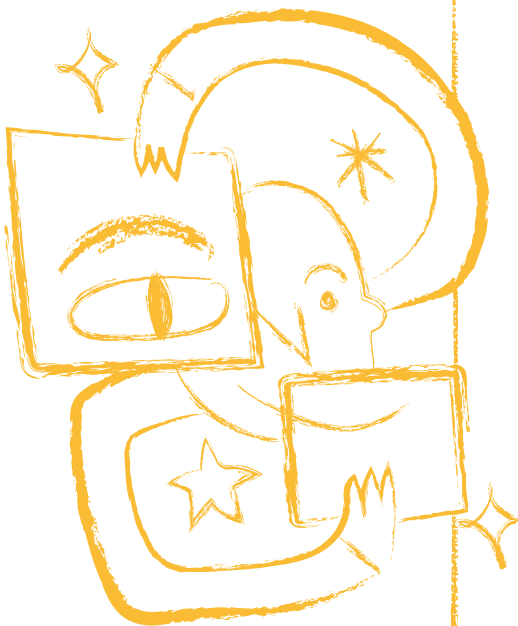
Integrating non-formal education into camp activities means that we are **pre-designing the process of learning** in our activities. It means that we would be using the learning potential of the activities to enhance or accelerate development of certain areas **with** and **for** our participants.

Designing learning processes may not be easy because it demands certain competences and experience. Like any beginning, this one may also be difficult. The key is not to look for perfection, but to start trying different things out and see what works for you and your target group. The good news is that you can always adapt and improve what you do. Below are some key steps to take into account when planning learning activities with and for young people.

●) Needs, issues and interests

Get to know your target group. The more you know them, the easier it will be to organise activities relevant to them and those activities will hold greater learning potential. You can get to know your target group by meeting them, asking them questions, distributing questionnaires to them and observing them.

THE MAIN THINGS TO OBSERVE/ASK WOULD BE:



- WHAT IS THE AGE OF THE TARGET GROUP?
- WHAT ARE THEY INTERESTED IN?
- HOW AND WHERE DO THEY SPEND THEIR FREE TIME?
- WHAT ARE THEIR NEEDS?
- ARE THERE ANY CHALLENGES THEY ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING?
- WHAT ACTIVITIES WOULD THEY ENJOY?
- ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC SKILLS OR HOBBIES THEY WOULD LIKE TO EXPLORE?
- IS THERE SOMETHING NEW THEY WOULD LIKE TO TRY, EXPERIENCE OR LEARN DURING THE ACTIVITIES?

●) Learning objectives

After exploring needs, issues and interests it is time to shape the learning objectives. So, what will the young people learn during our time together? One of the possible models to help us is the **ASK competence model**. This model says that competence is composed of three parts: Attitude, Skills, and Knowledge.

1 Knowledge:

Knowledge means acquiring information. It refers to what we know about something. In the sense of learning objectives, we can ask ourselves What new things will participants know after our activity?

For example: Participants will learn 10 new facts about the host country and they will be able to list them.

2 Skills:

Skills can be developed. They refer to what we are able to do. So, what will our participants be able to do or what will they be able to do better than before?

For example: Participants will be able to listen to another person for 1 min without interrupting them.

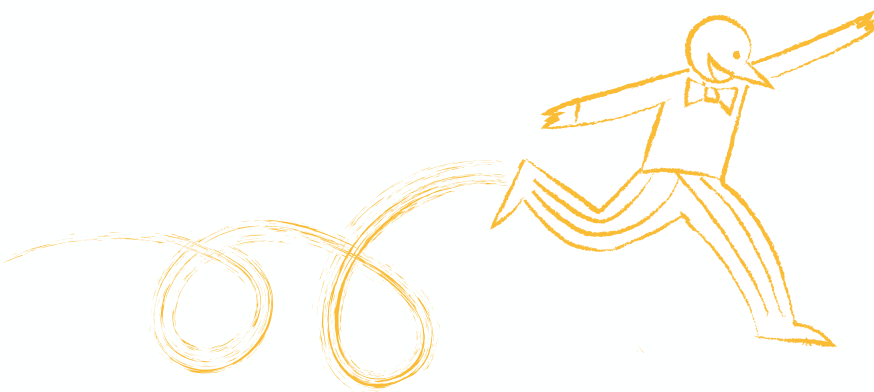
3 Attitude:

Attitude means how we feel towards somebody or something else. It takes time to change attitudes and it is also hard to say exactly how successful we were. However, it is one of the areas that education has a great impact on.

For example: Participants will be more open to talk to the people they don't know.

●) Activities

Based on the needs, issues and interests and on the learning objectives, we start answering the question, what will we actually do during our camp. There are hundreds and hundreds of activities we can choose to do with young people. **You can find useful links in the resource chapter.** The advice would be to start testing the activities and over time you will find out what works best for you and young people.



4.4 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

There is another important aspect when talking about learning in activities with and for young people. Most of the time we do something with young people, it means we have some kind of **experience** with them. In this case experiences may include: riding a bike, playing a game, visiting a museum, treasure hunting in the community, cooking together or having a conversation.

There is a learning model that helps us reflect on and extract meaning from experience. **Kolb's Experiential Learning Model**, developed by David Kolb in the 1980s, is a well-regarded theory that explains how individuals learn and process experiences. The model is structured around **four stages** that form a **continuous cycle of learning**, meaning learners can start at any stage:

CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

This stage is all about **diving into new experiences** headfirst. It's where you actively engage in an activity or situation without preconceived notions. Imagine trying out snowboarding for the first time - you feel the cold air, the balance on the board, the excitement of gliding down the slope.



REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION

After the experience, you **take a step back** to reflect on what happened. You consider what worked, what didn't, and how you felt during the process. Maybe you think about why you fell a few times or what made certain runs smoother than others.



ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION

Here, you **start connecting the dots**. You develop theories or concepts based on your reflections. You might realize that keeping your knees slightly bent improves balance or that looking ahead helps with steering. It's the stage where learning starts to solidify into understanding.



ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION

Now, you **apply your new insights** to the world around you. You get back on the snowboard, this time adjusting your stance or focusing on your balance. This leads to new experiences, and the cycle begins anew.



Kolb's model isn't just an abstract concept. It's a **dynamic learning process** applicable in everyday life. By actively moving through these stages, we transform experiences into learning. This makes it particularly useful in the context of summer camps. Every day is full of experiences. **Following the cycle can help camp leaders extract learning from experiences.**

4.5 THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF REFLECTION

Extracting the most important element that actually enables learning in non-formal education, we need to say a few words about **reflection**.

Reflection is an active, intentional process of critically **examining our experiences** to extract deeper meaning and understanding. In the context of non-formal education, reflection serves as a **bridge between experience and learning**.

John Dewey emphasized that, without reflection, experiences remain isolated events. It's through reflecting that we transform those events into valuable lessons.

●) Why does reflection matter?

- **Deepening self-awareness:** Reflection illuminates our inner world. By examining our thoughts, feelings, and actions, we gain insights into our motivations and behaviours.
- **Enhancing critical thinking:** Through reflection, we challenge assumptions, evaluate evidence, and consider alternative perspectives. This sharpens our critical thinking skills.
- **Fostering personal growth:** Understanding our experiences enables us to identify areas for improvement.
- **Promoting active learning:** Instead of passively receiving information, reflection encourages active engagement with the material. Involvement and reflection deepen learning.
- **Empowering learners:** Reflective practices give learners control over their educational journeys, increasing motivation and engagement.



●) Gibbs' reflective cycle

Gibbs' reflective cycle offers a **systematic method** for reflection, guiding individuals through six stages to explore experiences thoroughly:

1

Description:

What happened?

Lay out the situation in detail without judgment or analysis.

2

Feelings:

What were you thinking and feeling?

Acknowledge emotions and thoughts during the experience.

3

Evaluation:

What was good and bad about the experience?

Identify beneficial and challenging aspects.

4

Analysis:

What sense can you make of the situation?

Interpret the experience to understand why things happened the way they did.

5

Conclusion:

What else could you have done?

Consider what you've learned and how you might handle similar situations differently.

6

Action Plan:

If it happened again, what would you do?

Develop a plan for future action.

●) Reflection as a catalyst for community and collaboration

In non-formal settings, **learning often occurs in groups**. Reflection extends beyond individual growth to enhance group dynamics and understanding. **Sharing reflections fosters understanding and empathy among peers**, as articulating thoughts and listening to others enhance communication. Collective reflection creates a supportive environment where all voices are valued.

●) Incorporating reflection into practice

There are many different ways to incorporate reflection into activities with and for young people. You can find concrete exercises in the **"Resources" section**. Here are just some approaches to build understanding of how this can be done in practice.

- **Journaling:** Encourage learners to keep reflective journals. It's a personal space for honest expression. It allows them to track growth over time.

- **Group debriefs:** Facilitate discussions after activities. Shared insights enrich understanding. Debriefing could also be an opportunity for feedback between the peers.
- **Creative expression:** Use art, music, or drama as reflective mediums. Participants can for example be divided into small groups of 3-5 people and make a short play of a certain event and record it with phones. They will reflect during doing that as well as later when they will watch all the videos. Afterward, a structured discussion can follow to deepen the reflection.
- **Reflective questions:** Pose open-ended questions to stimulate thought. What surprised you about this experience? How does this relate to your life? Many more reflective questions can be found in the "Resources" section.

●) Embracing the Journey

Reflection is an **ongoing journey**, not a destination. It's integral to the process of non-formal education, where learning is flexible and driven by the learner's interests and experiences. By continuously reflecting, we keep the **flame of curiosity** and **growth** burning bright. Reflection transforms non-formal education from a series of activities into a meaningful learning adventure. It **empowers** individuals to:

- Gain deeper insights.
- Develop critical life skills.
- Connect with others on a profound level.
- Become agents of positive change.

4.6 EVALUATION

Evaluation in non-formal education is a process that helps educators and learners understand the **effectiveness of their efforts**, recognize **achievements**, and **continuously improve**. Evaluation means searching for the value (or the absence of it) in what happened. The value or the result we are searching for is strongly connected with our **objectives**. These, in turn, are linked to the needs, issues, and interests of participants. In other words, **if we don't know the objectives, it will be very hard to judge how successful our actions and intentions were**. It will be hard to know whether we fulfilled our purpose.

Evaluation can happen during the residential activities and after them. During the activities, we can include dedicated moments - for example, each evening - to check in with participants about topics that are important to us or to them. The same applies after the activity.

Evaluation can be done on both individual and group levels. There are many different ways and theories about it. For residential activities with and for young people, we would recommend to have a glimpse of it every evening (it can be together with reflection) and the main part after the activity. We recommend checking at least:

- What is the general atmosphere (how are the people feeling)?
- Are there any major concerns, complaints or any major successes during the day?

This will help assess the current situation in the group and also what are the main minuses and pluses of the day. We can keep track of that and, if the findings seem significant, adjust the program for the next day accordingly.

