ESA SALMINEN

KONE Camp

SUMMER CAMPS SINCE 1947

Machine repair shop Tarmo opens, is incorporated as KONE in 1910.

Harald's son Heikki Herlin joins KONE board, becomes CEO in 1932.

KONE moves its crane factory from Helsinki to Hyvinkää, 55 kilometers away.

The first children's camp is held for the children of KONE employees in Jollas in eastern Helsinki. Social manager Osmo Vesikansa works as camp director.

Campers are divided into two groups: camps for younger and older children are held separately.

Two camps become one with 120 children attending.

1908 1924 1928 1939–1944 1943 1945–1952 1947 1949 1950 1951 1953 1954

Harald Herlin buys controlling stake in KONE from Strömberg.

KONE serves Finland's military during the Winter, Continuation and Lapland Wars.

KONE delivers to the Soviet Union hundreds of cranes and elevators as part of Finland's war reparations obligation.

KONE buys the island of Konekari and increases the camp's size.

For the first time, more than 100 campers attend KONE Camps. Camp badges are introduced to show the number of camps that children or staff members have attended.

Organized swim instruction be though official sw badges have been previously

KONE C

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Heikki's son Pekka Herlin becomes CEO in 1964 and begins to transform the company. Pekka wants to make the company international and discontinues much of the social work.

1958

Former campers become staff members for the first time.

1960

The camp is divided into two again. Youth counselor Aarre Mäki arrives at KONE as assistant to the social manager and works as a staff member for the first time. New tents arrive.

1962

Aarre Mäki and Sirkka Vesikansa work together as camp directors.

1964

Aarre Mäki continues as camp director.

1965

KONE opens a new elevator factory in Hyvinkää and moves the manufacturing of elevators there.

1967

KONE internationalizes by purchasing the Scandinavian elevator business of Sweden's ASEA.

1968

KONE camp moves to Sääksjärvi in Nurmijärvi. Resources are meager.

1971

KONE purchases Westinghouse's European elevator and escalator business and branches out to France and Belgium.

1974

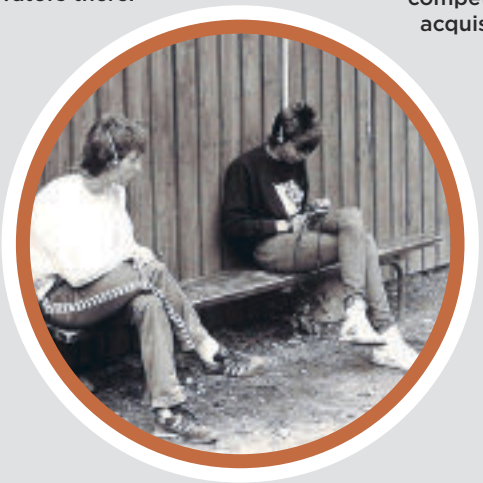
KONE spreads to other continents and strengthens its competitiveness by strategic acquisitions in Europe and the Americas.

1976–1992

The camp is moved to Tourun Torpat in Urjala. KONE makes improvements to the holiday center.

1977

amp



KONE *Camp*

SUMMER CAMPS SINCE 1947

"As long as we know how to play,
we will stay young."

– Osmo Vesikansa: ***Suuri Leikkikirja***
(**"*The Big Book of Games*"**), 1949

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Jussi Herlin (left), Esa Salminen, Carina Herlin, Jere Santala, Jyrki Vesikansa, Liisa Kannisto and Esko Vesikansa at Konekari, autumn 2024.

FOREWORD:

A MISSING PIECE OF HISTORY

On July 26, 1999, with the help of my parents' gentle yet insistent encouragement, I arrived at the Finnish Railway Museum in Hyvinkää for the first day of the KONE Global Youth Camp.

This sunny Monday was preceded by a weekend at home in Kirkkonummi, where I had gotten to know a fellow camper, a fun redheaded guy from Belgium by the name of Wim Gielis. I was fifteen years old, and suddenly encountering over a hundred other young people and the camp staff made me nervous.

* * *

KONE has been a major name in Finnish industry throughout the 20th century. Starting out as a machine repair shop in Helsinki, the company grew, industrialized and internationalized – and by the turn of the millennium it was already an established global corporation. Through the years, the company has directly or indirectly touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people: employees, shareholders, partners, suppliers and customers. If the end users of KONE products are included, the number rises to several million people. As of 2025, KONE moves two billion people every day.

All this industrial history is well documented; the stories of KONE, its leadership and its owners have been recorded in several books. However, there is a small but significant part of KONE's story that has remained unrecorded – until now.

This book offers a comprehensive and unique account of the rich history of KONE's summer camps for the children of employees, also within the context of the broader social policies of Finnish companies since the mid-20th century.

* * *

Why is it important to write not only about investments, acquisitions and operating results but also about swimming badges, food fights and campfires? Is not the sole task of a company to create value for shareholders? That may be what is written in the articles of association, but ultimately, even a global industrial company is just a scattered collection of people working towards a common cause.

KONE's summer camps have shaped the lives of thousands of participants. Most have since entered the workforce – or have already retired – yet these experiences of youth, meeting other people and molding their worldviews, are now an inseparable part of them. In this way, their camp experiences are also visible in their handprints.

In addition to telling a story and providing context, this book provides concrete tips and ideas for everyone involved in organizing youth camps. This is a very

important aspect. Raising young people to be enlightened and empathetic global citizens who appreciate other nationalities and cultures is perhaps more important than ever in these times.

* * *

Let us return to 1999. At first, the other campers, like me, were nervous about meeting a new group of people, but the feeling soon turned to curiosity and enthusiasm. I survived my first camp (and the following two) and have continued my "camp life" in various roles for over 20 years.

Through the camp, I have found not only my life partner and friends, but also new, meaningful ways of thinking and seeing the world through the eyes of others. The lessons and experiences of the camp continue to follow me faithfully through my career and life.

Helsinki, January 31, 2025

Jussi Herlin
Vice Chairman of the Board of KONE
Camp Director 2009–2023
Staff Member 2002–2008, 2024–
Camper 1999–2001

KONE's old factory and headquarters in Helsinki.

KONE AND SUMMER CAMPS FOR THE CHILDREN OF EMPLOYEES

KONE plays an important role in shaping the future of cities. KONE is a global leader in the elevator and escalator industry, making journeys safe, convenient, and reliable for two billion people in smart and sustainable buildings and cities every day. In 2024, KONE had annual sales of EUR 11 billion and at the end of the year over 60,000 employees in close to 70 countries. KONE shares are listed on the Nasdaq Helsinki Ltd. in Finland.

KONE began organizing summer camps for the children of employees aged 6–14 in 1947. At that time, many other Finnish companies also offered summer camps for the children of employees. Often, entire groups of siblings would attend, and the summer camps became an important tradition for many families.

KONE's summer camps grew rapidly, and before long, two one-week camps were organized every summer, each with around a hundred children. In the 1960s and 1970s, other Finnish companies gradually discontinued their camp activities, but KONE continued the tradition. In 1979, a third week was added: a camp for young people aged 14–17, which welcomed the children of employees from all the countries where KONE had operations. The young people arriving in Finland were first placed with host families for the first few days, after which they spent a week at the summer camp surrounded by nature.

The popularity of summer camps for the children of employees declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the last camp for children aged 6–14 was held in 1993. However, the KONE Global Youth Camp is still held every summer, attracting around a hundred teens from more than 30 countries around the world.

The camps are a source of great pride for both KONE owners and employees, as there is hardly any comparable employee benefit anywhere else in the world. The KONE Global Youth Camp has fostered a sense of family within KONE for almost half a century, and thousands of young people have been able to experience the magic of camp life.

INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR: THE CAMP BOOK AND HISTORY

The sounds of laughter, voices singing, wind filling the sails, oars rattling. Shouts that are difficult to make out. The clothing is colorful. So are the hairstyles, everything from white to pitch black. The atmosphere is one that only 14- to 17-year-olds can create. I wish I were still their age, just as young.

So reported *KONE-Uutiset* ("KONE News") on the atmosphere at the KONE Global Youth Camp in 1982.

This book presents KONE's summer camps: what happens at them, why they are organized, how they have changed, and what impact they have had on the people who have participated in the camps in different roles over the decades. The book has been written for former and future campers and their families, host families, and anyone interested in youth summer camps and their pedagogy.

The book progresses in the order of the camp experience, from arrival to departure. Each chapter provides a glimpse into both the present and the past, and we meet people from different decades of the camp. The historical sections run alongside the present, making it easier for the reader to appreciate what has changed and where echoes of the past can still be discerned. A summary in simple English is provided at the end.

Writing the book

For this book, I interviewed several dozen people: former and current campers, staff members, host families, researchers, and KONE employees. The historical picture was enriched by materials from the KONE archives and employee magazines, as well as

articles about the camps published in the local newspaper *Hyvinkään Sanomat*. I also consulted non-fiction books and studies on camp activities, adventure education, Finnish industrial history, and youth research.

We also sent online questionnaires about camp memories to young people and families who participated in the camps in the 2000s, to which we received nearly 200 responses. In the archives, we also found one camper's diary from 1998, and another camper agreed to keep a diary while attending the camp in summer 2024.

Together, these written sources and contemporary accounts paint a picture of camp life in each decade. Personal accounts shed light on the motivation for organizing the camps, particularly what the children's camps and KONE Global Youth Camp have meant to participants. The quotes throughout the book are taken from online questionnaires, interviews, and anonymous feedback from campers over the years.

There is a slight bias in the collection of data, as those who have had positive camp experiences are more likely to participate in interview requests and online questionnaires. Improvement ideas and constructive criticism were also gathered – fortunately, as the book was not intended to be a glossy advertisement but rather a genuine non-fiction book that deals with different aspects of the camps.

Old and new through my own eyes

I myself attended the KONE Global Youth Camp at the age of 15 in summer 1991. At the time, it felt to me like a scout camp with an international twist: we stood in lines to raise the flag, learned first aid skills, raced in rowboats, competed in various yard games, and hung out at the disco.

I participated in the camp again in 2024, now as a staff member and, above all, as a writer. Much had changed at the camp, as in society in general. The atmosphere was more permissive and relaxed, and the importance of competitions was less emphasized. The focus had shifted toward the themes of equality, empathy, and teamwork. The range of countries represented among the campers had increased: many Asians

participated, and the proportion of Europeans was clearly smaller. There were also fewer Finns.

Much remained the same, too. A hundred international teenagers, first cautiously getting to know each other and struggling with their English, then making friends and finally hugging each other goodbye as best friends. There were a lot of organized activities, but also plenty of time to chill and relax with new friends. The staff members still joked around but were reliable adults when needed. I remember it all from my own camp experience more than 30 years ago.

When it is time to leave camp, everyone has new friends from all over the world, just like we had. Fortunately, keeping in touch is much easier now than it was before the internet.

Instilling an international outlook

In a young person's life, small things can change the direction they take in ways that are only revealed later. While writing this book, I met many former campers who had gone on to study abroad and are now working in international careers. Many said that their early international experiences gave them the courage to make life-changing decisions later on.

I recognize the feeling. After my first camp, I applied to be an exchange student in Venezuela – simply because I had met a cheerful Venezuelan camper. The exchange experience led me to study languages and cultures at university, which eventually shaped my international career.

Although a single week at camp did not transform my life completely, it did open doors to new adventures. I believe that many share this feeling, and I hope that I succeed in conveying the international magic of the camp in more detail in the pages of this book.

Helsinki, January 31, 2025
Esa Salminen

Opening the Doors to FAR-OFF FINLAND

The KONE Global Youth Camp begins with the arrival of foreign youth to stay with Finnish host families. This offers them a soft landing and a moment to catch their breath. Although the time spent with host families is important, there has been a shortage of host families since the mid-1990s.

It was my first time on a plane and going abroad. I was a bit reluctant to leave my parents and couldn't help but cry at the airport. John recognized me right away at the airport. I was so happy that I forgot all the tiredness and unhappiness of the trip. Hello Finland! My dream! I was here.

DIARY OF A CAMPER
FROM CHINA, 1998

AROUND A HUNDRED YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD travel to the KONE Global Youth Camp each year. Many are surprised when they are greeted by name at the airport. Current camp manager Jere Santala makes sure to learn the names of each camper in advance.

"The young people are often nervous and shy when they arrive, so it serves as a good icebreaker to welcome them by name," Jere says.

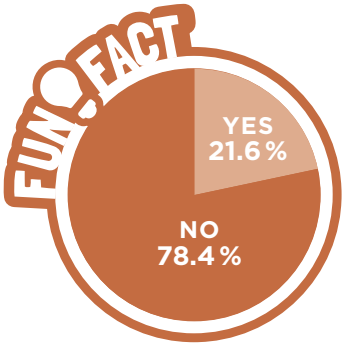
Welcoming the young arrivals by name is a tradition started by John Simon, who served as camp director from 1994 to 2008. He also learned about the hobbies of the young people and gave staff members the task of learning the names of all the campers ahead of time. Many staff members still try to learn the names in advance, although not everyone succeeds.

First independent adventure

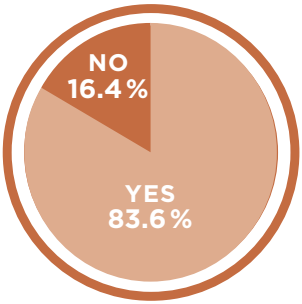
The aim is to make the young people feel at home right from the start, as most of them are traveling abroad on their own for the first time. This has been the case throughout the history of the international camp.

"I had traveled before with my parents, but never alone," says Stefan Mackensen from Germany, who attended the very first KONE Global Youth Camp in 1979.

Traveling was more challenging back then: flights were expensive and preparing for a trip required more effort. Without the internet, it was difficult to research what it would be like in Finland. Stefan's father had told him something about his job at KONE and mentioned the names of a few colleagues, but he did not know much else. Stefan remembers how strange it was that Finnish television programs were in English with subtitles, since in Germany all foreign TV programs were dubbed.



