

Subject: The Leicester Children's Holiday Centre (Mablethorpe)

Speaker/Writer : Peter A Daisley

INTRODUCTIONS

We are well aware that there are still kids who suffer real poverty. Today though, there are even more who are disadvantaged in other ways. Beyond these there are many, many more children who need a lift in their little lives, a break from their existence and a boost to their love of life. We cannot hope to put the world to right but our century-old charity does give hundreds of these youngsters a great holiday break in a fine setting.

Free Fun-Holidays

Throughout the summer each year, our purpose-built centre on the Lincolnshire coast provides an activity and play holiday for hundreds of local children. There they enjoy the sun, sand and sea together with entertainment and lots of games guided by caring activity-leaders. For some this is their only chance of a childhood holiday. For many their arrival here is their first ever view of the sea and thrill of a seaside holiday. For all of the kids it is a time for enjoyment of sea, sand, sun and play.

Group living

At Mablethorpe, the kids share the pleasure of proper meals at regular times, good food and eating in company. With gentle guidance they find real satisfaction in teamwork, cooperation and playing to rules. This holiday introduces many children to the change of life-style and a mind-opening glimpse of their own possibilities. Mixing with children from diverse backgrounds and cultures is part of an enjoyable adventure. Most importantly, its fun!

Free & Safe Care

The holidays are free. The only charges on parents and guardians are contributions to the cost of transport and a limited allowance of pocket money. Even before they arrive the children come under the protection of our activity leaders who guide them and accompany them on their journey to Mablethorpe. Properly recorded medication is collected, secured and strictly supervised by the Carers. This same level of protection is maintained throughout the holiday, to minimise the risks of accidents, induced sickness, abductions or other horrors that could worry parents.

WHICH KIDS?

The holidays are available to all children aged 7 to 11 years from the City, towns and countryside of Leicestershire and Rutland: We welcome all the kids who need a break.

Not just the poor

There are still many poor families who could not give their children a real holiday. We certainly accept them but we also provide the holidays for disadvantaged kids in the widest possible sense. We strive to include any children with difficulties in their lives. Society may have dealt with the worst of poverty but has yet to learn how to handle the deprivation and isolation that afflicts so many children. Some kids never escape the presence of sickness in their family, many are faced with abuse of alcohol and drugs, social exclusion, conflicts of culture, broken homes, single parent families, bereavement and all the other ills of this brave new century. We are here for kids who need a break or any opportunity to widen their horizons, for whatever the reasons.

Deserving cases

Every child is special and has particular needs. Of the thousand of stories that could be told a few are given to illustrate the continuing need for help.

A little 10 year-old invited to Mablethorpe said he couldn't spare the time. "Who would look after me mum?" he asked, recognising his sick mother's dependence. His dad was in jail. "Best place for 'im!" said the boy. We just had to find a way to give him a break.

A/7 intelligent and sensitive boy, Ali was shy of the city toughs, always excluded from playground games. He probably didn't make friends in his own community. Despite having affluent parents he was a child in need, who benefited greatly from the inclusiveness of the holiday we gave him at Mablethorpe.

Social Service sought help for a family of three small children who had been taken into separate foster homes. The unemployed partner of their late mother had tried to cope but failed and was gaoled for stealing food. Juggling was necessary to ensure that the three kids had at least a holiday together, for two weeks at Mablethorpe.

***Wearing just a skimpy dress
Shy and alone she came for the bus
carrying only a small case.***

***"Me Dad's gi'me me money"
was all she said,
handing over her pocket money.***

***Only just in time
as the bus was about to leave
her dad arrived by taxi.***

***Apologising, he pulled out a bag
of her still-damp laundry
from the back of his wheel-chair.***

MABLETHORPE TODAY

The holiday centre is situated on the coast of Lincolnshire. Set in attractive grounds near the lovely wide beaches it is protected from the sea by huge sand dunes. The centre has wide play areas with lots of play equipment. It has four dormitories of 16 beds each, twin bedrooms for staff, dining room/theatre, kitchen and various playrooms. Purpose built in 1936 the centre has been refurbished and refitted to align with current regulation and modern tastes. This includes providing disabled access throughout the ground floor.