Final evaluation is slightly more comprehensive. It should be done in written form, so that we have data to analyse. We would recommend Google Forms or Mentimeter to gather the answers electronically. At minimum, the evaluation should include the following questions:

- **In terms of time, this experience was:**
 - ☐ Just the right length
 - ☐ Too long
 - ☐ Too short
 - ☐ Please add your comments, if any.
- **In the terms of activities, this experience:**
 - ☐ Met my personal expectations
 - ☐ Was fun and challenging for me and my friends
 - ☐ Brought me new information
 - ☐ Please add your comments, if any.
- **Please rate the following aspects relating to this experience:**
 - ☐ General atmosphere
 - ☐ Activities
 - ☐ Group
 - ☐ Group leaders
 - ☐ Please add your comments, if any.
- **Please think of the logistics and rate the following:**
 - ☐ Accommodation
 - ☐ Food
 - ☐ Field trips
 - ☐ Transfers
 - ☐ Please add your comments, if any.
- **Please rate the following elements relating to the group of participants:**
 - ☐ Atmosphere
 - ☐ Dynamics
 - ☐ Accessibility/easy to work with
 - ☐ Please add your comments, if any.
- **Please rate the following in relation to yourself:**
 - ☐ I was 100% involved in this experience
 - ☐ I gave my best during this experience
 - ☐ I made new friends during this experience
 - ☐ I gained knowledge during this experience
 - ☐ Please add your comments, if any.

- Please write down three words to describe this experience (word cloud)
- Please name 3 favourite activities
- Please name 2 activities you did not like.
- Please name 3 things you will remember in 1 year.
- Please name 2 things you learnt during this experience.
- Do you have any suggestions for the organisers, to make next experiences even better?
- Is there anything you would like to add before we finish?

After the evaluation, a designated person should be assigned to read and consolidate the collected data. It should be summarized in a **report presenting participants' views** on different aspects of the residential activity.

While this covers the participants' perspective, **the camp leaders should also conduct their own evaluation.** The organisational leaders should provide these questions. Once both perspectives have been obtained, the organisational leaders or responsible staff managing the residential activities within the organisations will have the data required to make an **informed decision** about what to keep and what to change for future activities. These decisions help to align the programme with the **organisation's vision and strategic objectives.**

4.7 OPPORTUNITIES DERIVED FROM NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Choosing to use non-formal education in activities with and for young people may involve more effort and initially seem complex. However, it holds so much potential, especially in the long term. This chapter explores **what can grow from the seeds of non-formal education**, and what different target groups can gain from this practice.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR
CAMP LEADERS

OPPORTUNITIES FOR
ORGANISATIONS

OPPORTUNITIES FOR
PARTICIPANTS

BENEFITS FOR
THE WIDER SOCIETY



● Opportunities for camp leaders

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Camp leaders play an important role in creating and implementing camp programs for young people. This responsibility offers significant opportunities for **personal growth**. By working closely with diverse groups, camp leaders develop empathy and emotional intelligence, gaining a deeper **understanding of individual perspectives** and **emotions**. The interpersonal engagement helps them to improve their ability to connect and work with individuals with different backgrounds.

The challenges faced in camp environments **foster adaptability and resilience**. Leaders often manage unexpected logistical hurdles and varied participant needs, all of which build **flexibility** and **problem-solving skills**. These experiences teach leaders to think on their feet and maintain composure under pressure.

Additionally, camp leadership enhances **self-confidence** and **leadership abilities**. Taking charge of programs, managing teams, and making decisions that directly impact young people strengthens leadership presence and decision-making skills. Moreover, many camps emphasize sustainability, allowing leaders to cultivate a sense of environmental stewardship by integrating eco-friendly practices into daily activities and fostering personal responsibility toward **conserving nature**.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In a professional capacity, working in camps provides a robust platform for acquiring valuable skills. Leaders improve their program and **project management abilities** by **planning logistics**, and **overseeing budgets** for large-scale events. This comprehensive approach to event coordination equips them with essential skills for managing complex projects in any professional setting.

Youth engagement is another critical area of growth. Leaders learn to design and implement youth-focused activities that are both educational and entertaining, enhancing their ability to create impactful programming. In addition, the role often involves crisis management, where leaders develop the **expertise to handle safety protocols**, manage emergencies, and address logistical complexities, sharpening their decision-making and **risk assessment capabilities**.

Camp leadership also promotes community collaboration. By working with schools, local businesses, and government agencies, leaders expand their professional networks and strengthen their **negotiation and communication skills**. This collaborative aspect is invaluable for building partnerships that enhance the quality and reach of the camps.

Strong communication skills are also cultivated through constant interaction with participants, parents, and team members, fostering both interpersonal and professional growth. Furthermore, leaders become more eco-conscious as they plan and execute sustainable activities, deepening their understanding of environmental conservation and sustainability.

A key area of competence is **cultural sensitivity and inclusion**. Camp leaders learn to create welcoming and inclusive environments that celebrate diversity, preparing them to work effectively in multicultural settings.

One of the most valuable skills gained through camp leadership is **problem-solving**. Leaders are challenged to identify issues and develop creative, practical solutions. For instance, limited budgets and resources often necessitate seeking diverse options for engaging participants in a meaningful yet cost-effective way.

By addressing these challenges, camp leaders enhance their ability to solve problems efficiently while gaining the skills needed to foster growth, connection, and learning in their programs.

● Opportunities for participants

Participating in residential activities provides young people with numerous benefits. These experiences promote **personal development** by challenging participants to **step out of their comfort zones**, fostering **self-reliance, responsibility, and resilience**. They also enhance social skills through interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds, improving communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution abilities. Additionally, these activities increase cultural awareness and **appreciation for diversity**, as participants are exposed to different cultures and traditions.

Furthermore, residential activities help build lifelong friendships, offer practical skills in areas like cooking and time management, and **boost confidence and self-esteem** through overcoming challenges. Structured learning experiences provide a wide range of competences. Moreover, these activities provide **fun and recreation**, offering a balanced environment for learning and enjoyment.