Was attending camp your first trip abroad?



Was it the first time you traveled abroad alone?

SOURCE: SURVEY OF CAMPERS WHO ATTENDED IN THE 2000S

The world much larger back then, and Finland remained an unfamiliar place for a long time. Torsten Seidel, also from Germany, attended the camp in 1988 and 1989.

"I was 15 and excited to be going to such an exotic place. It was also my first time flying – big steps for a shy teenager," Torsten recalls.

Finland was not talked about much in Germany. All Torsten knew was that Finland was a country on the edge of Europe with good winter athletes. The only Finnish name he recognized was ski jumper Matti Nykänen.

"I remember how puzzled the bank teller in Germany looked when I ordered Finnish markka," Torsten says.

Initial stay with host families

Campers arriving in Finland from abroad are always placed initially with host families, usually for up to a week.

"It was awesome to have an experience in a family. It's different from a regular vacation, and you can learn a lot about other people," says Stefan Mackensen.

Former campers often look back fondly on their time with their host families. The best memories tend to come from everyday experiences: taking a sauna and going swimming, exploring the forest and heading into town, cycling, playing familiar and new games, cooking new dishes together and going on picnics. They often remember learning their first few Finnish words.

In many countries, young people do not leave home without their parents, so campers have enjoyed having other young people show them around. Some also remember taking pictures in front of the KONE headquarters and sending photos to their parents.

Even lighter cultural experiences have been memorable. A Dutch camper from the early 1990s recalls sitting in a car with the host family's elder brother and his girlfriend and driving around Hyvinkää. It was during these cruises that he fell in love with Guns N' Roses.

We have served as a host family many times, so all of us are used to it and look forward to when someone will come again. It is always exciting to see what kind of young person will be staying with us, but so far everyone has been very social, open, and eager to participate in everything.

HOST FAMILY

Everyone gets nervous

The eyes of the young visitors are usually wide open when they arrive, because their bodies are full of adrenaline. Everything is still ahead of them, and the new environment is exciting.

"I was scared at first. I thought I wouldn't fit in with the family because I didn't know the language," says a 17-year-old Mexican who attended the camp in 2024.

Receiving visitors is also exciting for the host families.

"I was really anxious, wondering if our young guests would feel at home with us and like our home and me, or if they would be bored," says Iiris Herlin, whose family hosted for the first time in 2022.

Iiris felt apprehensive even though her childhood home had hosted campers, and she herself has participated as both a camper and a staff member. She welcomed two young people who were quiet at first but warmed up quickly. They went grocery shopping together, and the young guests were happy when Iiris suggested that they

make a simple pasta for dinner. On the second evening, they made pizza together, and everyone got to choose their own toppings.

On the last evening, Iiris taught card games and gave the young guests a deck of cards if they wanted to teach the games to other campers. Iiris loved having teenagers at home, because her own children were still small.

"It's such a fun age, and such great conversations. Teens are on the verge of adulthood, yet they are still children who need to be taken care of."

Soft landing

Time with host families offers young people a gentle introduction to everyday Finnish life and the multicultural hustle and bustle of the camp.

Many young people from abroad get their first taste of the Finnish sauna while staying with their host families, which comes in helpful at the camp, where the sauna is heated every day. They often also become familiar with the silence and nature of Finland with their host families. Those coming from big cities may think that there are no people or cars in Finland, only fields, trees and green everywhere. The safe conditions and clean tap water also astonish many of the teens, which may also make their host families more aware of how good many things really are in Finland.

Some of the young people travel to Finland from a different time zone, which is something to take into account in the first few days. Both former campers and host families recall that they may go to sleep early at first, and that their bodies may feel strange as their eating patterns change. The time difference can also add to their homesickness, as they cannot always contact home when they would like to.

Emotions may vary in other ways too. A camper from Mexico recalls that she started to cry when the host family's mother was so sweet and loving, because she reminded her of her own mother.

"Then I remembered it was five o'clock in the morning at home, and I couldn't call my mom."

We often remember and quote our Chinese guest's sauna and swimming experience. First it was so hot on the sauna bench – "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die" – and then it was so cold in the lake that the same comments were repeated: "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die".

HOST FAMILY

I was pretty nervous at first, because I didn't speak much English as an eight-year-old. The boys were really nice, and both wanted to play in the yard, even though we didn't really understand each other.

CHILD OF A FINNISH HOST FAMILY

A positive experience, even with small children

Typically, host families are motivated by the desire to provide their own children with international experiences. The families are usually happy with the outcome, but since both the host families' children and the young people who arrive as guests are individuals, experiences vary. Sometimes small children get frustrated when their parents suddenly speak English. However, younger children are often very curious towards their guests.

The first time Mirka Jokiniemi and her family decided to host, her children were two and four. They were "terribly interested" in their foreign guests, despite not having a common language. Their journey as a host family began in 2003 and continued for nearly 20 years.

"I fell in love with hosting," Mirka admits.

Mirka Jokiniemi has helped develop host family activities.

It's really cool talking to the younger kids and trying to communicate despite the large language barrier.

CAMPER IN 2024, AUSTRALIA, AGE 14

Throughout the children's childhood and adolescence, summer visitors were an important part of the family's vacations. Thanks to this tradition, the children quickly learned the basics of English, and they have never been shy with languages. Mirka believes that the children's good language scores at school are at least partly due to this.

"We would start discussing early in the spring about which countries we would like to welcome campers from that year," Mirka recalls. Sometimes Mirka suggested taking a break from welcoming campers, but the children would not hear of such a thing.

When Mirka's children became teenagers, they both attended all three camps from the ages of 15 to 17. This is the case with many families, and the international camp experience can be an important part of their lives for a long time. It was only when the children became adults that Mirka's energy for acting as a host family began to wane.

"Once I had raised my own teenagers, I didn't have the energy to care for teens in my home anymore," she laughs. Nevertheless, Mirka has continued to participate in the camps as a staff member.

Activities and caring

Many families who plan to host a camper may worry about whether they will be able to come up with meaningful activities for their foreign guests. Many solve this challenge by taking on more than one camper. Mirka, for example, always wanted four young people, preferably as diverse as possible: different languages, different religions, and always two girls and two boys. For her, the combination worked well.

In the early years, Mirka tried to come up with lots of activities and excursions for the young people, but she soon realized that the schedule did not require much effort. The young people came up with things to do themselves with the family's own children. One great activity was to go to the beach and let the children have fun together there.

Families often host at least two campers, as this way the young people have support and company from each other. Although it is not a good idea to put too much pressure on them and plan too many activities, it is also not a good idea to be too lax with guests.

"If you want the young people to have a good time, you need to provide care and guidance," says Hanna-Leena Islander, who has hosted campers for many years.

In her opinion, being a host family requires some planning and preparation: you have to cook plenty of food and find places to sleep. Some families free up one of the children's rooms for guests, while others build a twin bed for the whole group. Young people often like to talk to each other late into the night, and sharing a room gives them a chance to chat quietly.

It is also important to provide encouragement and support. According to Hanna-Leena, it is worth the effort. The campers themselves feel that it is important to have the host families present. Negative feedback has mainly been given if the host family has not spent time with the young people and they have felt left alone.

AN INTERESTING SIGHT ON THE STREETS OF HYVINKÄÄ

In the 1980s, the majority of Finnish campers came from Hyvinkää, where the KONE elevator and crane factories and offices were located. The elevator factory is still located Hyvinkää. In those days, approximately half of the campers were from Finland, and each host family usually had one foreign guest. As a result, during the host family week, the streets of Hyvinkää had an unusually international atmosphere.

"It really sparked a lot of interest in the town when a huge group of people who spoke something other than Finnish would flock there on Friday and Saturday evenings," recalls Minna Karhunen, who spent a portion of nearly every summer at KONE camps in the 1980s. "There was always a crowd around us."

Bicycles were loaned to the foreign guests, and the whole group would cycle to Usmi beach to swim or sit on the bridge over the Hämeenkatu street in the evenings. And, true to the spirit of the 1980s, sometimes they might even enjoy a little drink in the nearby forest.

"It was an awesome week with those people," says Minna. "We got to know each other really well."

The host family was very warm and made me feel comfortable. We made food like salad and strawberry dessert together. We looked at photos of the host family members and taught each other our own languages.

CAMPER IN 2013–2014, HONG KONG, AGES 15–16

Food makes culture tangible

Few things make cultures and their differences more tangible than sharing a meal. The way Finns eat can sometimes be puzzling to visitors. Dinner so early? Hot meals for lunch? Have you really never eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?

"We ate quietly with our host family," says a 17-year-old camper from Mexico. "At home, we are never quiet, at least not at the dinner table. In Finland, people respect people's right to eat in peace."

Before mobile phones had translating apps, host families would enquire about possible allergies by drawing pictures, for example. Nowadays, such issues are addressed in pre-camp information forms. Food preferences can still be problematic, however, as some young people are selective while others like everything. Host families have various coping strategies for this: some give guests a questionnaire about their favorite foods and what they usually eat at each meal, while others take the young people with them to the grocery store.

One guest from Thailand missed having noodles at breakfast, and we once received popcorn as a gift from an American guest.

HOST FAMILY

"The host family's mother asked me what food I was used to," says another Mexican camper. "I replied that I usually eat bread and eggs in the morning. When she came from the store, she had bought me dozens of eggs and white bread, and I ran over to her excitedly. I missed my eggs."

Generally, the young people are open to trying Finnish food. They typically like classics like macaroni casserole and meatballs, and many say they especially enjoyed trying salmon, Karelian pies, and berries.

Organized activities for host families

In the early days of the global youth camp, families would have to come up with activities for the young people for an entire week. This led to some negative feedback in the 1990s, as the host parents may have been working full time and found it difficult to oversee all the activities.

Nowadays, host families are responsible for a long weekend, which also includes organized activities together with the other campers. These have included making pancakes at the lake or going to the trampoline park. The organized activities allow the campers to get to know each other and the host families to enjoy a break, not having to think of activities for every single day.

The joint barbecue was the brainchild of long-time host Mirka Jokiniemi. In the early years, she invited other host families to her home for a barbecue – and many still do. If you happen to work at KONE, you get to know your colleagues in slightly different circles.

Before long, the home grilling areas and yards grew too small. For a few years, Mirka and other host families rented a grilling area from the City of Riihimäki for a few hours, and when that proved popular, Mirka suggested the barbecue day be included in the camp's program. This is how a tradition was born that is still going strong, and around a hundred people gather around the grill each year.

We visited the forest at the campsite, where I met a lot of the staff members and campers already. There was a very large lake there, which is said to date back to the Ice Age. I saw a non-venomous water snake, and we visited the market and bought Finnish chocolate.

DIARY OF A CAMPER FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, 2024

"It's a safe way for young people to get to know each other. They can always come and hang out with their host family if they don't immediately find other young people they feel comfortable with," says Mirka.

A day at the lake

The actual camp program usually begins with so-called Lake Day, which was previously called Hyvinkää Day as it used to be held in Hyvinkää. On Lake Day, all the campers and staff members get together for the first time. The tradition began under John Simon's leadership in 1995.

"We used to gather on the sports field to play games we knew from kindergarten," John describes.

The idea was for every camper to get to know at least half a dozen other campers from different countries. Some of the games were intentionally physical, so they involved a little touching – a pleasant touch has been shown to increase trust between

people. Popular activities in the early years included a handcar rally at the Finnish Railway Museum and church boat rowing races, which required the young people to work together as teams in a physical capacity.

"We wanted to ensure nobody would feel left out. And everyone could see that almost none of the others spoke fluent English, and it wasn't a problem," John says.

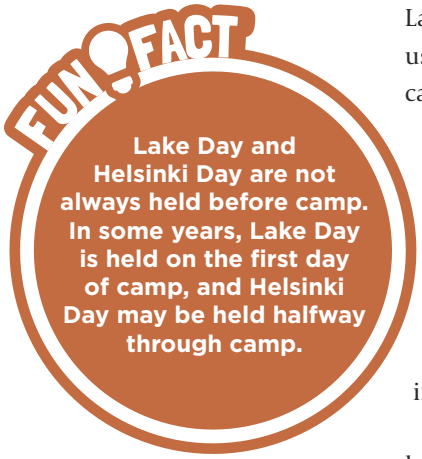
According to Magda Kotowska, a camper from Poland who attended in 2017, Lake Day dissipated a lot of nervous energy, after which camp no longer seemed so scary.

"I saw how many of us there were, and I got to know so many. It was cool."

Lake Day also gives the young people their first taste of the camp's spirit and customs.

"They wondered if we were going to start yelling at them and demanding things. And then we played," John says.

Typically, the young people return to their host families to spend the night after Lake Day, but it is still considered the first day of camp. The children of host families usually participate in Lake Day, and many of them think of it as a fun way to see what camp is about.



Getting to know Helsinki

Lake Day is often followed by Helsinki Day. A visit to the Finnish capital has been a part of the KONE Global Youth Camp program since the beginning. In some years, a trip to Porvoo has been added, and quite often a visit to the KONE factory in Hyvinkää.

Nowadays, campers are given various tasks for Helsinki Day. Together with a group leader, they go sightseeing in the form of urban orienteering. The idea is for the campers to get to know each other while also getting to see the capital and learn a little about Finland at the same time.

The urban orienteering is competitive, and groups are offered a variety of physical, creative, historical, and problem-solving tasks. At the same time, the campers get to know Finnish people, as the challenges include asking for advice or performing for the locals.

In Finland, you can see lots of forests and grassland everywhere, even in modern cities, among the shops and along the streets. Green trees and flowers surround us everywhere.

DIARY OF A CAMPER FROM CHINA, 1998

Often on Helsinki Day the campers participate in a trade-up challenge with the locals. For example, the groups are given a paper clip, which they then have to trade for something better, and so on. The winner is the group that has the best item in their possession at the end of the day. Groups have been known to carry large sets of encyclopedias or boxes of strawberries around the city, and sometimes they have spent a long time talking to the elderly in parks.

