

## Greenhill YMCA

Shared Education Residential – Dromara and St Michael's – June 18- 20

What an amazing time we had on our Y7 residential. Here is a short report to give you a taste of the brilliant time we had.

The excitement started when we arrived at the YMCA site high above Newcastle with fantastic views over the town and the beach. But more exciting was the moment we had been waiting for – who were we sharing a dorm with? Our accommodation was in a chalet split over two floors with spacious common rooms and all the usual facilities. There were plenty of excited squeals when we found out where we were sleeping. We put our duvet making skills into practice straight away and soon had our rooms looking cosy and neat, Mrs Collins and Mrs Burns loved their dorm inspections.

After a picnic lunch and a bit of an explore of the grounds we were ready for our activities. These included an adventure walk, archery, zip lining, bouldering and camp fire cooking. We split into four groups making friends with new people. These would be the four groups for the three days so it meant we got plenty of attention and practice at whatever our activity was.

Bouldering was great, who knew that there were so many drainage pipes in Tollymore Forest Park that we could crawl through, kitted out with wet weather gear, life jackets and safety helmets of course. We progressed from tunnels to waterfalls learning to always step on rocks under water to avoid slipping on the mossy ones. Most visitors to the park keep to the paths but we were lucky enough to walk up the Shimna River clambering up stream and taking the odd dip in rock pools having slid down waterfalls. The best part of the adventure was sliding down a natural rock slide into a cool deep pool, we were so looking forward to a hot shower.

The archery activity certainly showed us who had hidden talents with a bow and arrows. We were taught all the basic skills and safety lessons then had great fun with a variety of challenges from bursting balloons stuck to the targets to the pizza game which we loved, anything food related is good.

Talking of food we all loved the campfire cooking. Our instructor was in charge of the fire in the campfire pit and we were tasked with finding various sizes of twigs and small branches to get the fire going. What would we cook? Well we prepared bananas stuffed with chocolate and marshmallows or apples coated in chocolate all wrapped in tinfoil parcels. While these baked in the embers we had great fun singing campfire songs and even learnt some Hungarian ones from our instructor. The food was amazing and the smoke from the fire was even better as it helped keep the midges away for a while. As if chocolate fruit wasn't enough, next we toasted marshmallows which we sandwiched between choc chip cookies to make the most delicious smores.

To get rid of all that excess sugar Mrs Burns organised a challenging scavenger hunt to keep us moving and get our brain cells working overtime, where would you find a handful of nails (look at the end of your arms).

Away from food we got our wet weather gear on again plus safety helmets and set off on our adventure walk trying to avoid imaginary aliens by disguising ourselves with mud, sticking twigs in our helmets and generally crawling about through the forest. Our final disguise was to be fish, this involved falling backwards into a deep pool, the cold took our breath away but it was fantastic.

The highlight for most of us had to be the zip line. Imagine a wooden tower over 30 metres high, imagine climbing up it and stepping on to a platform high above Newcastle (fantastic views if you could appreciate them) then being hooked up to the zip line before standing on a tiny platform and being told to "Just step off!!" We have never heard so much screaming as people sailed past like birds through the gap in the trees. We all loved it (even the teachers).

So those were the activities we took part in over our stay but Greenhill wasn't just about challenges. It was about meeting new people, having fun outside with them and working with them to set and clear tables for the meals. The food was really tasty and we looked forward to the choices we had from chicken goujons to spaghetti Bolognese, from pork chops to chicken curry, from hot dogs to doughnuts (yes freshly baked doughnuts, our favourite).

We also had another food trip into Newcastle to sample the delights from some of the many ice cream shops. We had to have a run on the beach and a brisk walk home to burn off that sugar.

The weather was pretty kind to us and even when it rained our teachers kept us entertained with a quiz, some dancing and a bit of a talent show.

We would like to say a big thank you to the staff from both schools who really were on duty 24/7, some of us could have talked all night in our dorms but still the staff were cheerful and smiling every morning even when we were a little tired.

Also a big thank you to the instructors at Greenhill who come from all over Europe, they taught us many new skills and had a great sense of fun.

We were sad to leave and many of us could have stayed another day, so that tells you what a brilliant time we had and how many brilliant memories we could take home with us.