

Practical Steps to Starting a Remarkable Music Program for Your Camp

Case Study: Liberty Lake Day Camp

Andy Pritikin is the owner and director of LLDC, he also happens to be a musician. He made an intentional decision that he wanted to have music be a part of his camp's programming, but even more importantly, it has become part of his camp's culture.

Liberty Lake Day Camp is located in suburban Southern New Jersey. It averages over one thousand campers enrolled each summer. The programming is extensive, and they are able to offer over 60 activities for their campers to choose from as part of their Freedom of Choice Program.

The music activity choices include: Group Guitar Instruction, Group Drum Set Instruction, Group Keyboard Instruction, Rock Band, Song Writing, Glee Club, Radio/ DJ Booth, American Idol and Rap.

The model of having free choice electives has been successful as a way to incorporate music activities into the camp programming. 70% of the campers that sign up for the music activities have never played an instrument or sung before. Over 85% of the campers who sign up for music electives have continued to sign up for a music elective the following summer, and thus continue their involvement with music in camp.

Liberty Lake has done three crucial things to encourage music in camp.

1. Andy wrote a camp theme song, which has become a hit with campers and staff.

Watch the video on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/xX-f72brSJc>

The spirit that this song has created at camp is one of unity, fun, and a feeling of joy and gratitude. It sets the tone for what Liberty Lake is all about. And it has increased the camper enrollment by 15%. Many campers want to learn an instrument just so they can be able to play the Liberty Lake Song.

2. Liberty Lake creates performance opportunities for their campers.

Every Friday during the summer, they cut camp short and have a 45-minute concert in which campers and staff get in front of 600-1000 people to friends to perform. Karate choppers, Yo-Yo'ers, and LARPer's, are mixed in with Dancers, the Glee Club, Rock Band, Songwriting, etc. And of course, it culminates with a "bring the house down" version of the Liberty Lake Song, in which kids whose last day it is, get to rock out on the stage with the counselor/camper all-star band. Liberty Lake was inspired to do this after Andy visited Banner Day Camp, located outside of Chicago. Banner Day Camp built a beautiful outdoor amphitheater on the side of the lake that seats 1000, with giant speakers hanging from the trees, a sound booth, and a 30x30 stage, pre-wired with mic cables, outlets, and all of the necessary electronics.

Additionally, at the end of the summer, Liberty Lake has a music and art festival called Camp-a-Palooza. In addition to bringing in professional and local bands to perform, they feature the camp Rock Band, the Glee Club, and camper Rappers and DJ's. The other campers love

seeing their peers and bunkmates perform, and this builds enthusiasm and incentive for these campers to sign up the following summer for music electives.

3. Andy hires extremely talented and capable staff to teach the music electives. Many of his counselors are professional musicians that work at camp in the summer. And because it is a day camp, musicians are able to work at camp, and still maintain connected to their other musical and professional commitments.

An Interview with Andy Pritikin, Owner and Director of Liberty Lake

How many years have you been offering music activities at LLDC?

Since Day 1, we have been the "Camp of Rock". We used to do more "band instruments" - like flute, trumpet, etc., but with our lack of indoor space, we found that the Rock instruments simply translate better, especially considering the venue of the Friday performances.

What would you say is the greatest benefit of having the music program?

To be able to get kids on stage, performing for each other before they are old enough to be too self-conscious about it. The older you get, the more worried you are about "messing up", and looking cool in front of your friends. And once you get on stage and hear the applause- it's addictive. You want to get back there. It's amazing to me when I see an 8 year old rapper get up in front of 1000 people and rap about chicken nuggets for lunch.

What is percentage of campers participate in the music program?

20-30%, as music permeates the camp everywhere. The Radio DJ elective is extremely popular, but not necessarily with kids who play instruments and sing- It's a great place for music appreciators to share what's on their iPods. Metalheads, Rappers, Black kids, Chinese kids- all listening to each other's unique music and getting into it- it's totally magical for me to watch.

How has having music in camp affected camper enrollment and retention?

The kids just can't get that damn Liberty Lake Song out of their head- it's like a virus... Seriously though, MUSIC IS A HUGE PART OF CAMP. Luckily at Liberty Lake, the director is able to facilitate making it happen. For other directors, they should spend the money to have a REAL music staff- Kids love singing. Kids love banging things. Kids love music. Unfortunately, many adults see camp songs as corny- but they don't have to be.

What is the process that you go through when hiring a staff member to teach music?

It's one of the questions we ask in the initial application- Are you a musician, what instrument do you play, do you sing? If you want to create an army of musicians, you need to be intentional about it. Also, advertise through the local music stores, Craig's list, and other non-traditional ways.

What advice could you give to a camp (day or resident) that wants to start a music program?

Hire cool, talented music people. Give kids a chance to perform regularly- make it a NORM at your camp. Celebrate it- make the kids who do it ROCK STARS. Most camps do it already- during Color War! Why not all the time?