The most valuable acquired item to date was a Sartoria Rossi pocket handkerchief, traded in a store, with a retail value of 80 euros. The most interesting political item was the pen of Paavo Lipponen, a former prime minister. The group had run into him on the street and had a chat. The encounter led to a good discussion about running into

The prices were a bit high for me, but maybe they are ok for Finns because they get paid in euros. The mother of the host family took us to the shopping mall. She bought a handbag without hesitation, which was a bit of a shock to me.

CAMPER IN 2018, CHINA, AGE 16

Finnish politicians walking down the street with no security guards. The group also discussed the important agreements that Lipponen's pen might have signed.

At the end of Helsinki Day, the young people get to visit Linnanmäki Amusement Park, where they can walk around freely without any more tasks. The children of host families are welcome to participate in all activities throughout the day, and entire families are invited to join in the fun at the amusement park.

Not just for families of KONE employees

In the early days of the KONE Global Youth Camp, there were roughly the same number of Finnish and foreign campers. Since then, the number of Finnish campers has decreased, and as KONE has become more international, demand from abroad has increased. As a result, there is a great need these days also for host families who do not have their own children attending the camp.

One such family was Reeta Kalmari's childhood home. Her family hosted campers from 2009 to 2013, when Reeta herself was a teenager. Her father was a teacher, and one of his colleagues had told him about the host family program in the teachers' lounge.

"It sounded like a lot of fun," Reeta says. She had always been interested in cultures and languages. Despite not being able to attend camp herself as a teenager, even serving as a host family was nice.

"I told my mother I'd work for KONE when I grew up, so my kids could attend the KONE camp," Reeta says.

The experience was always positive and educational. It was a good way to learn English, even if the visits were short. It gave plenty of experience in intercultural communication, as campers arrived from Austria, Canada, England, France, the Netherlands, and Taiwan. The first year, Reeta and her siblings were young and shy about speaking English, but the campers were usually friendly, and Reeta got up the courage to spend time with them.

"The young people have chosen to come to camp, so they're interested in gaining new experiences."

One year, we hosted a boy from Japan. At bedtime, we wondered why he wasn't coming to brush his teeth. We heard him talking in his room. He had called home in a panic because he couldn't open his suitcase.

HOST FAMILY

"What do they care about us old people?"

Riitta Selenius and her husband were 56 years old when the couple decided to become a host family for two 15-year-old girls. Their own son had already moved out of the house.

"We have a big house and a lovely garden, and we were thinking about what to do with all this space," Riitta says. She was also keen to dust off her English skills. She was nervous when they picked up the girls from the airport.

"I thought, 'What do they care about us old people, when we don't even have kids at home?'"

One of the teens was from Denmark, the other from Russia. The year was 2009. The girls got their own rooms and were given time to get to know each other first. Before long, they warmed up to their hosts. Riitta and her husband showed the girls around

A special moment was when Iiris taught us solitaire and other classic analog games, which made a big impression on me. We also went to the beach, which was definitely a highlight of the trip.

CAMPER IN 2023, GERMANY, AGE 17

their hometown, Järvenpää, on bicycles, took them to the Heureka science center, played Texas hold 'em with their grownup son, and cooked together.

"It was wonderful," Riitta confirms.

As was customary, one of the days at camp was Visitors Day.

"We arrived a little late. We thought the girls wouldn't remember us 'old folks' and would have adjusted to camp life," Riitta recalls. "But what was so special is that the two girls were actually waiting for us at the parking lot and hugged us when we got out of the car. It brought tears to my eyes."

Luckily, Riitta had small gifts for the girls to take home with them after camp: Moomin, Fazer and Finlayson. A week after the girls left, a courier delivered a large bouquet of flowers and a card filled with hearts.

“Our discussions became deeper”

Mirka Jokiniemi’s family hosted for the last time in 2018. For a long time, spending time with the campers had been a song and dance – light-hearted times together, getting to know each other, and learning about different cultures. In recent years, Mirka noticed a change. Discussions about world affairs became deeper.

“When there was a tsunami, war or earthquake somewhere, we thought about them a lot.”

Mirka suspects that young people were learning about events around the world instantly through social media. Young people could tell each other what a natural disaster does to the environment or how it feels when a cousin lost their home. It had not occurred to many that those things happened to ordinary people like themselves.

“As the years passed, we talked about these things more openly than before,” Mirka says. “I felt like the young people wanted to talk and understand, and they didn’t necessarily have all the means to deal with such issues.”

Enduring relationships

Long-time camp director John Simon recalls some fun feedback. The parents of a young man from the United States had messaged John and asked him to thank his host family. The host family’s parents had been very kind and friendly, but the young man could not remember their names. They hoped John could find them in the paperwork and convey their thanks.

“The hosts in question were Tiina and Antti Herlin,” John says. “The boy had spent four days in their home and hadn’t realized it was the family of the owner of KONE.”

Often, however, the young people do remember the names, and many host families say they are Facebook friends with their former guests. Many pay their host families a visit later on, and the children of even more host families have met up with former guests while traveling abroad.

CHANGES TO CAMP SIZE AND COMPOSITION

The first KONE Global Youth Camp in 1979 had approximately a hundred young people, of whom just under half – 47 – were from abroad. KONE was used to organizing camps for over a hundred children, but it was more challenging with teenagers. As a result, the size of the camp was reduced in the 1980s. For the first half of the 1980s, there were 50–60 campers, and just under half of them came from outside Finland.

In the latter half of the 1980s, the size of the camp was increased to about 80 people, and the proportion of Finns gradually became a minority: in the early 1990s, there were just over 80 young people at the camp, of whom just under 30 were from Finland.

In 1994, two turning points occurred that explain the decrease in the number of Finnish campers. The first was when KONE sold its crane business, which meant that Finnish kids whose parents worked in the crane business could no longer attend the camp. At the same time, the number of potential host families decreased. In the same year, KONE's children's camps, which had attracted the families of employees to the camps, were discontinued. The last children's camp was organized in 1993.

The children's camps had been a good way to find host families also for the KONE Global Youth Camp, says Aarre Mäki, who preceded John Simon as camp director. Even if a family's

own children were still too young to attend the international camp, many were still keen to host young people from abroad, since the camp environment was already so familiar and cherished.

By the 2000s, the number of campers had grown to about a hundred, with only twenty or so coming from Finland. The number of Finns who are allowed to attend is not limited; everyone is welcome, especially as they help create more available host families. In fact, the camp could currently benefit from having more Finnish youth: in 2024, just 18 campers out of a total of 106 were Finns.

Growing need for host families in the 2020s

The long-term shortage of host families worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some long-term families dropped out of hosting when the camps were forced to close for the duration of the pandemic.

KONE was in the midst of change negotiations at the same time. Camp manager Jere Santala understands that opening the doors of one's home for an employer's youth camp is not attractive if one's own job or that of a colleague is under threat. However, that does not fully explain the downward trend. Jere believes that the spirit of volunteering and the culture of working together have diminished in Finnish society in general.

"Somehow it feels like it's getting harder to find families every year," he admits.

The camp could take in a few more young people if there were enough host families. At the same time, however, it is important to keep the numbers manageable in order to preserve the spirit of the camps.

From a week to a long weekend

The host family week was shortened from a full week to five days in the 1990s, and in recent years the campers have spent only a long weekend with their host families. The idea has been to lessen the burden on host families.

"On the other hand, some of the families still believe that a longer period would provide a deeper, better experience," says the current camp director Carina Herlin.

It is often the case that once they have crossed the threshold, families are willing to host again. The idea of paying the host families has come up, but in principle it is better to keep the host families involved for reasons other than compensation.

Creating the CAMP BUBBLE

The first order of business is to break the ice and put up tents. The nervous energy begins to fade, and campers get used to the Finnish nature. But how are the campers selected? Where did it all start?

Camp taught me how to seek out friends and connections. If you don't make the first move to gain friends, often you don't become friends.

CAMPER IN 2018,
USA, AGE 17

THE CAMPERS STEP OFF THE BUSES, FACES SERIOUS, BROWS SLIGHTLY furrowed. The young people check out each other, the campsite, and the staff members. Here we go again, many of the staff are thinking.

Bags are set aside, and one of the long-time staff members says a few words of welcome. The new arrivals are handed a photo of another camper, and their task is to find that person and hand him or her the photo. The photo has a group number on it, indicating which group she or he belongs to. This is how the camp groups are formed.

The groups immediately get to work. In recent years, one of the main events has been *100 Tasks*: a list of sports-related or silly group tasks that the groups must perform in front of the staff members as quickly as possible. The order of the performances is determined by a roll of the dice. The tasks help the campers get to know each other and the ways of the camp.

A safe group that supports everyone

The purpose of the first activities is to create a safe group where everyone has fun and develops the courage to do things. Silly games and loud activities that make the campers sweat and bump into each other are helpful.

The pedagogic term for the purposeful creation of team spirit is grouping. In a Finnish pedagogic classic, *Ryppäästä ryhmäksi ("From a Bunch to a Group"),* educator Mikko Aalto emphasizes the importance of a safe group to a person's ability to open up and grow; when people trust each other, a sense of security develops between them, and the safer a person feels in the group, the more they open up.

FUN FACT

On the first day, campers and staff members are assigned a secret friend who will be given a small token of appreciation every day, such as a letter, candy, or handicraft.

"A safe group consists of trust, openness, acceptance, support, and commitment to the group. Trust requires an individual to be open and courageous in sharing their thoughts for the common good. Nurturing trust requires the acceptance of the entire group," Aalto writes. "The importance of trust is particularly emphasized in activities in which group members are physically dependent on each other."

Staff member Juho Niskanen referred to Aalto's book extensively when he studied to be a youth counselor and was actively involved in developing the pedagogy of the KONE Global Youth Camp in the early 2000s. The book contains over 500 exercises for group building, many of which have been used in the camp program.

Effective grouping eliminates cliques, reduces the possibility of bullying, and prevents exclusion. As Tapani Ketola says in his book *Leirituuli ("Camp Wind")*, another classic book for organizing camps: "On the first day of camp, worlds and people

unknown to each other meet. There is nervous energy, fear, and doubt in the air. An encouraging and fair attitude towards campers builds connections and provides a model for how the camp should operate."

At an international camp, young people can feel especially nervous about different cultures. That is why at the KONE Global Youth Camp, small groups are divided in advance with as few people as possible from the same language groups. At the very first international camp in 1979, groups were formed by country, but this was quickly abandoned, as one of the basic ideas of the camp has always been internationality.

It is important to set the right tone from the start at camp. Ketola recommends that opening activities should be engaging, short and suitably relaxed. "A positive start to the camp also involves something to eat," Ketola adds. This means that as soon as the youth feel comfortable with their group, it is time to eat.

> **The camp was organized so that everyone belonged. Though everyone made their own friends at camp, the camp made sure groups were mixed, which was awesome – it gave us a chance to get to know more people.**
>
> CAMPER IN 2008–2010, FINLAND, AGES 14–16

Tent buddies

After lunch, it is time for the sleeping arrangements. The young people sleep in four-person tents, and they get to choose their own tent buddies. The tents are separated into areas for girls and boys.

Tents have been the cornerstone of the camp since the early days of children's camps. At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, the first camps had a couple of large US Army surplus tents that could accommodate dozens of children each. In the 1950s, special Naiger-style tents were ordered from a tent sewing factory in Espoo that could accommodate six to eight children. At the KONE Global Youth Camp, similar tents usually accommodate four young people each.

At the children's camps, KONE employees would voluntarily set up the tents in advance, but campers had to fill their own mattresses. It was done just like in the military: the children fetched straw from the root cellar, and everyone filled their own mattress bags. Then the bags were sewn shut. The very youngest children were allowed to sleep indoors, which was also the case for anyone who happened to catch a cold.

The first night was weird because it doesn't get dark until really late, but that was also very interesting. It gets cold at night so sleeping in the tent was a bit uncomfortable, but we were prepared for that.

CAMPER IN 2022, CROATIA, AGE 17

From the very beginning, some campers brought their own blanket or sleeping bag, but many did not yet have such a luxury. That is why the campers had to be provided with old army blankets. Being wool, they warmed up quite nicely.

Nowadays, a sleeping bag is mandatory for the young people, who are reminded many times before camp, also with pictures. Still, some campers show up without one. One summer, a young man crawled out of his tent after the first night, shivering from the cold. It turned out that he did not have a sleeping bag and, instead of speaking up, had used a damp towel as a blanket. Fortunately, the camp had a collection of sleeping bags left behind by campers from previous years, and the young man was able to sleep warmly the following nights.

Sleeping in tents can be an adventure

These days, the campers usually set up their tents by themselves on wooden pallets, and everyone gets a foam mattress from the camp. The setup process tends to be a bit haphazard.

"Only maybe 1.5 of staff members know how to pitch a tent, even though most of them are former campers," says long-time staff member Juho Niskanen. He may be exaggerating a bit, but the eye roll is genuine. Before long, the young people start to chuckle at the joint effort, and gradually the tents get put up somehow.

"The tents were comfortable enough," says Stefan Mackensen, recalling the first KONE Global Youth Camp in 1979. The only problem was the mosquitoes, which were plentiful in the forest. Stefan counted 29 mosquito bites on his face in just one night. Mosquito repellant was available in Finland back then, but according to Stefan's recollection, there was none at the camp.

Mosquito repellant is now available to campers around the clock, which attracts a lot of positive feedback. Mosquitos can be a new experience for people who did not know how many of them there are in Finland. Finnish people are sometimes surprised by the reaction of foreigners to mosquitoes, because by late summer, Finns are immune to the bites and often do not even notice them anymore. It may seem to Finns that the mosquitoes have disappeared, but their foreign friends still suffer, swatting at their limbs.

Camping is no longer a very common hobby, and sleeping in a tent is a new experience for many young people.

"It was my first time sleeping in a tent and a sleeping bag," said a 17-year-old Chinese camper in 2024. "I was pretty worried about the bugs, but luckily, the unwelcome guests didn't bother us."

