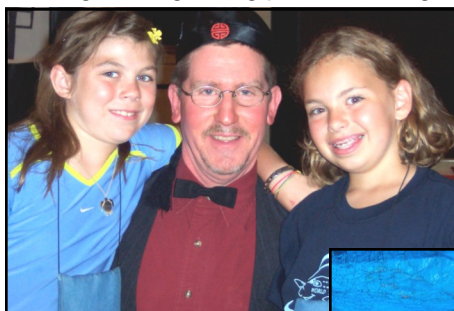


Kids Missions Camp Transformational Experiences Instill God's Heart for the World

Kids Missions Camp started nine years ago from Doug Hazen's dream to help raise up missionaries for the 2020s and 2030s. The Northwest Church Connections director for the mission agency WorldVenture, Doug had a growing passion to develop missional kids. He was burdened by the research showing that many missionaries report they were called by God before the age of 12, yet few 21st century children get much, if any, exposure to missionaries and the needs of the world. For generations, summer camp has been a transformational event in children's spiritual lives. Why not use a camping experience to instill missions in a fun way?



Camp Director Doug Hazen with campers at the banquet focused on that year's theme—China.

Designed to be intensely interactive, Kids Missions Camp runs Sunday through Thursday afternoon and is open to children in 4th to 8th grades. The program is developed by Doug and a host of talented volunteers in cooperation with the Camp Jonah staff where the camp is held in Trout Lake, WA. They all share a passion for missions and for communicating with kids.

The goal is to expose campers to missions in such a powerful way that they will understand and respond to God's heart for people. The usual camp activities—games, water sports, hikes, etc.—are included, but from the time they arrive at camp, children are experiencing missions. They learn about other cultures, eat some of their food, are introduced to other religions, and often most important, meet live missionaries and nationals.

Each year the program begins with an extensive entry process, simulating all that missionaries go through entering a

new country. Campers must have a "passport" with a stamped "visa." Their picture is taken, and they go through "immigration and customs." They are instructed to stand in long lines that go nowhere, and the staff sometimes hides their luggage and explains that it has been stolen.

An Annual Special Feature

Each year's program is built around a different focus. One year it was refugees. The first night the kids were told that as a special treat, they would be allowed to sleep in their clothes. At 5:00 the next morning, volunteer firemen set off several smoke alarms and smoke bombs. Counselors informed the campers that they had to leave immediately and could take only their sleeping bags.



Campers had fun living in the refugee quarters they built.

For the next 30 hours, everyone became a refugee. The staff previously had collected a pile of scrap wood and several tarps. Each cabin of campers scrounged for materials and built a tem-

porary shelter. Port-a-potties replaced bathrooms. Staff hung bananas on tree limbs and left peanuts and bottles of water on the ground so that the "refugees" could discover some of their own food. Each group was challenged to develop community—to work together to help everyone "survive." When they left their make-shift "homes" unguarded, staff raided and stole things to help campers understand how vulnerable refugees are. A missionary pilot flew into camp and brought a representative from an aid agency. Both of these missionaries explained how their organizations serve refugees.

The two-days-and-one-night experience of being refugees provided campers with powerful learning experiences they will never forget. Their compassion for displaced people grew exponentially. During the camp children made comments like: "I never knew who a refugee was." "I plan to pray for refugees and get my church praying for them."

♦Kids Missions Camp♦

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Two sisters went home determined to act on behalf of the homeless in their community. They started a ministry to the panhandlers at freeway ramps. Called "H2O," or "Hope to Others," the ministry the girls launched packs white paper sacks with basic hygiene items, nonperishable food, a free meal ticket at the gospel mission, and a tract. The sacks are distributed to needy people in their area.

Another theme revolved around the persecuted church. The cabins formed house churches meeting in secret locations throughout the camp. A missionary with experience in developing cell churches around the world helped the children understand what is essential to be a church. Kids learned church was not a big facility or elaborate programs.

The next morning, the campers were "arrested" and taken to a "North Korean concentration camp" where they were required to march around and do manual tasks. Eventually the staff helped them "escape to South Korea" by crawling 50 yards through a 3'x3' tunnel under the building.

Another unforgettable learning experience came when the campers took a trip to a nearby cave. Each child had a flashlight. At a gathering point deep in the cave, they were instructed to turn off their lights and experience complete darkness. Doug challenged them to consider what it would be like to live in total spiritual darkness. Then he asked how much impact one person could have if he or she took the gospel to those in such darkness. Doug turned on his single light, and the group was amazed at the impact of one little light.

