

YOUNG ADULT-FRIENDLY PLANNING

What makes for a successful young adult event? What does young adult-friendly planning look like? The Student and Young Adult Commission has planned a fall retreat at Crieff Hills Camp for several years. The following reflections come out of the experience of planning for those retreats. While there are no pre-packaged answers on how to plan with young adults, these have worked well in our setting. Perhaps these suggestions can also be helpful for any age of participant.

Young Adult Friendly Details

It is important to plan the details of an event in a way that is conducive to young adults. When is the event? Is it too near exam times or in conflict with work schedules? Is the location comfortable? What are the costs? The Crieff Hills Retreat only costs \$40. We do this by cooking our own food, sleeping in sleeping bags and doing our own resourcing. How is advertizing and promotion done? While posters, brochures and bulletin announcements are helpful, the more ideal method is by direct personal contact, email and young adult word of mouth.

Young Adult Ownership

Young adult events usually work the best when planned with young adults, rather than for them. An event or activity needs to be owned. People who are part of the planning can pass on that excitement. It's also a way to tap into some amazing creativity. Our retreat is planned and led by the young adults on the committee. We have not had a resource person. Each member shapes and leads one of the sessions or another significant part of the weekend.

Addressing Real Issues

Young adults have busy schedules and many options for their time. To be worthwhile, they want to be challenged and struggle with relevant material. Questions and food for thought are often more important than answers. Young adults want to tackle significant issues in relation to faith, like careers, money, school, conflict, sexuality, gender issues, spirituality and community.

Creative Style and Format

In many ways the medium (style and format) of an event is as important as the message (theme and issues). The last thing young adults want is presentations in a lecture style. Sessions need to be highly interactive, creative, and fun and utilize many different learning styles. Our retreats have included games, story telling, small group discussion, role playing, creative exercises and the use of symbols - all related to the particular theme. The Sunday morning worship has often taken the form of a guided hike.

Sharing of Stories

Part of a style that connects to young adults is to give lots of opportunity for people to share from their own experiences. People want lots of small group discussion time. I've been amazed by the vulnerability and depth of sharing when people are asked to speak from their own stories. One format we have often used is to have a panel of young adults (asked before hand) share their personal experiences, struggles and reflections on a particular topic. Amazing group discussion can grow out of this.

Relaxed Pace

The pace of an event is important. There needs to be a mix of quality sessions/content with fun activities and unstructured down time. Posted schedules serve only as rough guidelines, with lots of room for flexibility. For example, the supper and evening session may start and go late, but that's okay if there has been a whole afternoon of free time.

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