Sleeping in a tent often feels exotic. Tent buddies are a close-knit group who enjoy a bit of chatting before falling asleep. The sounds of nature can be heard from the forest, and occasionally raindrops patter on the fabric of the tent. The sun rises around five o'clock in the morning, and the birds wake up and start singing. Some of the campers say they miss their beds, but few complain out loud about the tent experience. After all, the tent and its tiny community of tent buddies are part of the camp experience – a small adventure to get through together.

> **The tents could have been together. It would have been more fun to have boys close by. Except boys who smoke.**
>
> CAMPER IN 1994, THE NETHERLANDS

FUN FACT

Finland has what is called Everyone's Rights or Freedom to Roam, which means that everyone has the right to move around in nature and pick berries freely, as long as they stay away from other people's yards.

TENT INSPECTIONS, A FORGOTTEN CAMP TRADITION

At the children's camps, tents were inspected each morning, and the cleanest one received a winner's pennant. Staff members made sure the same tent did not win every morning.

The pennant was a great honor. Campers worked hard for it and peeked into the winners' tents to see what had been done better. Being the winner was especially sweet on the day parents came to visit. Cleaning the tent taught the children to care for their belongings. When the beds were made and the tent was aired, bedclothes and other items had time to dry before nightfall if it had rained during the night.

Keeping tents clean was a matter of strict obedience from the first decades of the children's camps to the mid-1990s. The children and young people also had to take turns setting the tables, washing the dishes, and peeling potatoes. In 1994, the new camp director John Simon slackened the rules, earning praise from a former anonymous camper.

"The camp was totally different," the young person said. "We didn't have to do the dishes, which was awesome. We didn't have to keep our tents spick and span, and I think that's good. What do clean tents have to do with how the camp runs?"

Nowadays, campers are simply monitored to make sure the fabric on their tents is taut in case of rain and that larger items are kept inside.

In nature in a natural way

Campsites are familiar to most Finns: surrounded by forests, next to the water, a sauna, campfire pit, and separate buildings where you can eat, do laundry and organize activities if the weather is bad. Some of the young people arriving from abroad have the opportunity to discover the Finnish nature already with their host families, and all of them get to do so when they get to camp.

"The best part was walking in the forest," said a 17-year-old Chinese camper in 2024 who had hiked in the mountains of China, but never off-road. Walking along roads is easy compared to stepping off forest paths into the woods, feet slipping between roots, moss, and rocks. "I felt something move in my hair and pulled out a spider. I still can't believe I stayed calm and threw it away!"

The more campers spend time in nature, the more it becomes part of them. Ronja Verkasalo, a staff member from 1995 to 2007, remembers how some of the girls struggled to apply their makeup in the tent. Ronja remembers a girl who kept layering new mascara on top of the old every morning. "Others tried to put on their makeup for the first couple days, but gradually, their natural side emerged. They began walking around with messy hair, not worrying about their appearance after a swim in the lake."

Ronja considers it important that there are not mirrors all over camp, so that the young people do not constantly think about how other people see them. Since Ronja's camp days, smartphones have taken over, so the magic of not being able to see yourself in a mirror has perhaps been undermined.

Ronja notes that the attitude of young people towards the surrounding nature can also change at camp. One year, a young person from the United States told Ronja that they could not eat anything from the ground. This led to a conversation about where potatoes come from. Ronja feels Finns sometimes take nature for granted. For those whose connection to nature is weaker, the chance to walk barefoot, sit by a campfire, and pick blueberries from the forest can be more meaningful.

"It can be a great experience for those coming from another country. They may have been brought up to think that the ground is dirty, that they must always wear shoes, and that they can't touch anything in the wild."

I saw deer running. It was really beautiful. The air in Finland is really fresh, and I loved the weather!

CAMPER IN 2024, INDIA, AGE 16

2017 to present

Siikaniemi. In 2017, the Siikaniemi Course Center, owned by Lahti Parish, was chosen as the new camp location. It is significantly larger than Rantalahti and offers the most modern facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic and a renovation in 2023 disrupted operations, but the camp returned to Siikaniemi in 2024.

1997–2016

Rantalahti. Eventually, a long-term agreement was reached with Janakkala Parish for the use of the Rantalahti campsite. Rantalahti was an idyllic location surrounded by nature, but after 20 years it began to get too small, and it was time to look for a new home.

1977–1994

Tourun Torpat. KONE purchased the Tourun Torpat holiday village in Urjala, on the shores of the Vehkajärvi lake. The 15-hectare area had 16 holiday cottages, a restaurant, an office, a caretaker's residence and saunas. A covered hall was also built in the area, where various events and evening discos could be held even in heavy rain. It has been suggested that Tourun Torpat was such a fine setting, and so much nicer than Sääksjärvi, that it inspired KONE to establish an international camp there.

1971–1976

Sääksjärvi. The children's camps moved from Konekari to the Nurmijärvi municipality's recreational area on the shores of the Sääksjärvi lake. Compared to Konekari, Sääksjärvi was a huge area, and its facilities were considered by many to be inferior, and downright miserable in rainy weather. KONE was willing to develop the area, as it could also be used for educational purposes in the winter. However, an agreement with the municipality could not be reached.

1995–1996

Temporarily in Kiljava. When KONE sold Tourun Torpat, the camp needed a new home. In 1995, the camp was held at the Helsinki Scouts camp center in the village of Kiljava in Nurmijärvi and in 1996 at the Haukilampi campsite, also in Kiljava. Finding a place was difficult, because all the campsites were busy in the summer.

1947–1948

Jollas. The first children's camps were held in eastern Helsinki on the grounds of Jollas Manor. These camps were relatively small: the first camp was attended by just 21 children.

1949–1970

Konekari. In 1949, KONE purchased the island of Vasikkaluoto off Tammisalo in Helsinki as a recreational place for employees – first the northern side and the center, then the rest of the island in 1952. A competition was held among employees to name the island, and "Konekari" was selected as the winner. Families could rent rooms in the summer, and the island was an ideal place for organizing camps.

Lunchbreak at the camp in 1948.

FIRST CHILDREN'S CAMP IN 1947, FIRST KONE GLOBAL YOUTH CAMP IN 1979

The first KONE children's camp was held from Thursday July 31 to Sunday August 3, 1947 on the grounds of Jollas Manor in eastern Helsinki. It was an experiment, with 21 children of employees attending. The camp experience started in front of the KONE factory and headquarters in Helsinki, on the corner of Haapaniemienkatu and Sörnäisten rantatie. The premises now house the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

"A flatbed truck equipped with benches filled up quickly, and the journey to the campsite in Jollas could begin with the sun smiling in the sky," read the article in KONE's employee magazine *Hissilehti*, presumably penned by its editor-in-chief, camp director Osmo "Nasku" Vesikansa.

Osmo and two boy scouts had been busy the night before, pitching large tents for the children. The campers got to help clear the campsite of

twigs. A couple of extra tents were also put up, and the children helped make wooden benches and tables for eating. In addition, a festive camp gate was made, which served to unite the campers into one big family.

On the first day of camp, the children competed in identifying natural objects, learned about landmarks, went swimming and played.

"At the end of the day, the campers gathered for an evening together, where they drank tea and enjoyed a short entertainment program, but by ten o'clock both the girls and the boys were already asleep in their own tents. For many, it was their first night sleeping in a tent, but there were also many camping veterans among them, those who had already attended scout, pioneer, parish or sports camps," read the article in *Hissilehti*.

It rained throughout the first night, and some of the children's belongings got wet. However, they soon forgot about it. On the second day, they competed in tracking animals and played Capture the Flag. At the evening campfire, the girls competed against the boys to present the best program number. Osmo told an evening story about two birch trees, after which they locked arms in a camp circle, sang a closing song, and finally climbed back into their tents, exhausted.

Saturday was Camp Olympics, and the children were divided into four teams. They competed in fun events, such as relay races, boot running, throwing games and a version of the triple jump, but also drawing and making a camp museum. The teams found over 40 imaginative items for the camp museum, including Rembrandt's first brush, one of Moses's stone tablets, Adam's jawbone, Cleopatra's slippers, and a feather from Eve's canary.

The last day, Sunday, was Visitors Day. Parents could watch some of the events from the Camp Olympics, and they also had their own events, including ball relays and powder blowing competitions. The fathers beat the mothers, and the winners of the Camp Olympics received bags of licorice.

Considering the number of campers, there were plenty of staff members: 11 altogether. Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa were in charge of the program along with former KONE employee

Rudolf Nyberg, scouts Antti and Ilmari Nikander, and KONE employee Kerttu Honka. Meals were prepared in the outdoor kitchen by KONE's "office ladies and maids", including such favorites as meatballs, meat stew and pancakes.

According to *Hissilehti*, the experiment was a success. The only drawback of the camp was that it was too short, from Thursday to Sunday, so the plan was made to hold longer camps in the future if at all possible.

Social and geographic mixing

At the time of the first children's camps, KONE was already doing business in Helsinki and Hyvinkää, and soon it was expanding its operations to other parts of Finland.

"Buses brought children to camp from Hanko and Raahe," recalls Silja Niemi, who worked as staff member in the 1980s and as camp director for a few years in the early 1990s. She remembers bandaging the knees of city kids after they stumbled in the woods.

From the outset, it has been important to mix different social classes.

"As far as I understand, higher-ups felt obligated to send their children to camp," says Jyrki Vesikansa, who attended the camps first as a camper and later as a staff member in the 1950s. He is the son of Osmo Vesikansa, the first camp director. "The children of members of the board, workers and even communists all attended the same camp."

Staff members also came from diverse backgrounds. Long-time staff member Arvo "Lunkku" Lundgren was actively involved in the social-democratic labor movement, whereas Osmo later worked as city councilor for the conservative National Coalition Party. According to Jyrki, nobody at camp paid attention to parental status, and the children of white-collar and blue-collar parents enjoyed playing together. City kids did not think of those from Hyvinkää as country folk – "though they might have had reason to," Jyrki chuckles.

Teenagers interested in their own camp

Children's camps had been organized for over three decades when themes were discussed for future camps at the summer camp in 1978. That year, children were divided into three age groups, each with its own program: swimming lessons and story time for campers aged 7–9, a traditional camp program with competitions for campers aged 10–12, and a program with daily themes for campers aged 13–15. The themes were nature conservation, first aid skills,

orienteering, and swimming. The teenagers liked the experiment, and the disco evening, which was on the program for the first time, was especially popular.

"You don't have to be with the little ones all the time," one camper told *KONE News*. "Last year, the Juke Box Jury was for babies, but now we have some proper music," said another, clearly a fan of disco.

After the experiment, it was decided that 15–17-year-olds could indeed have their own camp.

"That's when the idea came up of making the camp international," camp director Aarre Mäki told *KONE News*.

The following year, the first KONE Global Youth Camp was held on a trial basis for just three nights from August 11–14 at Tourun Torpat. Campers arrived from eight countries: 17 young people from France, 10 from Denmark, 8 from Austria, 6 from Belgium, 3 from West Germany, 2 from Sweden and 1 from Norway. The camp themes chosen were music, sailing, first aid, nature conservation and English.

According to Aarre, it was unfortunate that only about one in ten young people could converse in English, although most of them understood the language. As a result, the campers spent most of their time together with others who spoke the same language.

Stefan Mackensen recalls that the German and French speakers spent a lot of time in their own groupings. "We probably ended up in groups because it was easier," Stefan says. He did not notice any major cultural differences, however, as everyone was from Northern or Central Europe.

Tricky menus

According to an article in *KONE News*, both the camp and the host families faced challenges coming up with menus, since the young people all had such different eating habits.

"My wife tried to think of what to cook and ended up making a meat dish," Risto Kurkela told the magazine. His family hosted two young Austrians. "She also tried a mushroom dish, and it was well received."

According to Stefan Mackensen, the food at the camp was good, but there was too little of it.

"They must have been thinking of 12- to 14-year-olds, but we were about sixteen. We were not starving by any means, but we would have liked a little more."

Teenagers who spend their days actively outdoors are known to have hearty appetites.

Interest grows for going global, waning interest in children's camps

The camp program for young people was considered a success. Sailing, the nature trail and the disco are mentioned in the company magazine as popular activities. Stefan remembers the camp having sports competitions between nationalities, for example, but otherwise the competitions were more about building team spirit.

Aarre Mäki thought the duration of the camp was too short, whereas an entire week with the host family was perhaps too demanding. Nevertheless, the host families gave positive feedback about the experience.

"It's important to socialize with people of different nationalities," commented Risto Kurkela. "It broadens your horizons. I support organizing similar events. We will continue to host campers."

Even though it was sometimes difficult to get the young people to obey, Aarre believed that group activities with people of different nationalities should continue to be promoted in the future. And so the tradition of the global youth camp was born.

The very last children's camp, however, was held in 1993. John Simon recalls that there was no longer much demand for them.

"We really had to entice and pressure families to send their young children to camp," he says.

The world had changed, and families were increasingly vacationing abroad. The KONE camps often disrupted holiday plans. There was growing demand for international youth camps, however, so from 1994 onwards, KONE decided to focus on them.

FUN FACT

Each camper receives a Funnybook electronically before the start of camp. It includes a photo and the name of each camper and staff member, along with a list of the campers' hobbies.

Selecting the campers

Throughout the decades of the children's camps, everyone was welcome to attend. When the number of campers increased, a second camp week was added and more tents were purchased. When the KONE Global Youth Camp was introduced in 1979, campers could attend on consecutive years, as with the children's camps, only now from ages 14 to 17. Generally, young people were welcome to attend the camp for three consecutive summers, but every now and then someone has managed to join four times.

In 2024, it was decided that, as a rule, young people from outside Finland can attend the camp only once in order to ensure that as many people as possible are allowed the opportunity. Young people from Finland can still attend three camps, as Finns are a small minority. Also, the participation of Finnish youth helps alleviate the shortage of host families, and the camp benefits from the presence of former campers who can support first-time participants, act as cultural interpreters and pass on camp traditions.