In conclusion, residential activities offer a **holistic learning experience** that fosters personal growth, cultural exchange, practical skills, and enjoyment, equipping participants with valuable skills for their future endeavours.

● Opportunities for organisations

Organisations implementing residential activities with and for young people play a role in promoting youth development, cultural exchange, and education. They can enhance the **organization's reputation and credibility**, attracting more participants and funding through positive feedback and success stories. Additionally, organizing these activities facilitates **networking** and the formation of **partnerships with other institutions**, schools, NGOs, and governmental bodies, fostering collaborative efforts.

Funding and support often follow successful programs, with grants and donations secured through demonstrated impact. Staff and volunteers also gain valuable experience, enhancing their professional development and expertise in youth work and non-formal education. Evaluations provide data for impact assessment, guiding future improvements.

Community engagement is strengthened as local communities participate and support youth development initiatives. Finally, these activities contribute to **positive social change** by shaping the next generation of leaders and culturally aware citizens.

In summary, organizing residential activities not only benefits the participants but also **strengthens the organization** by fulfilling its mission, building credibility, forming partnerships, securing funding, enhancing professional development, assessing impact, engaging the community, and driving positive social change.

●) **Benefits for the wider society**

Residential activities greatly benefit cities and communities involved by enhancing social cohesion, building resilience, and fostering community engagement. These activities bring together diverse groups, promoting interaction and collaboration that build strong relationships and foster inclusivity. Local residents often volunteer or mentor, strengthening community ties and creating a **sense of unity and shared purpose**. The shared experiences create lasting memories, promoting a sense of belonging and shared identity.

Resilience is built as participants develop adaptive skills such as problem-solving and stress management. Exposure to diverse perspectives fosters innovation, while the connections formed create a support network for times of need. Empowering young people **to take initiative and contribute positively to their communities** enhances overall resilience. Additionally, a culture of continuous learning equips the community with the skills needed to navigate uncertainties and thrive.

Community engagement is strengthened through volunteerism and mentorship, fostering a sense of unity and collective purpose. Cultural exchange and diversity are promoted, enriching the community's cultural fabric. Successful hosting enhances the area's reputation, attracting further interest and investment.

These multifaceted benefits underscore the positive impact of residential activities, creating more cohesive, resilient, and vibrant communities.



05

WONDERS

What makes a camp truly unforgettable? What turns a simple gathering of young people into a life-changing experience? The answer lies in wonder: those unexpected, surprising moments that leave us in awe, that make us smile, and that stay with us long after the camp is over.

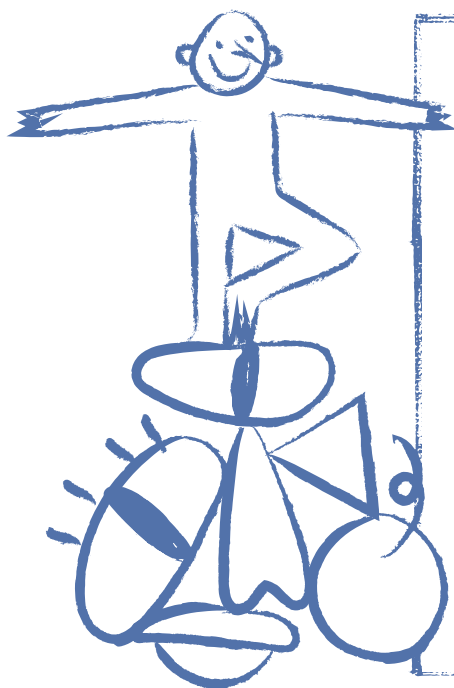
In this chapter, we'll explore the essence of wonder in youth camps: how to create it, how to recognize it, and how it transforms both participants and camp leaders. Wonder isn't just about big, extraordinary events. It's also found in small moments of connection, discovery, and joy. Whether it's a deep conversation under the stars, an unexpected breakthrough in a team activity, or a shared laugh that bonds a group together, these moments define the magic of camp.

5.1 RECIPE FOR CREATING WONDER

To help you bring this magic to life, this chapter includes **best practices** from our project partners. You'll find real examples of how different organizations have created impactful and **transformative camp experiences**. You'll also find testimonials and quotes from past participants and camp leaders, offering firsthand insight into what makes a camp truly special.

At its core, creating wonder is about intention and heart. A great camp experience doesn't just happen; it's built through creativity, respect, communication, and a **willingness to embrace the unexpected**. As you dive into this chapter, keep this simple recipe in mind:

RECIPE FOR CREATING WONDER



- 1 TABLESPOON OF CREATIVITY
- 1 TABLESPOON OF RESPECT
- 1 TABLESPOON OF TOLERANCE
- 1 TABLESPOON OF PLANS AND ORGANISATION
- 2 TABLESPOONS OF COMMUNICATION
- 2 TABLESPOONS OF HUMOR
- A FEW DROPS OF HEART AND PASSION (OR AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE)

Let's create wonders together. **Extraordinary moments** that everyone will keep in mind, that make us smile, and that turn a simple camp into an **unforgettable experience**.

5.2 IN A NUTSHELL

Camp leaders play a crucial role in the success of summer camps. As with any project involving young people, it comes with the responsibility **to create lasting memories, moments of wonder, and a truly enriching experience**. It comes with diverse practical information to understand, to process, and to suit the specific context of each camp.

The recommendations are just a base of recipes to use and to adapt according to the context, the target group, the place, the other leaders and collaborators, and other factors. **Remember that every camp is unique**, and the **context** in which you operate can greatly influence how you mix the ingredients.

For example, a camp set in a rural location may require a stronger focus on adventure and nature exploration, while an urban camp may place more emphasis on communication and collaboration.

