

# We may not be able to afford it- but we cannot afford not to do it

edwards  
*by Commissioner David Edwards –*

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It is summer time. And summer time in the USA means camp! The very thought makes some divisional youth secretaries break out in sweat. A lifetime ago, my wife and I served as divisional youth secretaries. This was on the island of Trinidad. Even as far back as then, arranging for and running the divisional youth camp program was part of the brief of appointment for the DYS.

Camping was as much fun for us as it was work. It had its rewards, especially when it came to what it did for some of the young people who benefited from these programs.

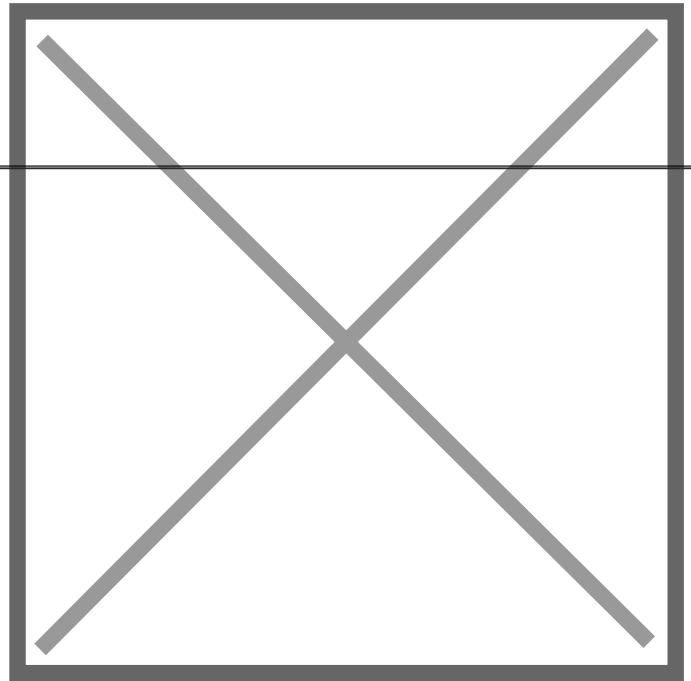
## **A kid named Michael**

Quite recently I got to thinking about one of those young people. It was while I was preparing for the dedication of the Alaska divisional camp.

I got to thinking about a young man I will call Michael, as I cannot really remember his name. Michael had gotten himself into trouble with the law and had been placed on probation by the courts. The Salvation Army was approached by the head of the probation department to allow Michael and two other teenagers, also on probation, to attend our youth camp that year when I met Michael.

It was not something that we were accustomed to doing, but we decided to take the risk. Most of the other young people at the camp were either members of The Salvation Army or associated with The Salvation Army in one form or the other. The group of young people accepted Michael and his friends without any hesitation. Michael and his friends were soon singing camp songs and joining in all of the camp activity. We had no trouble from them. They were on their best behavior.

It was several years later while in conversation with one of the youngsters, now an adult with a family of his own, who had attended that camp that I was reminded of Michael. He had met Michael on the streets of downtown Port of Spain. Michael by that time was either in his late twenties or early thirties. In fact, it was Michael who recognized him. Michael seemed to have been the worse for wear on drugs.



He asked about my wife and me. He shared something about his life since he had been at the camp. Life had not been at all kind to him. He admitted to my young friend, that those 10 days at that camp conducted by The Salvation Army when he was a teenager, were the one good thing that he could remember ever happening to him in his whole sorry life.

### **Camping costs money—loads of it**

Anyone who knows anything about camps would tell you that they are expensive to build and costly to maintain. The Alaska Division can consider itself rather fortunate in that the campsite that was just dedicated was a gift from the Kingslake Corporation. There is, however, quite a lot of work to be done in renovations to the buildings and the rest of the property. The division will have to find a considerable amount of money to spend on these renovations.

In addition, they will need to raise a substantial amount of additional dollars every year to keep these facilities in good condition as well as to conduct the annual camping program.

### **Camping can make a big difference**

In explaining to the folks, gathered for the dedication, why we were taking such a big risk in accepting this gift, I drew attention to the fact that it has to do primarily with our concern for people. Our primary concern is with people. Camping is just one of the number of programs we operate in the service of people. Programs that are intended to make a difference in the lives of people. We were willing to take the risk because we believed that camping could make a difference in people's lives.

Programs at camp help to make a difference for hundreds of kids who, like Michael, come from rough inner city environments, even if it was only for 10 days. They help to make a difference in lives of the lonely elderly. They help to make a difference in the lives of retirees in good health who have loads of time and not much to do with it. The Salvation Army is in the business of making a difference in the lives of people. At times we may not be able to afford it, but we certainly cannot afford not to do it.

Perhaps someone reading this and in a position to help, might be willing to help make it affordable for the folk in Alaska.