Until well into the 2000s, the selection of young people from abroad was the responsibility of KONE's country coordinators. They were notified when the application opened, and they handled the marketing and selection of campers. There have always been more applicants from certain countries than others. Italy and France have been well represented, for example, as has China too in recent years.

Even before it was decided that young people from abroad could only attend the camp once, it was difficult to get in multiple times if there were a lot of applicants from the same country. If a young person had been to the camp before, they were at the bottom of the list during the selection process.

Applicants at the top of the age range are also prioritized, because for a 17-year-old, this year is always the last chance to get into the camp. It also matters whether the young person has applied several times but not yet been admitted. In other words, someone applying for the third time and last time has a greater chance of being selected.

Not just for the children of senior managers

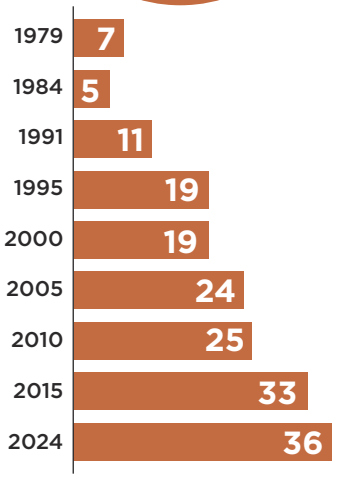
Long-time camp director John Simon says he democratized the selection of campers in the late 1990s because it seemed to him that many of the participants were the children of senior managers. John worked as a public relations officer for KONE, and in that role he also spread the word about the camp.

"Senior managers knew about the camp, but there were many in middle management who didn't, not to mention blue-collar maintenance and installation employees."

The camp was not yet fully democratized, however. In the early 2010s, a staff member who held an international management position at KONE asked camp manager Jere Santala whether children of managers were prioritized, since he knew many of the parents of campers who were managers. Jere began investigating the matter, and it turned out that in some countries, country coordinators had adopted their own application criteria. He eventually obtained a spreadsheet from which it became clear

that in some countries, the selection was indeed influenced by factors that included the parents' years of service in the company and the child's academic performance.

Since then, the application process for campers has been done electronically, and today applications are sent directly to the camp manager. Jere says he understands that there can be a lot of pressure choosing between the child of your superior or someone else. Fortunately, he does not mind being the "bad cop" as long as it is fair for everyone.



Initially, campers came from 7 countries in addition to Finland, whereas now they represent more than 30 countries.

Open criteria and drawing lots

Nowadays, the selection criteria for camp are kept clear and simple: the age of the young person and the number of times they have applied. Sometimes, parents like to include school grades or previous travel history on the application, but these have no impact on the selection.

"We don't want academic performance to be a criterion, if only because learning disabilities are not recognized very well in all countries. It is very possible that a young person who has done less well at school will get much more out of the camp than the top students in the class," Jere says.

Having a diverse group is better in other ways, too, and keeping the criteria to a minimum allows for a reasonably comprehensive representation of the generation. In practice, different countries have quotas depending on how many KONE employees work there. China is clearly the largest country in this competition, and there is also a lot of demand there: Often more than a hundred applications come from China.

When the oldest and those who have applied more than once are selected, there may still be 30 names left that need to be narrowed down to around ten. The final selection is made by drawing lots.

"This way I can always tell anyone who asks how the young people are selected and that chance plays a big role," Jere says.

I noticed that Finland is happier than Sweden: everything is beautiful, and everyone is beautiful.

CAMPER IN 2024, SWEDEN, AGE 16

Seeking better reach

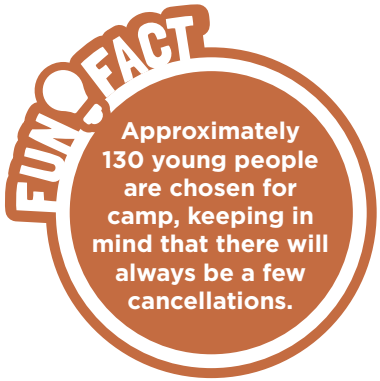
Although the KONE Global Youth Camp is free, families of foreign campers usually pay for their own flights, which somewhat limits the possibilities of sending a child to camp. When camp director Carina Herlin visited India in 2024, she met parents of former campers, all of whom worked at the company's headquarters.

"I don't think we've had any children of Indian factory workers at the camp," she says.

Over the years, different countries have had their own practices regarding whether to support the families of campers with the cost of flights. In some countries, the human resources department may have reimbursed half of the airfare, while in others, it may have paid for the entire trip, but only once. These forms of support have now

largely been discontinued. The camp organizers have considered providing assistance with the cost of airfare, but clear criteria would be necessary to ensure the process is fair and transparent.

"It's very difficult to create such a system," says Carina. It would be slightly easier to improve the flow of information so that news about the camp reaches employees more equally. Carina is keen to work on that; ideally, she would like the message to reach all employees at KONE.



What motivates young people to attend camp

We asked young people who had attended KONE camps in the 2000s why they wanted to go to camp. Their responses included wanting to see a new country, make friends from all over the world, practice their English, and have adventures. Most said that they had heard about the camp from their parents and had been willing to go: 76 percent of respondents confirmed that it was their own decision.

One in ten said that an older sibling had attended the same camp, which made them want to go. This has been typical throughout the existence of KONE camps: often, campers have become familiar with the camps through older siblings. Approximately 14 percent said that going to camp was a parent's decision, but almost all added that fortunately they agreed. On the other hand, Magda Kotowska from Poland remembers that her father signed her up for camp in 2017, and she was very against it.

"The unfamiliar surroundings scared me, and I had never spoken English to anyone for more than an hour or two at a time. I thought I'd be lonely or that the experience would be overwhelming."

Eventually, her father talked her into trying the KONE camp at least once. It would only be for ten days, and if she was unhappy at camp, it would never be discussed again. Magda agreed. Her worries lingered on the plane ride, but they melted away as soon as Magda got to her host family.

"They were so nice," she says.

Magda Kotowska was nervous about going to camp, but the language barrier was easily overcome in the end.

At first, many are nervous about their language skills and whether they'll find friends. Then they notice that they can be themselves at camp, and there are many with the same interests. Besides having fun, it's about conquering fears and uncertainties.

DANIEL NORIN, STAFF MEMBER, SWEDEN

Ella Nyström from Finland faced a similar situation in 2015, when her mother practically forced her to go to camp. "I was shy, a total introvert, and my mom thought camp would be a fun experience for me," she says.

Ella's attitude changed on Helsinki Day, when the young people were doing group tasks in the city and having fun at Linnanmäki Amusement Park. The camp spirit began to take hold when she felt acceptance from her peers. "A small group asked me if I'd like to spend the day with them. They became my camp buddies," Ella recalls.

ILLUSTRATED LOVE LETTERS TO CAMP

On either Lake Day or the first day of camp, campers are given a camp T-shirt that serves a unifying role, a kind of symbol that binds the camp together. In previous years, groups of campers have designed their own shirts, but today everyone is given the same design.

The camp shirts have been designed by many different people, but since 2015, long-time staff member and four-time camper Krzysztof Bernfeld has been in charge of the T-shirt department. When he attended camp in 1997, the names of the participants' countries were printed on the shirts, and Krzysztof felt proud to see Poland on the shirts in honor of him and one other camper. The following summer, the faces of participants were printed on the shirts.

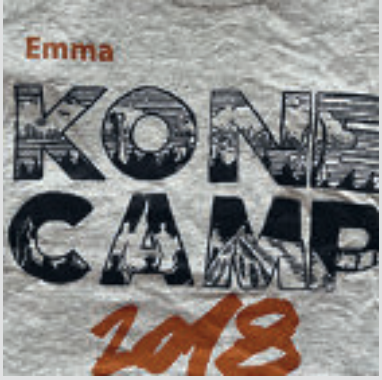
"It was a big deal to see your face printed on a T-shirt among others," he says. Krzysztof has always tried to encapsulate the essence of the camp in the design of the shirts. Initially, his design featured a tent because it seemed to reflect much of the camp spirit: after a day of activities, campers slept in a tent in the forest with three others. Krzysztof then began to think of other things that unified the campers and came up with the next image: a campfire.

"I think the 2022 shirt is the best," Krzysztof say. He had realized what was most meaningful about the camp. After all, it was not about the tent, it was about the four people in it – and not the fire, but rather the people sitting around it. "I don't know if anyone will pay attention to the images on the shirts, but they're important to me. They're illustrated love letters to camp."

Krzysztof has also designed the camp's Funnybooks, as well as the folders used by staff members. They hold important information, but Krzysztof also wants them to ignite camp spirit. This work also impacted his own life: designing the T-shirts, Funnybooks and folders finally gave him the impetus to study art. Still, he is beginning to feel that he has given all he has got when it comes to the camp shirts.

"I'll design one or two more; it's difficult to come up with something new to say." Someone else can take over from there.


global
youth
camp


Emma
KONE
CAMP
2018


KONE
CAMP
2023
FINLAND


KONE
CAMP


Jiry
KONE
CAMP 2015


KONE CAMP 2019


KONE CAMP


KONE
GLOBAL YOUTH
CAMP


KONE
CAMP


KONE CAMP 2024


KONE
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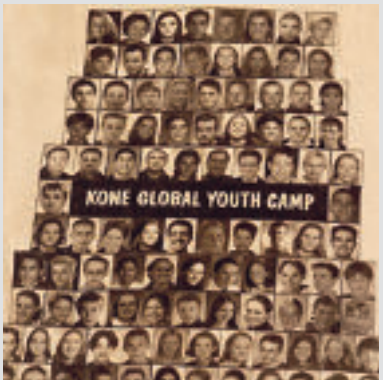

KONE GLOBAL YOUTH CAMP


2007
Kone Camp

Kids will be kids – and increasingly homogenous

During the first days of the camp, young people can be seen lying on the camp's sofas with their smartphones in their hands. They keep in touch with friends, tell their parents what they have been up to. However, the appeal of mobile phones is surprisingly weak, and a much larger group of campers play yard games or dash from the sauna to swim. Occasionally, staff members still need to tell them to put away their phones or take out their earbuds, but not as often as they used to.

Staff members say that the latest technology has molded the youth into a more homogenous group.

"We used to have English punk rockers and Italian anarchists," says long-time staff member Daniel Norin.

Twenty years ago, it was easier to identify by clothing and style who was from the United States, who was from Eastern Europe, and who was from further away in Asia.

Nowadays, everyone wears very similar clothes made by global brands and knows the same TikTok dances.

The camp's long-time staff members have seen a change in young people over the years. Iiris Herlin feels that in the 2010s, young people began to display more courage, self-awareness, and even positive arrogance.

"They began to question authority more than before," Iiris says. They no longer carried out every task without complaint, and many questioned why something had to be done. Daniel thinks this has changed again since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think the teenagers have had a more relaxed attitude in the last couple years and followed stories without too much questioning."

I realized how many things you can do in one day if you just put your stupid phone away and enjoy life to the fullest.

CAMPER IN 2024, AUSTRIA, AGE 16

A more empathetic generation

For several years now, staff members have detected a more empathetic trend among the young people.

"Young people today are smarter and more capable of acting in social situations," says camp director Carina Herlin.

Long-time staff member Mirka Jokiniemi agrees.

"Apparently, the risk of embarrassing yourself isn't as great anymore."

It may be that the instructors know how to create a safe atmosphere at the camp with their own dedication, but Mirka also believes that young people have become more deeply interested in each other.

"They understand that putting others down is really hurtful and leads to no good."

She is happy to see the young people encourage and cheer each other on: "Go on, you can do it. Great job!"

Research on younger generations seems to support the perceptions of staff members. A 2023 study published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* examined the capacity for empathy of American university students. The research found that their empathy and consideration of other people's opinions had been declining

The best part is seeing the young people start talking with each other.

JUKKA WILJANEN, STAFF MEMBER, FINLAND

since at least the late 1970s. However, a turnaround occurred in the early 2000s, after which students have been more empathetic again.

It could be that people in general are more empathetic these days: According to the UN World Happiness Report in 2023, people around the world on average feel that they have been helped and treated with kindness more often in their daily lives.

FROM CAMP INITIATION TO THE WORLD'S FASTEST KISS

Those attending a children's camp for the first time got to – or had to – participate in a type of camp initiation. It is an old scout tradition, where campers walk blindfolded through an obstacle course, while others tickle them with evergreen twigs. In the Konekari years, campers walked blindly holding onto a string, while at Tourun Torpat, they held each other's hands.

At the end of the initiation, campers were given some kind of strange-tasting concoction that the staff members had conjured up in the kitchen. The tradition is related to today's high school freshman initiations and hazing rituals.

"It was exciting," recalls Katri Keihäri, who was initiated at the age of seven.

The older children had scared her beforehand. Katri remembers that she started to cry a little when she was blindfolded, but one of the staff members immediately came to comfort her and said that there was nothing to worry about.

The initiation tradition was not continued at the KONE Global Youth Camp. However, strange foods are still on the menu, as one popular camp activity involves eating Finnish delicacies: meat jelly, Finnish Easter pudding, salted licorice, Karelian pies, pickled herring, and liver casserole with raisins. Yum!

A faint echo of the camp initiation is sometimes still seen in the evening program, when it is time for the world's fastest kiss. The staff members line up on stage, and the emcee explains the rules. The aim is to break the world record for the fastest kiss, each staff member planting a kiss on the cheek of the one standing next to them – as quickly as possible.

The practice round is timed, and then it is time for the real thing. "Even faster now," the emcee encourages. When the next chain kiss starts, someone is in for a surprise. As a first-time staff member turns to kiss the next person – preferably quickly – he or she gets a cream pie in the face. The staff members usually know that the pie is coming for one of the newcomers, but the excitement and surprise factor are still there. The campers love it!

Oona Tchitcherin delivers the cream pie.

