

# Camp teaches youngsters to defuse their anger

## Fresh Air Fund

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STAFF REPORTER

The discussion during “secret circle” was intense.

Six boys aged 10 and 11 were talking about how difficult it can be to control their tempers. It had been a particularly testy day for the group and some kids had let their rage take over, some whipping crayons at their peers and cursing, another having a tantrum in the hallway.

But counsellors at Camp Wimodausis, a day camp that caters to kids ages 6 to 11 with behavioural problems and histories of violence, were unruffled and endlessly patient. Luis, 11, said the counsellors taught him how to walk away from confrontations, instead of punching the other children.

“You have to take a deep breath, take a drink of water or tell a teacher,” he said while working on his Popsicle-stick picture frame.

The youngsters had just finished an anger management workshop, role-playing how to be a good sport when losing a game of soccer.

Luis admitted he had punched a boy

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one year older than himself, after being teased about his weight and family.

The program, which helps about 80 campers in month-long sessions, is built on the SNAP premise — Stop Now and Plan — a problem-solving and self-control technique.

“A lot of these kids have been bullied or are bullies,” said camp director Karen Sewell. “They’ve been kicked out of other day camps, some have had multiple suspensions and can’t cope in school or in social situations. But no one’s kicked out here.”

The camp, held at the Child Development Institute (formerly known as the Earls court Child and Family Cen-

tre) at St. Clair Gardens near Dufferin St., is one of 98 summer camps subsidized by the Star’s Fresh Air Fund, which helps 25,000 underprivileged and special-needs children.

Nicholas, 10, has a charming smile, and can be princely when he sees fit, emphasizing his pleases and thank-yous. But he admitted applying SNAP principles is sometimes easier said than done. “It’s hard to walk away . . . I’m just telling you the truth.”

If anyone knows how hard it can be, it’s counsellor Dizia Raposo-Ferreira, 16. She had also been enrolled as a camper at Wimodausis, after her mother had had enough of their explosive arguments. It got so bad once that neighbours had to call police to defuse the fight.

“We’ve all gone through the program, my two sisters and my mom. Now she’s a mentor for other groups,” the 16-year old said. “We came here and worked it out, (learning) there are better ways to deal with anger, and incorporate that into life.”

Both she and her younger sister are counsellors at Wimodausis, hoping to set an example to some of the campers who are mirror images of their former selves. Counsellors undergo intense



TANNIS TOOHEY/TORONTO STAR

Sam, 6, left, gets a Spiderman makeover from camp counsellor Bernice as Matthew, 6, waits his turn at Camp Wimodausis.

training to help them understand the kids’ backgrounds, be it low-income or foster families.

“Here they have boundaries and structure, things they didn’t have in

school,” Dizia said. “We need places like these.”

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