"Now what if I recruited just one of you to help me dispel the darkness?" he asked and then instructed one camper to turn on his flashlight. One by one, campers asked another person to help them bring light into the darkness, and soon every light was burning again. Both spiritual darkness and the power of light took on a brand new meaning that day for every participant.

Staff and Parents

The camper-to-staff ratio at Kids Missions Camp is kept intentionally low so that counselors can monitor situations in

which campers could get frightened. Parents are given an orientation when they drop off their kids. They receive a copy of the schedule and are asked to pray for their children throughout the week. At the close of camp, parents join their children for the final two-hour activity on Thursday afternoon. They get a taste of what their children have been learning throughout the week.

Practical Implementation

Campers learn multiple ways they can get involved immediately in missions. "I learned to pray at missions camp," one child said. Campers are also equipped to share the gospel with their friends and neighbors.

One year camp featured "children at risk" with a Mission Impossible theme. Each cabin received the story of a real child somewhere around the globe who was significantly at risk. The campers were deputized as special agents and each received a pair of sunglasses. Their assignment was to develop a way of informing other people

about the needs of this child. The result was some amazing presentations. A video team came in and worked with each cabin to produce a DVD about their child. At the end of the week, children took home copies of their cabin's presentation that they could share with their church, Sunday school classes, and friends. Many eagerly asked for news of "their" child in the following months.

One of the most effective parts of camp is the interaction between guest missionaries and the children. Doug cautions that not every missionary is gifted at engaging kids. They have to be able to tell stories that get into the hearts and lives of kids and challenge them. One missionary brought an African church leader with him to camp

one year. Together they demonstrated a Christian/Muslim conversation around the making of tea as it is done in that African context. The "Muslim" went through the ritual ablutions and said his prayers, but also listened intently as the "Christian" shared his faith. Campers and staff were intrigued.

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"Refugee" campers welcomed a missionary plane carrying "aid" and letters from home.



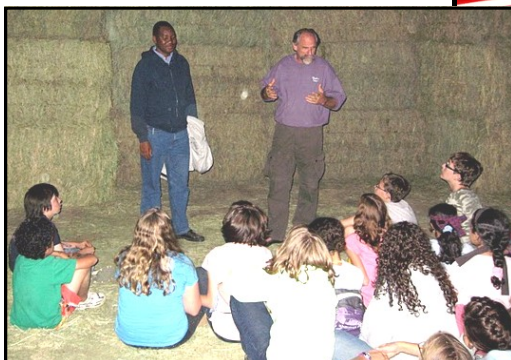
Crawling through a tunnel was campers' means of escape from "concentration camp."



Campers learned to identify with needy people around the globe.

One little girl told her mother that she believed God wanted her to be a missionary. "I would have had a better idea how to help her become an astronaut than a missionary," the mother reported ruefully. "So I started looking for resources and eventually discovered Kids Missions Camp on the web."

She drove her daughter several hundred miles so she could attend. On the way home, the girl talked for five hours straight. "Mom, the first couple of days were pretty intense, and I realized that if God wants me to be a missionary, I could die. I wasn't sure if I could make that commitment, but by the end of the week, I realized I was willing to give my life as a missionary." Back home, this camper put together three presentations about Kids Missions Camp for her church—one for children, one for youth, and a third for adults.



Missionaries and nationals who can effectively connect with the children are the key to camp impact.

The last day, Thursday, is always commitment day. The children go up on a hill overlooking the mountain and are challenged to do business with God about what He is asking them to do. It may be a future in missions, or it may be straightening out their relationship with their family. The staff fervently believes that God speaks to children and they can respond. Their goal is to see boys and girls committed to global missions but also intent on reaching those around them right now.

Comments from Campers

- "Mom, it was so ALIVE!!"
- "God is calling me to be a missionary in India."
- "Missions camp is the BEST!"
- "My dad asked me about going to basketball camp this year, but I told him I HAD to go to missions camp. There

are people in the world who are dying without Jesus, and I need to know more about that."



Campers experimented with the dress and foods of other cultures.



"Special agent" campers learned to work together to develop a presentation about their child at risk.

Missions Camp in Other Formats

This type of missions focus can easily be integrated into an existing camp program. The concept can also be translated into a weekend children's retreat, a kids' missions conference, or even a VBS venue. With some adaptation, it can also fit a family-oriented camp program.