A Typical Action-packed DAY AT CAMP

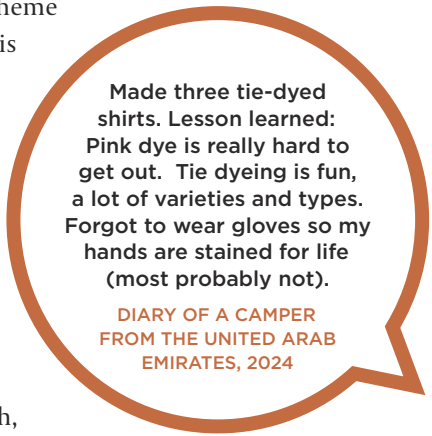
The camp program used to be quite strictly scheduled. Nowadays, there is more freedom, but campers still fill their days with a variety of activities, playing, swimming, singing and dancing. Sleep does not always come immediately after a long day.

FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, THE CAMPERS GATHER IN FRONT OF the main building. The chill from a night spent in a tent dissipates with a short morning workout, after which the young people are told about the main schedules for the day. Many then go to study the noticeboard.

In practice, groups of campers complete task stations related to the daily theme in the mornings, and optional activities are organized for the afternoons. This leaves quite a lot of free time, which they can use as effectively as they choose. Want to make tie-dyed shirts or carve a butter knife? Learn how to play the ukulele or try climbing? They may also want to leave time for rowing and sauna bathing. There is a separate excursion for SUP (Stand Up Paddling) boards, as well as an exotic forest walk. For early risers, there is even a morning run at 7 o'clock.

"If we wanted to go the easy route, we could simply throw a ball among the campers," camp director Aarre Mäki told the local newspaper *Hyvinkään Uutiset* in 1991. A leader would quickly emerge and decide on the game. "But then a third of the group would become passive, move to the sidelines to watch, and the camp devolve into just a holding place for young people."

It is important to have a varied program that offers something meaningful for everyone. Ball games are great, but the camp also needs activities like Capture the Flag, kayaking, and more. In the past couple of years, there has also been a quiet room for reading and playing video games, as well as a dedicated space for prayer and meditation.



More sports in the old days

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, sports played a bigger role at the youth camps than they do today. There were volleyball and table tennis competitions with spectators cheering on, campers went sailing in dinghies and had rowing races. Competitions between groups were mandatory, but they did not fill a large part of the days. Even then, most of the program was voluntary – to the extent that Minna Karhunen, who attended the KONE Global Youth Camp a couple of times in the 1980s, does not remember it at all.

"I'm sure there was a program, but all I can remember is hanging out with friends," she says.

There were lots of yard games. Minna remembers table tennis and tetherball. Many campers from those years also mention shuffleboard.

Since the program was largely voluntary, campers could also make their own schedule. One camper recalls the most important activity being just sitting around chatting and socializing, while another camper was busy full-time playing volleyball, tennis or table tennis. The same is true today: some eagerly fill the sign-up lists for workshops while still doing their own thing, others throw basketball, others spend all their time at the lake, and still others just like to nap. The staff members make sure that no one is left out.

Breaking language barriers

Young people nowadays are reasonably good at grouping across language barriers. At first, especially in the canteen and around the pool table, they may seek out the company of those who speak the same language, but quite a few people shuttle around regardless of language barriers. Their English skills have improved a lot over the years.

> **Camp showed that people from faraway foreign countries aren't that different. My interest towards other countries grew.**
>
> CAMPER IN 2013–2015, FINLAND, AGES 15–17

"We French and Belgians were the biggest group besides the Finns," says Eric Polli from Belgium, who attended KONE camps in the 1980s. "Most of us didn't speak English very well."

At camp, Eric decided to move from group to group.

"I'm social, curious, and not shy, so talking to everyone felt natural to me. I had trouble with English and would often pull out a miniature dictionary. The Nordic teens found it funny, which helped break the ice."

Such young people who pull everyone together can be found at camp every year. In 2024, one of them was a young Peruvian, who had come to camp from Spain.

"At first, people had their own little groups, and it seemed I was the only one who tried to talk to everyone," he says. "I think it's more fun to mix cultures."

A lot of fun activities, did clay and bead crafts, tent building. Evening program introduced the camp. Very fun and interesting day, arts and crafts, staff introduction. For lunch and dinner, I ate vegetables and plain pasta. A lot of nature, burned a marshmallow at the campfire, not gonna try campfiring again or ever.

DIARY OF A CAMPER FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, 2024

Naturally global

Many international youth camps are organized around the world, but they often have a narrower range of participants from different countries.

Juho Niskanen, who has worked with the KONE camp program for many years, has taught youth social work and estimates that he has worked at over a hundred camps. In his opinion, what sets the KONE Global Youth Camp apart from other international camps is that its starting point is inherently global: young people from every country in which KONE operates are welcome, and the campers typically represent all the inhabited continents.

The global nature of the camp adds its own spice to international education: young people discover that people from very different backgrounds are, after all, quite similar. Over the years, the camps have had young people from countries that are politically at odds with each other and from different religions.

"In a way, the teens can step out into the world, thanks to the camps," says longtime staff member Mirka Jokiniemi. "Suddenly, they have friends around the world. A Muslim, a Jew, a Christian, and a Hindu will sit at dinner and like each other."

An opportunity to reinvent yourself

The camp quickly forms its own bubble: a happy and safe space where people can do things together. Many former campers describe the atmosphere as one where you can be yourself or even reinvent yourself, since your social circles and parents are far away.

"I felt like nobody pressured me," says a 17-year-old camper from Peru who attended in 2024. "You're aware that parents aren't there, and you can be yourself."

Matts Falck from Sweden remembers this feeling from the summer of 1986. He had gone to camp somewhat reluctantly at his father's request. He would have preferred spending the summer with his friends, but luckily the camp was fun, and he easily blended into the international groups. It was his first time abroad on his own, and according to his recollections, he was also the only Swedish camper.

"No parents, relatives, or friends who expect you to behave a certain way. It was a great adventure with people from around the world."

Finding or reinventing yourself is especially emphasized for those arriving from abroad. Many Finns have attended camps before, but KONE camps are different from confirmation camps, coming-of-age camps, scouts and recreational camps, as many of the young people attend these types of camps together with friends. At KONE camps, the unifying factor among campers is the workplace of their parents, and few of them have acquaintances there.

> The camp gave me self-confidence and assurance, it proved to my parents I could work independently while travelling far from home. It also gave me a lot of carefree time in a heartbreaking summer as my grandfather died just a week later.
>
> CAMPER IN 2023, GERMANY, AGE 17

Not everyone has a good time

Many people say afterwards that camp was the best experience of their lives. However, camp is not always fun. Some people find friends right away and dive into the camp bubble quickly, while others take longer to adjust. Some campers, especially the younger ones, get terribly homesick, or their life situations may be difficult. Some people simply do not enjoy camp, while others rebel for no particular reason. Of course, campers can always go home early, but it rarely comes to that.

Giulia Alessi from Italy applied to the camp three times before finally being accepted at the age of 17. She was also homesick at first, but she caught the camp spirit quickly. She has been a staff member since 2016.

"Now when I see campers who don't even try and only complain, the adult in me understands and tries to help them as much as possible," she says. "But the teenager in me wants to shake them for being ungrateful – they were selected over some other kids and all they do is whine!"

EXERCISE, FLAG RAISING, AND STRAIGHT LINES

The original children's camps had a clear and concise morning program to start the day. First, they gathered for some brisk morning exercise. It is not remembered as one of the most enjoyable traditions: boring stretches and bends with eyes still bleary from sleep. Next came flag raising and the ceremonial *Flag Song*.

"It was a great way to start the day before engaging in the fun daily activities," says Katri Keihäri, who attended the children's camps in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

After raising the flag, the groups of campers lined up in front of the canteen. The day's program was announced and group tasks assigned. Some got to peel potatoes, others did the dishes, carried wood, set the table, and so on. The location of the camp determined the chores: At Konekari, dishes were washed while squatting in the sea, while at Tourun Torpat the campers could pick blueberries that were used to bake blueberry pies in the evening.

The morning announcements included the news of the day, such as the weather forecast or any significant world events. It was important to form a straight line, as the neatest one got to be the first at breakfast. Katri recalls that the clear daily schedule created a safe atmosphere at the camp.

"It was wonderfully organized and activity-filled, and I have great memories of it."

A controversial flag and the Marseillaise at midnight

The morning routines were a little easier at the youth camp. The *Flag Song* was abandoned because few of the campers knew Finnish, but the flag was still raised. This ceremony puzzled some of the youth from abroad over the years. Torsten Seidel from Germany, who attended camp in the late 1980s, said he was surprised at the patriotism, as it was a difficult subject for many Germans after the Second World War.

"It was strange to have to honor the flag in the mornings, and it got irritating when they used it for discipline," Torsten says.

Ultimately, it was not so much the flag raising ceremony that bothered him but having to stand in line. He understood that it was probably a way to settle down before breakfast, but it still bugged him. Torsten tried to stand nicely at the front of the line, but apparently some of the campers behind him were joking or not listening. It seemed like he was always in the last group to get to the canteen. At the time, Torsten felt like his whole group was being punished for the indiscipline of a few.

Some French campers in turn were bothered by the Finnish flag itself. Why not flags for all the countries? Camp director Aarre Mäki's answer was simple: when in Finland, we honor the Finnish flag.

"The tables had small flags, which some of the campers fiddled with and raised their own

flags," former staff member Silja Niemi remembers.

Usually, the flag raising ceremony at the youth camp was a quiet affair. One summer in the 1980s, however, some of the Finnish campers became nostalgic, as most of them had stood in the same lines and sang since their childhood. According to Minna Karhunen, who attended that year, the Finns started singing the *Flag Song* when the flag was raised. The French campers responded by singing the *Marseillaise*, and then the other nationalities joined in with their own national anthems.

"Everyone sang on top of their lungs and laughed, but the staff were probably horrified," Minna says.

The French national anthem echoed in the forests of the camp regularly; French pride seemed to call for it. In the early 1990s, a small rebellion broke out. Timo Skog, a Finnish camper who spoke fluent French, hung out with the French. One evening, the French group agreed that at midnight they would start singing the *Marseillaise* from their tents. When they started, Timo sang along at the top of his lungs. The staff members tried to get the teens to quiet down, but they yelled back saying their country demanded respect – just as they had been told in the mornings that they must respect the Finnish flag.

"It was the first time we saw youth defy the staff. We had a big group; we managed to get up some rebellious action," Timo says with a chuckle.

Today, the flag is no longer raised. Camp director John Simon, who moved to Finland from the United States, ended the tradition around the mid-1990s.

Once, some Italian and Spanish campers tried to raise their own flags as a prank at Siikaniemi, but they did not know how to tie the bottom end of the string to the flag correctly. The strings slipped to the top of the pole with the flag, and a ladder truck had to be summoned.

What I remember most is the camp's warm, open atmosphere that includes everyone. I've never experienced something like it elsewhere.

CAMPER IN 2013–2015, FINLAND, AGES 15–17

Moments of success through crafts

The arts and crafts room is a popular space to relax and make gifts to take home or give to a secret friend assigned at the beginning of camp. The materials that are available and fashion trends determine what kinds of crafts are made.

Tie-dyeing T-shirts and making bracelets from paracord have been popular with boys and girls alike, whereas most of the pottery and bead bracelets are done by girls.

Sometimes new activities are introduced, such as calligraphy and macramé crafts, but mostly, the same time-proven activities are on offer.

When the arts and crafts space is introduced at the beginning of camp, there are always some campers who say they cannot participate since they are not creative or talented with their hands.

"Many protest, because they don't want to embarrass themselves," says Mirka Jokiniemi, who has helped organize arts and crafts activities for many years.

Every year, however, many of these same campers come to watch their friends make crafts, and after a little encouragement, they dare to try it themselves. They are told not to worry if they mess up – none of their old friends are there watching them. For Mirka, the most rewarding moment of camp is when such a young person gets excited and finally feels proud of themselves.

"It's wonderful to see the joy in their eyes when they come and show me the finished product and tell me they made it!"

Mirka gets to take pictures at every camp, because the campers say their families would never believe they made something like that. Mirka feels it is important that young people overcome doubts about their own abilities or creativity.

"I believe it leads to many other things in life when you get to experience that you weren't as bad as you thought. When you try, observe others, and ask for advice, you can create something to be proud of. That is an incredibly important experience."

COMPETITION AT THE HEART OF CHILDREN'S CAMP

At the children's camps, competition between groups was everything. The children were divided into groups, typically with names from nature: the Buzzards, Seahawks, and Crested Grebes competed in 1952, and the Foxes, Stoats, and Ferrets in 1957. The idea was to make it as easy as possible for the children to form groups and get excited about the games. The groups were divided in advance to include as many ages as possible in each one, from little 6-year-olds to 14-year-old teenagers.

The competitions lasted the entire week, and the range of events highlighted different skills. The more physical groups did well in some competitions, while the smartest succeeded in others. The staff members were allowed to introduce new ideas, and the competitions slowly developed over time. For example, poetry was made an "Olympic sport" in 1967, perhaps inspired by the actual Olympics, where poetry was an official event from 1912 to 1948.

At the evening campfire, winning teams were awarded beads to keep score. When the teams had enough beads, they could trade smaller beads for bigger ones. Later the beads were replaced with balls and eventually discs, but the scoring system remained the same through the years.

Points could also be earned for tasks, such as potato peeling or dishwashing. Ilona Autti-Rämö, who attended camp in the 1960s, suspects that the staff members could have been using these extra points to even the score between teams and encourage the children to try even harder.

FUN FACT

At the children's camps, the older children looked after the younger ones also in their tents. The oldest slept by the door and the second oldest in the back, with the younger ones in the middle.

Importance of mixing age groups

Ilona later worked as a pediatric neurologist, and she believes mixing age groups is an excellent pedagogic solution.

"I think it's a great shame that children today only play with their peers," she says. "It doesn't give them a chance to learn how to interact with different people; how to encourage and defend."

These skills were automatically acquired during the week at children's camp. In team competitions, even the smallest children were cheered on.

