

Jussi Herlin: Experiences from KONE Global Youth Camp



KONE Corporation has arranged summer camps for the children of its employees since 1948. I have personally been involved with the youth camp for 17 years; first as a camper, then as staff member, and for the last seven years as the camp's director. The teenagers taking part are 14 to 17 years old and come from all around the world – this year we had 40 nationalities present at camp.

The campers spend a weekend in host families doing everyday things after which we have a week-long program for them. We spend one day in Helsinki orienteering and completing assignments that let the campers see sights and interact with the locals. Most of the week, however, is spent in a campsite where we do sports, arts and crafts, waterfront activities and other fun activities. What sets KONE Camp apart is our program. It involves a global, contemporary theme which we attempt to tackle through emotionally engaging team activities.

In 2014, [we addressed the question of inequality](#) by assigning the campers into three distinct social classes – a few were rich, some were middle class and the majority was poor – and having them complete simple, “essential” tasks in this context. For example, we had the teams build themselves a shelter (an essential need for meaningful life) but made the supplies so expensive and the timetable so restrictive that success was practically impossible for the poor – while the rich could simply buy a pre-built shelter. All the activities reflected and emphasized this imbalance in one way or another.

After a morning of activities, we lined the campers up for lunch, but once again gave the rich campers a three-course meal with butlers while the poor masses got rice and water and were forced to sit outside. When the campers started to get angry and voiced their frustrations about the unfairness of it all, we initiated a conversation about their emotional response and how the people whose whole lives are like this might feel. The program was well received and made the campers think about their own life and privileges.

Through a variety of programs (we have also addressed e.g. disabilities, cultural differences and global warming) the camp promotes empathy, communication and teamwork skills as well as fostering critical thinking. These are skills we consider essential for a better world. We do not preach right answers but attempt to evoke thoughts and feelings from the campers themselves.