Always **adapt** your activities, group management, and leadership to the specific characteristics of the group, location, and available resources. You'll find more detailed guidance in the **GOALS** chapter. Meanwhile, here is a collection of essential keywords that summarize **the main ingredients** needed to create a camp full of wonder:

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT COMMITMENT MOTIVATION DYNAMIC ADVENTURE MANAGEMENT
EMPATHY GROUP COHESION SURPRISE FIRST AID EXPLORATION FUN LEADERSHIP
RESPECT LEARNING CREATIVITY DECISION MAKING COLLABORATION PROCEDURES
RESOURCES HEALTH AND SAFETY TEAM TRUST, INVOLVEMENT TOOLS NATURE OUTDOOR
CHECK LIST LEGAL OBLIGATIONS PLANNING RULES TEAMBUILDING INCLUSION
CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TRUSTWORTHY ENVIRONMENT ACTIVE LISTENING RECOGNITION
EMERGENCY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT RELAXATION COMMUNICATION TIME MANAGEMENT
STRESS MANAGEMENT INCLUSION LIVING IN COMMUNITY ADAPTABILITY PREVENTION CHALLENGE

So how do you mix and balance these ingredients to create a truly unforgettable camp experience? Just like in cooking, it's about finding the right proportions, knowing when to add a little extra of one ingredient, and when to scale back on another. Here are a few tips:

- **Balance structure with flexibility:** Like a recipe that needs both preparation and room for improvisation, ensure your camp has a solid plan (safety, rules, schedules) while allowing space for spontaneous activities and flexibility.
- **Mix fun with learning:** Just as too much sugar makes a dish overly sweet, an excess of "fun" without any educational value can leave the experience shallow. Incorporate learning moments naturally into fun activities.
- **Blend group activities with individual engagement:** While it's important to have group cohesion, don't forget to offer moments of individual reflection and autonomy. This creates a well-rounded experience that addresses both collective and personal growth.
- **Add respect, empathy, and inclusion:** These ingredients should be present in every activity and interaction. A pinch of empathy can transform a simple game into a powerful learning moment. Ensure that every participant feels included, valued, and heard.
- **Season with adventure and relaxation:** Adventure sparks curiosity, while relaxation helps re-energize. Balance both to keep energy high without overwhelming participants.

Ultimately, **adaptability** is your greatest tool: like a skilled cook adjusting a recipe to the moment, a great camp leader knows how to read the group and the environment. Just as a great dish requires attention to detail, a successful camp requires you to keep your finger on the pulse of the group and the environment.

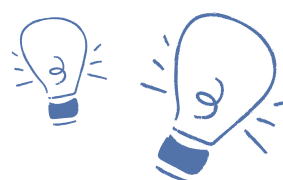
Mix these ingredients with care, tweak them as needed, and create a truly magical experience for everyone involved.

5.3 GOOD ADVICE

In youth camps, the journey is as important as the destination, and sometimes it's the simplest advice that has the biggest impact on creating a memorable experience. As camp leaders, we are often caught up in managing logistics, schedules, and responsibilities.

However, **the heart of the camp lies in the connections we make, the moments of joy, and the lessons learned along the way.** This section is dedicated to offering you a few key pieces of advice-simple, yet powerful tips that will help you not only survive the camp but thrive, creating an environment where everyone can experience the magic of wonder.

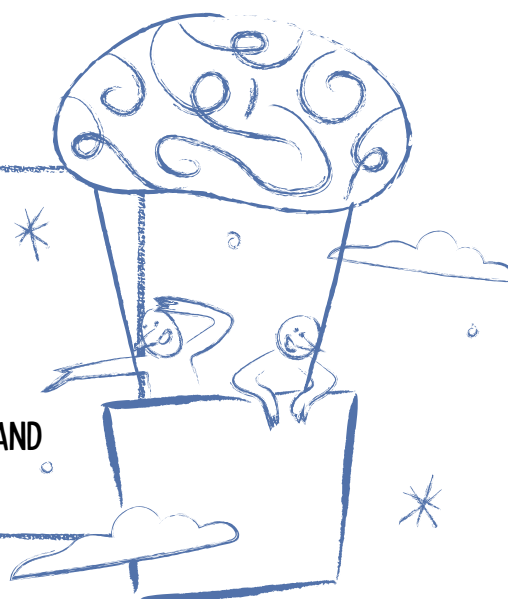
	POWERFUL TIPS
Keep things simple!	In the hustle and bustle of camp life, it's easy to get caught up in trying to create elaborate plans or complicated activities. However, simplicity is often the key to success. It's not about having the most complex program, it's about having the most meaningful interactions. Keep your plans clear and focused on what truly matters: connection, learning, and fun. Don't overwhelm yourself with unnecessary details. Sometimes the simplest activities, like a quiet walk in nature, a group reflection session, or a casual game, can be the most impactful moments of camp. Keep things easy to follow and adaptable, and make sure there's space for the unexpected to unfold.
Be in contact with yourself and the young people around you	One of the most important things you can do as a leader is to stay connected - both with yourself and with the participants. It's essential to maintain your own well-being and to check in with how you're feeling physically and mentally. Burnout is real, so taking moments to recharge is critical. At the same time, be in regular contact with the young people in your group. Ask them how they're doing, listen actively, and create an open space for them to express themselves. Whether it's through informal conversations, structured activities, or simply sharing a meal together, staying connected with your participants builds trust and a sense of community.