"I was terribly small myself," Ilona says. "My older siblings had always ignored me, but at camp I was suddenly cool among the older kids and allowed to participate," she recalls.

The competitions were tough, but age differences were taken into account. There were lots of ball games, sack races and dodgeball. Since each team had both younger and older players and the result was shared by the team, no one was discriminated against.

Ilona feels that it was an "incredibly cool" move from a pedagogical point of view. It is important to remember how much children raise each other. These days, with smaller families, it is often not possible to put together ordinary neighborhood teams.

"If it weren't for the camp experience once a summer, there'd be a lot to lose," Ilona says.

My favourite memories were the competitions against other teams and also sitting around the fire eating those warm choc-chip banana things. I remember the older team leaders dancing to Backstreet Boys. I also remember trying salty licorice for the first time (and spitting it out).

CAMPER IN 2016, AUSTRALIA, AGE 15

Non-stop eating

Anyone who has been to camp knows that there is no shortage of food. In the early days of the children's camps, it was a good selling point that children were offered full board, and the food was often more varied than at home. From the early days of the KONE Global Youth Camp, there are anecdotes about how everyday Finnish food, which is heavy on potatoes, was not to the liking of all foreign campers. Some of the early feedback from the youth camps expressed disappointment that only crisp-bread was offered with their evening tea – whereas those who attended the children's camps fondly remember the crispbread and tea, after which they went to wash.

Sometimes the food was inedible. Who came up with spaghetti soup with sausage bites?

CAMPER IN 1994, THE NETHERLANDS, AGE 15

In recent decades, the food offerings have been generous. For example, today's camps at Siikaniemi offer a hearty breakfast, lunch, dinner and evening snack, as well as the opportunity to grill sausages, buns, pancakes and marshmallows over a campfire in the evenings. Campers in recent years have been happy or at least satisfied with the food offerings. It may be a cliché that Italians turn up their noses at the pasta-cooking skills of foreigners, but experiences from the camp show that even though some may scoff at Finnish spaghetti and ground beef sauce, they still come back for more.

According to Jari Rissanen, manager of the Siikaniemi Course Center, certain things have to be considered when catering for an international camp. In addition to allergies and diets that are already familiar to Finns, there may also be restrictions based on religion or culture. Even though campers will eat most things, Finnish casseroles have proven unpopular. These days, pasta and sauces are always served separately, and baked pastas are not served at all.

Staff members admit that at the beginning of camp, the amount of food seems almost too much. Then somehow, as the days go on, the body gets used to being at camp, and the size of the portions grows.

From the soda cellar to the candy store

The Konekari camp had a root cellar that was used to serve sodas after lunch. The only sweet treat campers could buy during the camp was soda. There was no root cellar at Tourun Torpat, so in the 1980s and 1990s it was replaced by a soda kiosk that opened during breaks. Campers could still not buy candy.

There is a tradition associated with soda bottles that lasted for decades at the camps. The bottles used to have a thin metal tear-off cap that could be pierced with a nail or needle. Some people would suck on the soda through the small hole throughout the day to make it last longer. A more typical use for the small hole was to put a thumb over it, then shake the bottle and spray the soda around the camp. Some watched from the sidelines as money was being wasted on expensive soda. Others laughed out loud.

These days, the camp has a small candy store that is open after lunch and dinner. Soda is no longer sprayed around – except when someone slips a Mentos candy into a Coke bottle.

> **The staff members are nice, but the morning workouts are horrible, when we have to exercise while still half-asleep. I wish the kiosk had candy along with the soda.**
>
> CAMPER IN 1992, FINLAND, AGE 11, AS REPORTED IN THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER ***HYVINKÄÄN UUTISET***

Back and forth from the sauna to the lake

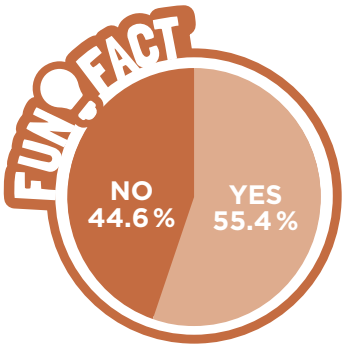
Many foreign campers have never been in a sauna before coming to Finland. Taking a sauna is not mandatory at camp, but it is very popular. When the weather is good, the saunas are full and dozens of young people are swimming in the lake. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, it was common to have just one sauna night per week, but now the saunas are heated daily.

One of the few strict camp rules is no swimming without a staff member present. Because there are so many campers, there are also several lifeguards on waterfront duty at the same time. Staff members have occasionally had to fish out campers who have been over-confident about their swimming skills. The staff members are also aware of which campers do not know how to swim.

Taking a sauna is also a way for staff members to relax at the end of the day: in the early decades, the men and women alternated between taking saunas and getting the campers ready for bed.

"Aarre had his own ways," says Tapani Väljä, who was a staff member in the 1970s. "We weren't allowed to throw water on the rocks until we broke a sweat, whereas we little guys would've been throwing water constantly. Up on the benches, Aarre would then share his life wisdom."

After sauna, the staff members enjoyed their evening snacks, which sometimes even included cold cuts. According to Tapani, that was a rare treat back in those days.



Was it your first time in a sauna?

SOURCE: SURVEY OF FOREIGN CAMPERS IN THE 2000S

Weekend camp during the COVID-19 pandemic

Since 1947, the camp has only been canceled once, in 2020. Even then, the application process had already begun and staff members recruited, but by spring it was clear that the camp had to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The camp faced the same issue in 2021. Fortunately, the pandemic had eased enough by autumn 2021 that a camp weekend could be held in October for the children of KONE employees living in Finland. The program was planned along the same

lines as the usual global camp: the camp began with a visit to Linnanmäki, followed by task stations, camp Olympics, games, an evening campfire and sauna at the camp site. The camp lasted from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon and was attended by 25 young people and 11 staff members.

The campers enjoyed their weekend, as the extended periods of self-isolation due to COVID had been difficult for the young people. According to staff members, the weekend camp also had its advantages: even in a short time, participants could get a taste of the camp atmosphere, the swimming supervision was more relaxed since it was October, and the staff members were not as exhausted after the camp as usual.

An opportunity and duty to perform

The evening program is an official part of the camp schedule. The staff perform skits and put on small contests where they ask for volunteers. Campers are also invited to perform on a voluntary basis. These sometimes reveal surprising talents: someone proves to be a piano virtuoso, another makes wonderful digital drawings, a third is a great storyteller. Typically, on the first two nights, few of the campers dare to go on stage, but towards the end, there can be a line of performers. Feeling safe in front of the audience and receiving applause can boost self-esteem.

A big part of the evening program is devoted to returning lost items. The emcee presents all the items that have been found around the camp, and the campers get them back in exchange for a small performance. Some gather their friends together to sing their country's national anthem, for example, but performances have also included walking on hands or simply counting to ten. The staff members encourage the campers to help each other or come up with easy ways to redeem their mislaid possessions.

> **When you forget something and have to sing, it may be fun for the others but embarrassing for you. Luckily, I didn't lose anything! Singing is horrifying!**
>
> CAMPER IN 2003, GERMANY, AGE 16

Campers react differently to the slight pressure to perform. Sometimes a lost item of clothing is left unclaimed, for fear of having to perform in front of everyone. It can be challenging at times to strike a balance between encouragement, pushing someone out of their comfort zone, and being sensitive and providing a safe atmosphere.

After the evening program, the campers have a moment of free time. They can sit by the campfire, have a nighttime snack, play games, or just chat with friends. Around 11 o'clock, silence descends on the tents.

EVENING CAMPFIRES

The children's camps had a clear and concise evening program that was a little different from the current youth camps: Campers gathered around the campfire and sang together, and the groups performed various program numbers, from small plays to poetry readings. Beads were also awarded for the important camp competition.

The evening campfire is an essential part of the summer camp experience: at the end of a day filled with activities, campers settle down together to watch the fire and sing songs. Several studies have shown that singing together has a unifying effect on people, and it can even promote happiness and mental health.

The children's camps involved a lot of singing, around campfires and otherwise. During the Konekari years, Antti-Veikko "AV" Nikulainen played the accordion, and Hellin Yliherne, a teacher in civilian life, also enjoyed leading the group singing. The camp even had its own songbook, a duplicated booklet that contained fun songs that everyone knew. Campers from the Konekari days still know the songs by heart, according to those who attended in the 1950s and 1960s.

The KONE Global Youth Camp also had its own songbook for a long time, which contained songs familiar to everyone and also songs from different countries. For example, the songbook

for the 1997 camp contains songs in different languages: *Love Is All Around* in English, *Guantanamera* in Spanish, *Kalliolle Kukkulalle* in Finnish, *Sommartider* in Swedish, and *Saaremaa Valss* in Estonian. Now that more than 30 nationalities are represented, there are fewer songs that everyone knows. Fortunately, they can now look up the lyrics on their smartphones.

Hanging out at the disco

Since the earliest days of the KONE Global Youth Camp, a disco has been offered as an alternative to the evening campfire. The very first disco evening was organized for older participants at the children's camp back in 1978. The campers got to listen to hit songs and gather up the courage to ask someone to dance.

The music at camp has lived with the times: heavy metal, Madonna, Eurodance, techno and grunge have all had their day. In 1984, the camp organized highly popular breakdance rehearsals and competitions. *KONE News* reported on the new dance style: "Breakdance is when you move in any way you want to the beat of the music. You can spin on your head or your neck, do somersaults, anything you can think of."

Efforts have been made to consider the musical tastes of young people by encouraging them to bring their favorite music to camp, first on cassettes, then on CDs. These days, music is easily available on streaming services, so it is easy for young people to request their favorite songs. According to the staff members, the music used to be more varied, whereas now everyone dances to the same beat.

Disco nights were popular, but not many people danced because the music was old as the hills.

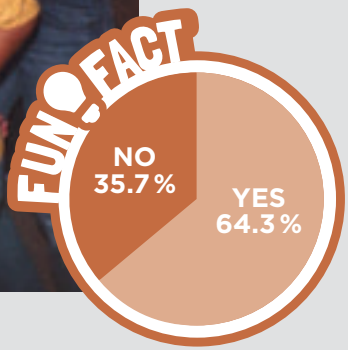
CAMPER IN 1994, GERMANY

Discos no longer so popular

The popularity of discos at camp has varied. In the 1980s and 1990s, a disco was held every night. Since then, a disco has sometimes been saved for the last night or held nightly. In some years, campers have also organized their own small dance parties with portable speakers.

In 2024, the disco moved to the lakeside when a beach party was organized for the young people on the last day of camp. The sound system was carried to the sauna, and the campers danced barefoot. It was a great success.

"It was my first time at a beach party," says a camper from China. "Chinese people don't often attend parties like that, so it was a precious opportunity for me."



Did you learn new dance moves?

SOURCE: SURVEY OF CAMPERS IN THE 2000S

Discos are no longer as popular as they were in past decades, and they are a bit challenging for staff members to supervise. In 2024, therefore, an evening disco was again held on the last night only. There has been no negative feedback yet, and the young people were happy to play games or sit by the campfire most nights, so the reduction in discos may remain in effect for the time being.

Circle dances with crushes

While midsummer dances and other fun events were organized for adults on the island of Konekari, discos were generally not organized at children's camps.

Instead, campers got to play familiar circle dances from school. Children held hands, either in pairs or in a circle, and danced around the yard. Campers from the 1950s and 1960s

Don't tell anyone, but sometimes at night we stay awake, eat chocolate, and chat a little in the tent. We do it so quietly that the staff members don't notice. Our tent has only been knocked on twice the whole week.

CAMPER IN 2024, ITALY, AGE 17

Campers Minna Karhunen and Christian Klein in 1985.

remember the circle dances as one of the fondest moments at camp. You could get close to someone you had a crush on and hold hands.

"That was the best," says Inkeri Karanko, who attended KONE camps in the 1950s.

When the employee magazine *Hissilehti* asked in 1957 what they liked most about camp, the eyes of the bigger girls lit up when they replied: "The circle dances, of course!"

The exciting tradition of sneaking out

The camps have always had night guard duties for staff, and these days two staff members sleep in small tents between the girls' and boys' areas. A few staff members are given "sandman duty", which means they walk among the tents, telling the excited campers to hush and go to sleep. A couple of times a night, these staff members have to get up and walk through the camp. This ensures the safety of the campers at night and is an attempt to eradicate one of the most enduring camp traditions: sneaking out.

Sneaking out, or leaving the tent at night, has been a recurring theme in camp stories since the 1950s, and many campers remember doing so. There is something particularly exciting about sneaking out of your tent at night.

At the children's camps, sneaking out was a show of strength for older children and teenagers. They slept in the front and back of the tents, so it was especially easy to slip out under the flap. Thanks largely to the veterans of children's camps, the tradition of sneaking out was carried over to the global youth camp.

"It was exciting and forbidden," says Katri Keihäri, who attended children's camps in the 1980s. "Though I didn't exactly get the idea. We got out of the tent, it was dark outside, and we didn't really have the nerve to go anywhere."

Mulled-over strategies

Especially for slightly older campers, a typical target for sneaking out in the night has been the tent area of the opposite gender. Some even arranged a time and place to meet.

"We had all sorts of strategies for throwing off the night guard," says Terhi Salminen, who attended camp in the 1980s and 1990s. "Bathroom trips were the most classic, of course. I don't recall anyone ever coming into our tent, or us going to the boys' tent. We mostly hung out with the boys in a group around the bathroom."

Eric Polli, an active camper from Belgium in the 1980s, took the night-time sneaking out seriously.

"It was a real challenge," he recalls. "We had to stay awake long enough for the staff to be asleep, locate the tactical route to the girls'

tent area in total darkness, and make it back by dawn, before everyone woke up."

He says he was only caught once.

Other than a few active teens, most of the night-time sneaking out happened in the children's camps. At the youth camps, campers were allowed to stay up late, and the disco nights provided an opportunity to hang out with their crushes. According to Aarre Mäki, the long days and physical activities also made it easier to fall asleep at night.

