

Take your teenagers away and reap the benefits - Jodie McNeill

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Your youth group is too small to go away on camp? Think again. Camps are one of the most powerful tools in youth ministry. A weekend away is equivalent to half a year of ministry... in both contact and impact. Camps achieve many great purposes. They build community, can help introduce change, or even assist in helping teenagers 'graduate' to the next age youth group.

One of the greatest benefits of camps is their ability to provide a powerful tool for mission to outsiders. As the Christian students are nurtured by the word of God and are enriched by the fellowship of the community, the non-Christians friends they have invited will witness the powerful impact of the gospel in their lives.



Unfortunately, these 'mountaintop experiences' are often considered to be out of the reach of small youth groups. Yet this doesn't need to be the case. Here are three tips to help your small group enjoy the camping experience.

case study - Blakehurst

Second year Ministry Training Strategy apprentice, Joel Moroney can't deny that his youth group is small. Yet the youth leader at St Martin's, Blakehurst has seen the group grow from zero to eight in just one year.

A youth group camp in term three last year helped build relationships within the diverse group of Christian teenagers. Jodie McNeill helped run the camp and give the talks.

"It gave us time to bond and develop a group identity," Joel says. "We rented out a house in Katoomba. We self-catered and had the kids do the cooking, which kept costs down. It also gave them the experience of looking after themselves."

Firstly, rent a holiday house or select a small campsite. Youthworks have campsites for as few as 7 people. By the time you've asked houseparents and another leader, you only need a handful of teenagers to fill the campsite!

Secondly, bring your group along to Kyckstart each April. This annual Katoomba Christian Convention attracts around four thousand teenagers, many of whom are from small churches. The sight of thousands of other teenage Christians is a great boost to many youth groups. What's more, because this year's conference is now targeted at the whole of high school (not just years 10 to 12) you can now bring your whole group along.

Thirdly, encourage individual students in your group to attend a pre-organised holiday camp, such as those run by Youthworks, Crusaders, or Scripture Union. If your small group has only one or two students in year 10 to 12, then these camps can provide great support and relationships, whilst still enabling them to enjoy and remain within their home church. However, let me add two more pieces of advice.

Firstly, make sure you invite mature and responsible houseparents. Not only will they be a great support, they will also help you comply with child protection guidelines, such as the new 'Faithfulness in Service' code. Second, resist the temptation to organise a combined camp with a larger youth group from another parish. Otherwise you might find that the teenagers from your group enjoy the energy and new relationships so much that they join the other church!

Camps truly are a slice of heaven. Don't miss out on this great opportunity for nurture and mission of teenagers!

Links:

<http://www.youthworks.net>

<http://www.kyck.kcc.org.au>

<http://www.crusaders.edu.au>

<http://www.su.org.au>

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Photo courtesy Michael Jastremski ©

Christian Camping International Australia has a membership of over **210 Conference Centres and Camps** across the Country (*including Youthworks, KCC, Crusaders and SU sites*). They cater for small to large groups in all styles of accommodation.

Find out more about **potential sites** by visiting
<http://www.cciaus.org.au/> >Directory
or using CCI Australia's new web based service Venue Finder