

HUMAN RIGHT DIVERSITY CAMP

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “People hate each other because people fear each...People fear each other because people don’t know each otherPeople don’t know each other because people are often separated from each other.”

This is certainly becoming the case more and more in Montgomery County as we have grown in population and diversity. The county is now home to residents from some 164 different nations from around the world. Nearly 100 different languages are being spoken in our schools. We have indeed become an international county. And yet some fear in the midst of such change and the growing diversity many of us are retreating back to more homogenous surroundings and are avoiding becoming a part of the new Montgomery County. This movement is being driven by fear and the lack of knowledge of one another. While less pervasive in our schools than in the general population there are still pockets of isolation and lack of inclusion that our students do face. There is also a resurgence of hate groups who are specifically targeting our youth in their recruitment effort. We feel we can begin to address some of these issues through this unique human relations experience.

ACTIVITIES: Recreational activities, which are free, include volleyball, basketball, soccer, hiking and the traditional camp fire. The recreational activities provide useful breaks from the more thought-provoking sessions. Efforts are made to accommodate students with physical and medical disabilities.

STAFFING: OHR Staff, OHR Commissioners and COHV members will serve as team leaders and trainers. Former middle school attendees and other authorized adults may serve as assistant team leaders.

FUNDING: The present expenditures support 40 students for the weekend, (Friday mid morning-Sunday afternoon) including 7 meals and all activities during the camp session.

PURPOSE: Hate is fueled by fear and ignorance. The aim of the camp is to alleviate that fear through interaction and education. The program is designed to bring together students from diverse racial, cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds for a shared weekend experience in interracial and intercultural understanding, exposure to diversity concepts and other cultural competencies.

OBJECTIVE: Our overall objective is to promote diversity and to combat all forms of discrimination that act as social and cultural barriers to the students. We want the students to become active and positive by implementing diversity education in their schools and communities. The new impressions, perceptions and attitudes gained through the Camp experience can be of lasting value in reducing prejudice and hate incidents.

BACKGROUND: An award-winning camp fully endorsed by the community was run by the Office of Human Rights until 1995, when the Community Relations unit was challenged with extreme budget cuts. The program and all related documents were transferred to the Department of Recreation, who was to take over the camp. Unfortunately, the camp was dropped and the documents appear to have been lost. The Camp was re-instituted in October of 2004 and to date some 600 Montgomery County youth have attended the camp and benefited from the experience.

PARTICIPANTS: 40 elementary school 5th grade students.

LOCATION: The site of the camp is the YMCA Camp Letts in Edgewater, Md. The camp facility consists of separate cabins for males and females, and a lodge for group sessions and meals.

CURRICULUM: The camp is divided into 6 training sessions for 3-days and 2 nights.

***Session 1:** All about me, understanding differences and definition of diversity is facilitated by the OHR Community Outreach division and MCPS Staff.

***Session 2:** Team Challenge is facilitated by the YMCA Camp Letts

***Session 3:** Equal Rights Application is facilitated by OHR EEO Office

***Session 4:** Introduction to civic responsibility...the importance of voting by Bd. Of Elections

***Session 5:** Fair Housing Poster is facilitated by the OHR Fair Housing division and the NFHA

***Session 6:** Motivator speaker talks about diversity and bullying Prevention

***Session 7:** This session is rotated between the U. S. Parks Service and the Human Rights Commission. The session is keeping with the purpose of the camp (civil rights movement, diversity, tolerance and understanding).