Don't rush	Camp is about more than just getting through the schedule - it's about savoring the moments along the way. In a world that's often moving too fast, it's important to slow down and be present. Take the time to appreciate the small moments, whether it's the beauty of nature, a quiet conversation, or a shared laugh. Avoid rushing through the day. Encourage reflection and allow space for participants to process their experiences. By taking your time, you allow for personal growth and deeper connections to emerge, both for yourself and for the young people around you.
Have fun!	Perhaps the most important piece of advice is to have fun. The energy and enthusiasm you bring to camp sets the tone for the entire group. When you are enjoying yourself, it's contagious, and everyone around you will feel that positive energy. Even when things don't go as planned (and they won't), the key is to embrace the moments, laugh off the mistakes, and keep the atmosphere light and enjoyable. Encourage creativity, celebrate the unexpected, and don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone. Remember: the purpose of camp is to have fun, learn, and create memories - and that starts with you as the leader.
In conclusion	The best advice for creating a truly remarkable youth camp experience is grounded in simplicity, presence, and joy. Keep things straightforward, take care of yourself and your participants, and focus on building an environment that fosters creativity, collaboration, and personal growth. By following these simple yet powerful tips, you'll create a space where wonder can flourish, and where participants will leave with memories that last a lifetime.

GOOD ADVICE

- HAVE FUN!
- DON'T RUSH!
- ENJOY AND BE PRESENT
- KEEP THINGS SIMPLE!
- BE IN CONTACT WITH YOURSELF AND THE YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND YOU



5.4 TESTIMONIALS/QUOTES

This section brings together **voices from the field** - honest, heartfelt reflections from camp leaders and participants. These testimonials show the real impact of summer camps: moments of connection, personal growth, cultural discovery, and pure joy. **Each story is a small piece of the bigger picture of what makes these experiences unforgettable.**

● Camp Leaders

Natalja
(Germany)

"My best memory [...] It was such a good day - the kids were dancing and jumping in the fountain on the street."

Sarah
(Germany)

"My best memory [...] Their faces lit up with joy and pride when they succeeded, and the moment was filled with so much happiness."

"It was a pure moment of innocence and joy, and it reminded me of the impact we can have on children's confidence."

"This experience showed me how new activities can help children develop new skills and boost their self-esteem."

"My most cherished moment was when I helped create a safe space for them to be themselves."

"This challenge helped me become more adaptable and creative in finding ways to engage everyone. It taught me patience and how to communicate more effectively with kids, making sure that each child felt included and had fun."

Milica
(Germany)

"This camp was unique because of my personal growth. It strengthened my teamwork skills and helped me form unforgettable connections with amazing people."

Laura
(Romania)

"I think I gained more confidence and self-awareness."

Elodie
(Italy)

"My challenge was not speaking Italian well. It pushed me to express myself through gestures, drawings, and a lot of patience."

Nuria
(Italy)

"My best memory was the creative lab, where they made superhero capes and gave each other superhero names."

Joshua
(Italy)

"The kids' honesty made this experience truly unique."



● Participants

**Matej and
Eva,**
(Slovenia)

"One thing that surprised me was visiting the salt mines in Romania. I licked the wall — and it was extremely salty!"

"There was a lot of different food. It gave us a real insight into the culture of the country."

"We discovered that we could actually speak and communicate in English. That was a big validation for us."

"When we went up the mountain, we rode in big cars. The nature was amazing!"

Ioana
(Romania)

"It's so important to have a good connection with your group even before leaving home. In a new country, they're your support system — the ones you turn to when you feel tired or need someone to count on."

"I learned more about my fellow Europeans. We communicated without any problems, saw the world at a young age, and had fun doing it. For me, the experience itself is the real achievement."

Eliza
(Romania)

"The friendships we make during these youth exchanges — and the cultural differences or even similarities — are what make the experience truly unique."

"I never get tired of these experiences because you meet people from all over Europe, visit new places, and try food from different cultures."

Anonymous
(Slovenia)

"I've learned that everyone is unique and that we should focus on people's positive aspects, not just on the ones we don't like."

"I'd recommend this experience to a friend — because you really step out of your comfort zone and learn so much."

Alessia
(Italy)

"I learned that I'm brave and creative."

Giuseppe
(Italy)

"I discovered that I enjoy helping others, and that I can be a leader in my group."

Sofia
(Italy)

"The wonder for me was realizing how much fun we could have - without phones!"

Appendix 1

YOUTHPASS FOR CAMP LEADERS AND YOUTH WORKERS

Youthpass is an important tool for recognizing and validating the non-formal learning that youth workers, including camp leaders, gain through their work with young people. It provides a framework to assess the skills and competencies developed in youth work settings, especially in activities such as camp leadership. By completing a Youthpass, camp leaders can reflect on their personal and professional growth, which is essential for future career development.

WHAT IS YOUTHPASS AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Youthpass is a **certificate issued to participants in Erasmus+ and other European youth projects**. It documents the competencies acquired through non-formal learning activities. For camp leaders, the mechanics behind it help recognize the valuable skills gained while managing, organizing, and leading camps.

The process of obtaining a Youthpass includes **reflection and self-assessment**. Participants assess the skills and competencies they have developed throughout their camp experience, guided by a framework provided in the Youthpass template. This reflection allows participants to recognize their achievements and areas for further growth.

For camp leaders, this means reflecting on the skills developed while organizing, leading, and managing camp activities, such as leadership, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. By evaluating how these competencies were applied in a practical setting, youth workers and camp leaders can gain insight into their **personal and professional development**.

HOW YOUTHPASS IS RELEVANT TO CAMP LEADERS

- **Recognition of non-formal learning:** Camp leadership involves a wide range of non-formal learning experiences often overlooked by traditional education systems. Youthpass helps validate these skills, ensuring that camp leaders receive formal acknowledgment for their development in areas such as communication, teamwork, and leadership.
- **Career development:** Having a Youthpass allows camp leaders to demonstrate their professional development. This certification can strengthen their CVs and portfolios, proving to future employers or training providers that they have developed key skills that are transferable to various professional settings.
- **Competence framework:** Youthpass uses a structured competence model, which identifies areas such as leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork. For camp leaders, this framework provides a clear way to assess competencies they've developed in this context. It helps them reflect on their growth and sets a path for further professional development.

