

MUSLIM YOUTH CAMP HISTORY

The Muslim Youth Camp has been around since 1977 when the first camp was held in Pleasant Valley Camp just northwest of Chicago. Four years later, in 1981, the camp was held at Camp Wapaca near Wapaca, Wisconsin (about 200 miles north from Chicago). This camp (designed for teenage youth) provided for an education program for lectures as well as swimming in a lake, water skiing, tubing, archery, rifle range, tennis, hikes and games. At one time there were 225 boys and girls attending the camp. Initially the camp was organized, conducted, and planned by a group of brothers at Muslim Community Center. Slowly the organization and program planning was taken over by the youth. After about ten years at Camp Wapaca, the youth were tired of the activities at this camp and besides the camp was becoming quite rundown. Therefore, a new camp was sought.

A couple of years the camp was held at ISNA Headquarters in Plainfield, Indiana. This setting was not conducive to the kind of camp that was wanted. There was very little for the youth to do except play games. After pouring over a list of camps in Illinois and surrounding states, it was decided to visit a camp near Rockford (about 100 miles from Chicago). Everyone liked the camp and after talking to the owner to see if there was room for us for a one week camp, the decision to try this camp was made. By this time the youth were doing all of the planning and work required for the camp under the advice of some adults. In 1993 the camp chosen to try was Camp White Eagle in Leaf River, Illinois. The change of camps was very beneficial to the camp programs. The staff at Camp White Eagle worked with us to teach how to shoot an arrow and gun, to swim (in a pool), arts and crafts, and best of all Team Building. Team building is a process that a team goes through to build the self esteem of all individuals and teach people to work together to solve a challenge. The Camp staff also led the teams for the team building exercises.

From the beginning of the camps in 1977 through about 1993 the camps were coed, both boys and girls attended at the same time which caused a lot of rumors to be spread about what was going on at camp. In 1994 the decision was made to separate the boys and girls, with the boys going the first week of August and the girls the second week.

This is the way the camp is conducted today. The youth decide the theme for the camp, what the program will be, and they conduct the activities at the camp. A group of primarily college students are the counselors and they lead most of the workshops and discussions. It is a great experience for them and they can relate better to the campers than can older adults.

A counselor training program was initiated a few years ago to give the counselors some training about what to expect at the camp and how to handle the campers. It has been beneficial to both campers and counselors.

Last year (2008) there were 80 campers plus 12 counselors attending each of the camps. In 2009 the boys camp is scheduled from June 14-20 and the girls July 26 - August 1. The charge for the camp is \$325.00 (discount \$25 before July 10th). The fee includes transportation from MCC to the camp and back, food, shelter (cabins with beds), and all camp activities. All meat is Zabiha. This camp is organized by Muslim Community Center, 4380 N. Elston Avenue, Chicago, IL 60641. Registration forms are available in the MCC Office (773) 725-9047 or by mail.

For further information please contact: Mary Ali (773) 588-4663.