Sharing Resources

Inspired by the success of the original Kids Missions Camp, the First Baptist Church of Eugene, OR, has used the concepts and materials to launch their own version of missions camp. They are excited about the growing results.

Doug and his team are eager to share everything they have learned as well as their curricula with other groups interested in initiating a similar program. He cautions that you need a committed team, a passionate director, and missionary participants who can relate well to children and young teens. To learn more and access missions camp curricula, contact the WorldVenture Northwest office at 360.450.6209 or d.hazen@worldventure.com.

Doug's Suggestions for Mobilizers

Postings: Readers may feel way too busy now. Could missions camp fit into what they are already doing?

Doug Hazen: It *is* a significant commitment, but my role primarily is helping to develop the vision and then committing my time for the one week of camp. Others do the big presentations, and my assistant coordinates most of the logistics. We also lean heavily on our planning team and on Camp Jonah staff who host the event. They handle all the counselors, support staff, registration, meals, etc. My team is just responsible for the program. If a director can limit his/

her time to developing the theme, finding good presenters, and nailing down the schedule for the week, a missions camp is very doable.

My team will coach any agency or church that wants to start something like this. We now have nearly 10 years of themes and materials, and although we don't have our resources neatly cataloged, we have the pieces and ideas we would love to pass along. We also have learned a lot by trial and error. For example, we know that the key elements are good counselors and *never, ever, boring* the campers!



I recommend you come join us for a day or two of our camp. I think it is worth the expense just to see it in action.

Postings: What kinds of people are needed on the planning team?

Doug: Recruiting a good team is crucial. Our core team is me, my assistant, and a children's missions specialist with years of experience and great ideas. The three of us try to meet monthly to put together the basics. Our expanded team includes one or two key Camp Jonah staff, a couple of tech guys who produce the camp DVD, a couple of activities people who plan games or activities that integrate with the theme, three or four core presenters, and various others who just want to serve in some way because they love the idea of missions camp. I delegate *a lot*, and our program varies each year depending on who we have available to help.

Postings: How would you approach a church about this type of camp project?

Doug: People in the children's department or on the missions team are usually the ones passionate about this type of thing. I help them see that camp is a great way to educate both kids and adults about their own missionaries and places of ministry in the world. It also puts the church's missionaries elbow to elbow with the kids for extended time.

Another thing that makes a missions camp appealing to church leaders is that it is all about discipling the congregation (I call it "the development of missional people"). When you tell a church that you will teach their kids to pray and to share the gospel as well as catch God's heart for the peoples of the world, it's pretty tough for them to say no! Because of our interactive approach, over and over we have had kids and staff tell us they have never experienced anything like it. Their lives are forever impacted for *participation* in Kingdom work.

Postings: How would you approach a camp about adding a week of missions camp to their program?

Doug: Many camps use an age-graded approach, so the challenge is to convince them that a theme camp is worth pursuing. We have found that the theme orientation produces a deeper result. Another selling point is that a missions camp attracts kids who want to be challenged to go to another level spiritually.

Postings: Missionaries and appointees often speak to children here and some run children's programs overseas. Would your materials be adaptable for their use?

Doug: These materials would be great both for appointees and home-assignment missionaries. Imagine teaching kids



Doug loves interacting with campers.

about the "Back to Jerusalem" concept by walking them through the countries from China to Jerusalem as we did a couple of years ago! Or imagine teaching the Perspectives lesson on God moving people by having the kids "come and go" carrying suitcases or boxes as they learn how God moves people around in order to bring them to Himself. Or imagine not just talking about your ministry but having kids experience it themselves.

This type of program could be easily adapted for use anywhere. We would be delighted to see this concept mobilize European kids to get a burden for children at risk, or South American children to become passionate about reaching Muslims, or Asian kids praying for the persecuted church.

Postings: What are the benefits for an agency to put effort into making such camps a reality?

Doug: We need *right now* to be producing the missionaries and local church missions activists of the 2020s and 2030s. That's what we believe we are doing through Kids Missions Camp here in the Northwest. We envision some of our campers becoming WorldVenture missionaries or passionate mobilizers of their churches because of their exposure and experiences at our camp.

There are other benefits too. After their children come to Kid's Missions Camp, churches open their doors to me to coach them in mission strategy or whatever they need. It also gives me an inside track to introduce other events we are doing. Any time an agency brings resources to the local church, it adds value that opens up future relationships.

Interchange Postings

Catalyst's **Postings** e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

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