YOUTHPASS COMPETENCE AREAS FOR CAMP LEADERS

- **Leadership and decision-making:** Camp leaders take charge of managing activities, guiding participants, and making decisions under pressure. Youthpass recognizes their leadership in organizing events, delegating tasks, and handling crises, all while motivating participants to engage in activities.
- **Communication:** Effective communication is essential for camp leaders. Whether giving instructions, providing feedback, facilitating conversations or managing group dynamics, these tasks require strong communication skills, which Youthpass helps to document.
- **Teamwork and collaboration:** A camp leader must work closely with other staff members to ensure smooth operations. The ability to collaborate with diverse individuals, coordinate tasks, and foster teamwork is critical. Youthpass highlights these competencies, ensuring camp leaders are recognized for their contributions to a collaborative environment.
- **Conflict resolution:** During a camp, conflicts between participants or staff are inevitable. A good camp leader must be able to handle disputes effectively, ensuring that the group remains cohesive and that individual issues are addressed respectfully. Youthpass acknowledges this skill, recognizing the leader's ability to mediate and create a harmonious environment.
- **Time management and organization:** Camp leaders are responsible for organizing schedules, planning activities, and ensuring that everything runs smoothly. Youthpass certifies their competence in time management and organization, documenting their ability to balance multiple tasks, plan ahead, and adapt to unexpected situations.

YOUTHPASS AND THE ROLE OF CAMP LEADER

For camp leaders, Youthpass offers an opportunity to recognize the competencies gained in a youth work setting. The process of planning, executing, and managing camp activities requires a wide range of skills, from leadership to conflict resolution, and from communication to problem-solving. **Youthpass helps to formalize these skills**, enabling camp leaders to reflect on their personal development.

For example, when a camp leader handles a group of participants, resolves issues related to behavior, organizes group activities, or manages a team of assistants, they are not only providing a fun and safe environment for participants but also developing **essential skills** that are **recognized in the Youthpass framework**.

The competencies developed by camp leaders through their daily tasks-such as motivating participants, managing schedules, adapting to changing circumstances, and leading team discussions-are all documented in the Youthpass. This provides **a clear and structured overview of their learning journey**, enhancing their employability in the youth work sector and other fields that value leadership, communication and organisational skills.

Appendix 2

COMPETENCE MODEL FOR INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK

A competence model for international youth work outlines the key skills and knowledge needed to work effectively with young people from diverse backgrounds, especially in cross-cultural settings. Although camp leaders may not always be formally recognized as youth workers, your role in facilitating impactful learning experiences closely aligns with the competencies highlighted in this model. By engaging with this framework, you can better understand and develop essential skills such as communication, cultural awareness, leadership, and problem-solving.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Effective communication is at the heart of youth work. As a camp leader, you must be able to communicate clearly and meaningfully with young people, your colleagues, and other stakeholders. This includes both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as active listening. In international settings, where language barriers may exist, the ability to communicate beyond linguistic differences is especially important.

Tip for camp leaders: Focus on clarity in your instructions and be mindful of language differences. Use visual aids, gestures, and other creative methods to bridge communication gaps.

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY

Working internationally requires an understanding of and respect for cultural differences. Camp leaders should be flexible and adaptable, adjusting their approach to different cultural contexts and recognizing the value of diversity.

Tip for camp leaders: Embrace cultural diversity by incorporating different cultural perspectives into activities, encouraging inclusivity, and promoting mutual respect among participants.

LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK

As a camp leader, you are responsible for guiding groups, organizing activities, and ensuring tasks are completed effectively. At the same time, leadership is not just about directing others. It is also about collaboration. Strong teamwork among camp leaders and with young people is essential for creating a successful and harmonious camp environment.

Tip for camp leaders: Strike a balance between leadership and collaboration. Empower young people by encouraging them to take responsibility and actively engage in group tasks.

PROBLEM-SOLVING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Challenges and conflicts are inevitable when working with diverse groups. The ability to think critically, stay calm under pressure, and find fair solutions is crucial for resolving disputes and ensuring a positive group dynamic

Tip for camp leaders: Remain calm in difficult situations, listen to all perspectives, and work toward solutions that respect all viewpoints. Approach conflict as an opportunity for growth and learning.

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

Planning and organization are essential to ensure smooth camp operations. As a camp leader, you will need to manage schedules, coordinate activities, and adapt plans as necessary. Effective time management and the ability to adjust plans when unexpected changes occur are crucial.

Tip for camp leaders: Plan in advance, but be ready to adapt. Always have contingency plans in place, such as backup activities or alternative approaches, to maintain the flow of the camp.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Being approachable, empathetic, and able to build trust is essential when working with young people. You need to create an environment where participants feel supported, heard, and valued.

Tip for camp leaders: Show a genuine interest in the well-being of all participants. Foster open, respectful communication and create a safe space for everyone to share their thoughts and feelings.

COMMITMENT TO PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Youth workers, including camp leaders, should constantly strive for personal and professional growth. This involves reflecting on your own practices, seeking feedback, and being open to new methods and approaches.

Tip for camp leaders: Regularly assess your own strengths and areas for improvement and actively seek feedback from your team and participants.