Staffing

An experienced resident manager runs the centre, plans and organises a wide range of activities and entertainment. A deputy, kitchen staff and cleaners are engaged for the summer months. For support and care of the children we bring in selected "activity leaders". These are usually students from foreign universities, fluent in English and certified by their police authorities as suitable for Child Protection. On arrival the staff are trained here in the essentials of Child Care and Health & Safety as well as their duties and house rules. We are fortunately able to get a continuing supply of these highly competent young people for the important duties. Many of them return over several years.

Activities

Under the strict guidance of our Manager, Helen Eagle-Lanzetta, the children have a wide range of activities during their stay. We make the most of outdoor pursuits but with innovations and technical aids we can easily occupy the children whatever the weather conditions. These are continuously evolving with experience and take advantage of suggestions from the visiting Activity Leaders from other countries. One real winner is the Jungle Trail, set up by the Leicester fire & Rescue Service.

EVOLUTION

Early History

The charity was founded in 1897. Lady Rolleston, of Wigston Magna Leicestershire, took pity on the boy newsvendors in the streets of Leicester, who she discovered were often the main source of family income. In 1895 the Leicester Boy's Club was established in Newarke Street. Following its success, Lady Rolleston inspired the formation of "The Leicester Poor Boys Holiday Camp" which was set up on the sand dunes at Mablethorpe. It was soon expanded to include girls, not now under canvass of course but in their own pavilion built of wood. Boys and girls shared a dining room while the boys still slept under canvass but soon a larger "home" was built to accommodate both boys and girls. There may be a few mature people who still remember holidays in the wooden centre.

The building of Shaftesbury Hall in Holy Bones still accommodates the charity office but was for 50 years a meeting and education centre for the deserving children.

A Special Place

Support and funding for the charity was superb in the early 20th century. Thus, by 1936 the charity was able to build the purpose-built holiday centre we see today. For many of the following years the use of the centre developed under the guidance of Mrs Eagle, whose daughter succeeded her as manager. Notably, the strictly traditional fare and Christian ethic of the early days has long been relaxed and holiday life is now adapted to accommodate the racial and cultural differences of today's population

Inclusiveness

The population mix of Leicester and the surrounding area has changed greatly over recent decades. To ensure that none of the children are excluded it is essential that the charity adapts to the diverse needs of the whole community. The Centre is geared to providing special diets and allow for the practices of different faiths. A much more difficult challenge to the charity organisers is the need to build bridges between the widely differing life-styles, family bonds and expectations within our mixed community.

Challenges

Maintaining the large building with all its contents and services is itself quite demanding. Though an advanced building in 1936, they did not match the standards of the 21st century. Major structural changes were necessary to meet Health & Safety standards, to provide for disabled access and to improve security for Child Protection. Internal refurbishment was needed to keep up to date with expectations and regulation, adding to the challenges to the charity. New pressures arose when our temporary staff were subject to immigration rules and had to be employed rather than engaged as volunteers. Consequently our Activity Leaders had to be paid according to the national minimum wage rather than the personal allowance that we had given for many years.

Developments

The traditional holiday of sea, sand and sun has the same appeal today as it did in the past. Kids still love the old established ways of having fun. Fast changing fashion and instant communication however, leads children to look for more. The Manager and staff have generated a vast number of activities and entertainment but these too have to evolve with new games and events added each year. The play equipment has to be maintained and replaced. New equipment has to be bought and installed to align with current taste and fashion. These are all very demanding on the resources of the charity. With up to a third of children now on some kind of medication, we have to exercise strict control. We insist on advance notice of illnesses, treatments and special needs. All medication is collected, identified and securely stored before the children depart on the coach. Treatments are given only to formalised rules. First aid and emergency treatment is given when necessary only by authorised persons. During the holiday, contact with children by a parent or guardian is usual, some contact is by telephone but often by visits. These have to be carefully controlled as protection against abuse and disruption of the holidays. All medical issues, all activities, all events and visits are logged by the staff and reviewed by the administration.

Nominations

In the past, teachers in the primary schools identified the children who would benefit and encouraged their nominations. This still happens where the practice is maintained but there has been a serious falling off of nominations. Some schools seem to have lost the habit, despite the evident needs. The charity is seeking to extend its scope by inviting you all, organisations and individuals, to help to identify children who ought to come to Mablethorpe, to liaise with their families and make sure our charity knows about them.

FUNDING

.Costs are rising every year while regular income declines, making it more and more difficult to give the kids the holidays they need and deserve, We have no governmental aid, no lottery hand-outs, no other formal funding of any kind! The charity continues its efforts by virtue of the wonderful generosity of you, the good people of our City and Counties.

Donations

The charity is grateful to the Firemen, the Lions, the Rotary, the Round Table, the Masons, Pubs and Clubs and many other groups who regularly give us help. We are indebted to the many individuals who give us donations and arrange local collections and appeals for Mablethorpe. Special appeals on our behalf are made by the Lord Mayor and by the Leader of the County Council. All these together with the donations and legacies from caring souls are very welcome.

Promotions

What we desperately need is regular income. It requires a lot of people helping with fund-raising, collections and promotional event across the region. There are many wonderful volunteers but never quite enough. We need this and more support to help promote the charity and extend the necessary publicity.

Self-help

Though specifically for summer holidays for our local children, the excellent facilities and expertise can be made available at any other times of the year. We do get some out-of-season bookings but these are limited by the restrictions of the school year. The charity now seeks to hire out our Centre to firms for training sessions and team-bonding for adults and for social occasions. This is inexpensive for the hirers and helps a little with containing our rising costs.

We are now offering our facilities for-hire to any Firms, Clubs or Bodies who can see the scope for whatever away-from-it-all events they care to organise. Take over our fine facilities for an out-of-season week for just a reasonable contribution to our expenses. Why not arrange your day-out or celebration week-end at Mablethorpe?

Thus you, your business, your church or your club can benefit while assisting our local charity.

MR LEICESTER

In association with the **Leicestershire Chronicle**



Message from Mablethorpe in 1923

NEWS that the new Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Roger Blackmore, has chosen the Leicester Boys and Girls Holiday Home at Mablethorpe as his charity for his year in office, prompted Mavis Rabbit to get in touch.

"Davis has sent me these three

postcards which her Aunt Emma sent to her mother in 1923.

Mavis says: "She lived in Frederick Road and from the message on the back it looks as if they were children from St Saviour's church.

"She is the one in the front row

on the beach and the second from the right on the third row outside the home."

On the back of one of the cards is the reassuring note from one of the adults: "Emma is having a good time and is quite happy. I will look after all from St Saviour's and the others."



Article from the Leicester Mercury September 2009



NOSTALGIC: Paul Tuff outside the entrance to Leicester Children's Holiday Centre, in Mablethorpe, where he stayed as a child



ROOMS: Memories flooded back as Paul visited the dormitory.

Paul was one of the thousands of young beneficiaries of childhood holidays at the centre and has maintained contact with it in adulthood, making regular return visits and helping to raise funds. He has written to tell me about his most recent trip to the centre, for its civic day. He said: "As on previous visits, the weather was glorious and a great time was enjoyed by all who attended. "The day started with a civic reception with the Lord Mayor of Leicester, the Mayor of Mablethorpe and lots of friends and supporters of the holiday centre. "After lunch, we were given a tour of the centre, which was very nostalgic for anyone who had stayed there as a child. I visited the boys' dormitory, which I had slept in as a child. "I felt a lump in my throat as memories came flooding back of past times. "I then walked out through the back door of the centre and there it was the sand, the sea, and the sun. "After reminiscing on the beach I returned to the centre for a concert given by children who were staying there. "The children enjoyed performing the concert as much as we enjoyed watching them and they were all rewarded with a little extra spending money from the Lord Mayor for their efforts. "Seeing the children's smiling faces on that stage reminded me how important this holiday centre is for less-privileged children." Paul, who is a poet and an author, has written a poem in support of the Lord Mayor's Appeal. It is as follows:

Our world is blessed with children
Who give the greatest joy
All part of God's creation
Every single girl and boy.

Some children are less fortunate
Through no fault of their own
And need a little help in life
Until they are fully grown.

Imagine the feeling a child gets
When first seeing the sand and sea
I know that feeling only too well
As once that small child was me.

Imagine a smile that outshines the sun
And lights up a small child's face
I remember that smile very well
As I once stood in that child's place.

These children are our future
Don't let them walk alone
Please give to the Lord Mayor's Appeal
To support the Mablethorpe Home.