Appendix 3

MAPPING THE NEEDS FOR YOUTH CAMPS

To create this toolkit, the GROW project first listened to the people who know youth camps best. We wanted to understand what makes a camp safe, fun, and meaningful for everyone involved. This section summarizes the findings of the needs analysis conducted, focusing on the perspectives of three key groups: youth participants, camp staff, and organizational leaders.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

We collected 205 responses from five countries (Germany, Slovenia, Romania, Italy, and Ireland). We asked three main groups:

- **Youth Participants:** 116 young people responded, with 68.1% being female and 48.3% aged between 15 and 18 years. A significant portion (55.2%) came from rural areas.
- **Camp Staff:** 74 people who work in youth camps responded. Most respondents were women (47), aged between 30 and 45 years old, with 42% having over five years of experience managing residential youth activities.
- **Organisational Leaders:** 15 people who run or manage camps responded. 66.7% were women, and 60% had more than five years of experience managing youth camps. Some of the biggest challenges they identified were budgeting (73.3%), finding enough staff (46.7%), and organizing everything smoothly (40%).

HOW WAS THE INFORMATION COLLECTED?

Project teams from different countries worked together to create simple surveys in different languages. Everyone could answer anonymously and freely. Here's how it worked: **a short survey** for organisations to learn how many camps they run and what problems they face; **a full questionnaire** with questions about safety, accommodation, activities, personal growth, and more.

Surveys were shared online in different countries, so we could hear from lots of people with different backgrounds. All the answers were analysed and brought together in **one final report**. This report was translated into all project languages and it helped shape the toolkit you're reading now!

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

The survey of **116 young participants** revealed key insights into their preferences for youth camp experiences:

- **Location preferences:** A clear preference for natural environments was observed, with 42.2% of participants favouring the sea, followed by lakes (23.3%) and mountains (20.7%).
- **Accommodation and comfort:** The majority (57.8%) preferred staying in cottages, while 29.3% favoured shared dormitories. Fewer respondents opted for tents or individual rooms, indicating a preference for accommodation that balances comfort, sociability, functionality, and safety.

- **Favourite activities:** Sports such as volleyball (66 mentions), hiking (62), and swimming (59) were highly popular. Artistic activities like photography (85) and painting (64) also received strong support, along with educational activities like first aid (57), science (42), and robotics (31). Recreational activities, including bonfires (57) and movie nights (51), were also widely requested.
- **Personal Development and Team Building:** Personal growth activities were highly valued, with 57.8% indicating an interest in leadership and 69.9% in team-building activities. Outdoor time was important for 72.5%, and 87.1% felt that making new friendships was crucial. Inclusivity and diversity were essential, with 74.1% expressing a desire for inclusive activities.
- **Safety and Well-being:** Safety was a priority for 75% of participants, followed by creating positive memories (49.1%) and developing new skills (15.5%). Many participants preferred traditional (29 mentions) and international (25 mentions) dishes, while 31.9% favoured buffet-style meals. Access to technology was important for 68.1% of respondents.

STAFF PERSPECTIVE

The survey of **74 staff members** from Slovenia, Serbia, Germany, Romania, Italy, and Ireland provided valuable insights into effective camp management:

- **Core activities:** Staff identified activities that fostered socialisation, cooperation, and physical development as the most effective. Popular sports included hiking (43 mentions), football (35), and swimming (29). Artistic activities like painting (46), photography (43), and dance (41) were also well-received. Educational activities such as first aid (45) and nature survival (34) were favoured, as were recreational activities like bonfires (55) and group games (40).
- **Personal Development and Inclusivity:** Staff highlighted the importance of leadership (74.3%) and team-building (97.3%) activities, as well as inclusivity and diversity (98.6%). Shared experiences, like bonfires, were seen as excellent for building a united community.
- **Connection with nature:** A remarkable 94.4% of staff deemed a connection with nature essential. Outdoor educational activities, such as hiking and camping, were regarded as vital for learning, and necessary equipment included camping gear, hiking supplies, and outdoor safety tools.
- **Food and accommodation:** Staff preferred traditional meals (27 mentions) and camping food (18), with a focus on variety and vegetarian/vegan options. Ideal accommodation should be comfortable and functional, with 64.8% favouring comfortable beds and proper sanitation. Safety was a top concern, with 96% of staff stressing the importance of well-defined medical procedures and qualified personnel.
- **Staff competencies:** Key staff competencies included empathy, communication, patience, and experience. However, there was room for improvement in self-efficacy, active listening, and flexibility.

ORGANISATIONAL LEADERS' PERSPECTIVE

The survey of **15 organisational leaders** from Slovenia, Germany, and Romania provided insights into the practical challenges of managing youth camps and the factors that contribute to their success:

- **Key challenges:** Budget management (73.3%), staff management (46.7%), and logistics (40%) were the most prominent challenges. Volunteer turnover, shift organisation, transport issues, and costs were also significant. There was a clear need for continuous volunteer training.
- **Key success factors:** Leaders identified event size, role clarity, outsourcing certain logistical functions, and offering personal growth opportunities for youth as essential for success. Ensuring that young people have access to experiences they might not otherwise have was also crucial.
- **Staff selection and Training:** Criteria for staff selection included skills, a positive attitude, experience with youth, and adequate preparation. Important competencies for staff included activity design, technology use, challenge management, teamwork, empathy, and active listening.
- **Sustainability and Community Impact:** Leaders emphasised the importance of environmental sustainability, with practices like waste management and using recyclable materials. Collaboration with local schools, authorities, and businesses, along with community awareness through events, was key.
- **Safety and Emergency Management:** Leaders ensured that comprehensive safety procedures were in place, with qualified personnel, health and safety training, and first-aid kits.
- **Suggested improvements:** Leaders suggested involving professionals such as doctors, psychologists, and career advisors, increasing budgets for better facilities and materials, and strengthening teams for more effective camp management.

CREDITS

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