"We knew the tricks," he chuckles.

Night watch of varying degrees

The attitudes of staff members towards night watch responsibilities have varied at different times. Some say that supervision was provided throughout the night, while others remember a more lenient attitude.

"As a young kid, I used to think all staff members were lurking in the bushes, looking to spot those who were sneaking out in the night," says Rolf Relander, who attended camp in the 1980s. He worked as a staff member in the late 1980s and early 1990s and admits that most of the time nobody kept watch.

"It was more of a deterrent. Maybe someone kept an eye on things for the first hour, but after that, we went to sleep or watched TV," he laughs.

Staff members have looked at sneaking out through a soft lens; many are former campers and know that small adventures are part of the experience.

"Is it so bad, if someone wants to get to know another?" points out Jouni Mäkäläinen, a staff member from the 1980s. "They're healthy teens."

Few campers sneak out nowadays

In recent decades, the popularity of sneaking out has waned. One reason may be that young people today are less familiar with camping than before. If being in a tent is already exciting enough, there is no need to seek adrenaline by sneaking out. Staying up late and chatting in the tent is enough rule breaking for many. Another reason may be the tradition started in the late 1990s to take down the tents on the last evening of camp and let the campers stay up all night.

John Simon remembers a funny incident from the mid-1990s when the staff got word of the boys' plan to sneak to the girls' tent at one o'clock in the morning.

"I told the others I thought it was great; we could sleep until twelve-thirty," John recalls.

The most fun was when the staff let us stay up until midnight on the fourth day!

CAMPER IN 1993, THE NETHERLANDS, AGE 16

Just before one o'clock, five staff members got up and quietly went and sat down in a half circle in front of the boys' tent. At the stroke of one, an alarm clock went off, and they saw movement in the tent. The zipper slid open, and a camper from Germany stepped out and dashed straight into the arms of one of the staff members. The boy let out a yelp, dove back into the tent, and silence resumed.

The boy probably expected a talking-to in the morning, but nobody mentioned the adventure. After lunch, John asked the campers to remain in the canteen for a minute. He told everyone that there had been a close call the night before with one of the campers sleepwalking. Fortunately, the staff members had caught him before he got into any danger. John announced that the boy wanted to thank the staff members by handing them medals. He turned to the German runaway. The boy took the medals that John had handed him and obediently hung them around the necks of the staff members.

"He was beet-red," John chuckles. "I'm sure he can still remember it."

Learning TEAMWORK *While Having Fun*

Summer camps should be fun, but they always offer something to learn too. In the early decades of KONE camps, campers learned scouting skills, first aid and, above all, swimming. In recent decades, campers have gained new ideas through fun adventures.

UUNA THE UNICORN, WHO ENTERTAINED THE YOUNG PEOPLE ON the first day of camp and led morning yoga, has disappeared on the second morning of camp. A white chalk outline, as seen on TV, has appeared on the asphalt. The unicorn has been murdered!

This is how the morning theme for the 2024 camp began: with a murder mystery!

The campers had to work together in groups to solve the mystery, which was loosely based on the board game Cluedo. Who had murdered Uuna, how, where and why? Clues were obtained by completing tasks at different activity stations. As the game progressed, the campers realized they could also trade clues with other groups.

On the second day of the game, the groups began to receive mysterious items: unicorn hair, basilisk scales, and dewdrops. The groups were also handed papers with strange numbers and letters. Many of the papers had a quarter of a circle or a square in one corner.

Towards the end of the game, ideas began to dawn on the campers: Some groups had matching squares on their papers, others had circles. A camper from Portugal called all the group leaders to the front of the main building. When all the papers were connected on the ground to form a large sheet, the formula for a mystical elixir was revealed that could be used to bring Uuna back to life. The groups needed to mix together the items they had collected under the stars. The murderer was also revealed: a lonely woman in red, who in her bitterness had poisoned the unicorn at the sauna.

Jussi Herlin, who led the game, asked the campers what the lesson of the story was. "Friendship and teamwork," the campers shouted. Jussi nodded and said that no one should be left alone. During the evening program, Uuna was brought back to life, and all was well again. In its amusingly modified voice, the unicorn then talked more about the importance of friendship and teamwork.

Groups rotate between stations

In the themed camp program, campers gather in predetermined groups and rotate between activity stations in the mornings. The stations include tasks, such as walking blindfolded through a maze, building a bridge with old crates, or solving puzzles. One popular activity involves amusing pictures of the staff members, and the campers have to come up with funny memes for them. At another, the campers have to get through a spider web made of rope. At one of the stations, the entire team has to ski together on a single pair of giant skis.

A staff member follows along, helping to keep spirits high and the group on schedule as much as possible. Staff members are allowed to help occasionally if the group gets stuck. The groups receive more clues and tools for each completed task.

Typically, two staff members man each station. They sometimes have free rein for how the campers complete their task, as long as it is fun and provides the necessary tips for the unifying theme. Long-time staff members make good use of their freedoms. For example, in 2024, Steve Davies and Freja Hansen were given a task with the following instructions: "Campers will carry a wet sponge over their heads and fill a bucket with it." This is an age-old tradition that dates back to the children's camps.

"It didn't sound like it was fun enough," Steve says. He talked with Freja, and one of them said, "tunnel vision." They had done it at camp before. They made plastic cup "binoculars" with tiny holes for eyes. The campers had to wear them as they passed through an obstacle course, and if they stumbled, Steve shot them with a water pistol.

"At lunch, the campers came and told me they hated me. But they had a lot of fun."

Steve says those kinds of tasks teach patience and accuracy, and taking turns will get the shy campers to join in with the others. Nobody minded it being completely different from the instructions.

Bold themes

A lot of social themes have been addressed at the global youth camps, from nature conservation to equality, disabilities, intercultural communication, inequality, tolerance, and so on. According to Juho Niskanen, who has been a staff member since 1995, the themes chosen each year have typically been open-minded and bold.

"Making the world a better place, one camp at a time," Juho says. However, addressing social issues and being bold requires a balancing act in a global environment.

"When the youth go home and tell their parents what they did and learned at camp, we must be able to stand behind the camp's words and deeds."

The boundaries of what is acceptable are culturally bound, and certain themes on sexuality or religion, for example, have not been included. However, themes such as teamwork and communication are universal.

"We've always been able to give a reason to why something's been done the way it has," Juho says.

When discussing the themes, staff members are not always unanimous. Long-time staff member Krzysztof Bernfeld says that for his entire camp career – nearly a quarter of a century – the camp ethos has remained on the better side of the mainstream. The camp has always been attuned to the social debate and striven to stand for good.

Nevertheless, he believes the camp should not become too political. Some campers come from countries and families that are much more conservative than those in the Nordic region, and they should also feel welcome. Krzysztof emphasizes that while certain issues dividing liberals and conservatives are debated behind the scenes, all staff members are ultimately on the side of the campers. No one wants the young people to feel bad or for anyone to feel unsafe.

"We sometimes have intense discussions," Krzysztof says, "but different opinions are heard. Everyone wants to create a great camp experience."

The rich and the poor: a favorite theme

Since the mid-1990s, camps have been planned with a different theme each year. As some of the campers may attend three years in a row, they want to experience new things. However, there are a few themes that have been repeated in different years with slightly different applications.

Many staff members and campers alike mention a game that has stayed with them: The Rich and the Poor. Juho Niskanen introduced it in 1995, his first time as a staff member. In the game the campers are divided into three groups: most of them poor, some middle class, and one or a handful extremely wealthy.

Otto Akkanen was active in developing the camp program.

I didn't really like it when we were divided into the poor and the rich, but I get why they did it.

CAMPER IN 2000, GERMANY, AGE 16

The game illustrates income differences, inequality and privileges between people in the world. The poorest have to work harder and face various challenges in their tasks. For example, doing a craft without scissors proves difficult if none of the wealthy are willing to lend their scissors. The wealthy are chauffeured from place to place, while the poor have to walk from station to station with their feet tied to another camper's feet. The rich are actually not allowed to do anything, and the game becomes tedious for them over time, as all they can do is observe the others and give orders.

Food fight!

The inequality becomes especially tangible at lunch.

"From some offhand remark came the idea – what if the poor were given only rice, the middle class got a normal meal, and the rich were served a five-course meal at a set table?" Juho Niskanen recalls. The idea from the 18-year-old gained support, and they went with it.

"On paper, it was a great idea," he says.

However, the "poor" were so unhappy with their lot that an all out rice war broke out in the dining area at Kiljava camp, with the poor throwing their rice at the "rich". Juho held his head in his hands, thinking that his first camp might also be his last. It had been fun, but he was sure he would not be invited back.

Fortunately, camp director John Simon was unfazed. The afternoon program was cancelled, and there was a cool-down discussion. John led twenty or so extremely frustrated young people to the campfire area to talk. Several of the campers said they had not come there to eat nothing but rice and that the whole thing was unfair. John pointed out that they had missed one meal, but it was reality for millions of people in the world. Was it fair for so many people are born poor? A great discussion followed.

"Everything we did was meant to bring out questions, and we addressed them in our discussions," John says.

The experience was so powerful that it was repeated in subsequent camps. The reactions are similar year after year. Some of the campers do not get the idea behind the game, but other times, the wealthy want to share their food and other amenities with the poor – and often they do not.

> **The camp changed how I think about wealth and opportunities in life. And also how important it is to broaden one's own horizon.**
>
> CAMPER IN 2000, GERMANY, AGE 16

This was the simplest meal since my birth; however, it was the most impressive one. I got a lot from this simple lunch.

DIARY OF A CAMPER FROM CHINA, 1998

Camp teaches us to appreciate our own and other cultures. After camp, I want to travel more, because all the countries sound so interesting.

CAMPER IN 2022–2024, FINLAND, AGES 14–17

The goal: a sense of inequality

Long-time camp director Jussi Herlin addressed the topic of role playing in the book *Aivot työssä ("The Brain at Work")* in 2019. "The aim of the exercise is to experience the meaning of inequality," he says in the book.

Many campers remember the theme of inequality. Some of those who had to take on the role of a wealthy person found it embarrassing. Some of the "poor" later recall the game with humor, while others get angry even years down the road.

"My least favorite part was the *stupid* life lesson when some of the campers got good food, and we were given plain rice and water. The right thing to do would have been

to give the rest of us a decent meal afterwards," says a camper from South Africa who attended in 2014. "My family spent a lot of money to send me to Finland, and this was how I was treated. I complained about it, but all I got was an apology."

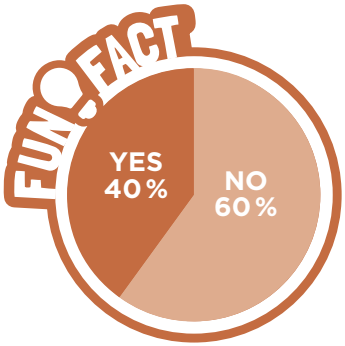
Jussi points out in the book that there are always some in the "poor" group who protest loudly against the arbitrary system of the game, but the goal is to give the campers a powerful experience.

"Empathy develops when we practice seeing the world through another's eyes, and a key part of learning empathy is that the experience must be felt emotionally, not just understood logically."

Current staff member Giulia Alessi participated in the game as a camper in 2014 and was assigned to the poor ranks.

"I was starving and super angry, because it felt so unfair," she says. "But then I loved it." She was glad to see how some of the wealthy realized the unfairness of the situation and shared their food. She understood that life was unfair for many. "I remember going home, my mind full of thoughts –but in a fun way."

Giulia points out that all the campers come from a privileged position in the world – either from Finland or from families who can afford to pay for their child's airfare. It is also worth remembering that mealtimes are frequent at camp: After a light lunch, the next meal is around the corner, so no one goes hungry for long.



Do you remember an educational theme?

The themes the campers mentioned the most were inequality, internationality, and the importance of teamwork.

SOURCE: SURVEY OF FORMER CAMPERS

Zombies attack!

The theme in 2015 was zombies, which were fashionable in TV series at the time. The story told about a virus spreading through the world and the collapse of civilization. The camp was a top-secret facility where campers were trained to fight zombies, and a mad scientist was working on an antidote in a secret hideout.

The virus eventually spread to the camp, and many of the staff members began to turn into zombies. The groups had to find the keys to the scientist's lab, as he had apparently come up with the antidote.

All the tasks were funny and a bit stupid, but it was great.

CAMPER IN 2003, FRANCE, AGE 16

"It may not have been the most profound theme, but it was fun," says a camper from Finland. When the staff members fully embraced their zombie roles, it became easier for everyone to laugh at themselves. The makeup was so impressive and scary that some of the staff members' children who were at camp were kept indoors and out of sight.

"I think it was the best theme," says Jiry Boute, a staff member at the time. The virus spread gradually, which meant that each morning the makeup had to be better than the day before. Jiry admits that losing sleep became a challenge.

"We woke up at five in the morning to put on our makeup," he chuckles.

Bob the Builder: building all night long

There was a certain level of technical ambition in the camp programs after Ari Hänninen, who worked in KONE's product development, joined the group of staff members in 1995. Ari himself says he was like Bob the Builder – constantly building various gadgets and contraptions.

Ari prepared for camp by purchasing a trailerful of building supplies and looking into what was left over from previous camps. The budget was DIY style, maybe a hundred euros per year, Ari recalls. It was common, especially in the early years, for staff to come to him in the evenings with all sorts of questions: Could he make a large ten-piece puzzle for the following morning's task, for example.

"I had to find out if there was a used piece of plywood I could cut up," Ari says.

It was not unusual to see Ari building in the evenings and even in the middle of the night. Sometimes it was due to unexpected requests, but also because the Rantalahti campsite was small, and the contraptions were meant to be a surprise to the campers.

Through the years, the last-minute requests became less frequent, and more preparations were made in advance, Ari says. "Camp gradually became professional."

Ari Hänninen.

The magical “Kone” machine

Ari himself remembers best the “Machine” (Kone in Finnish) as part of the environmental and recycling theme in 2012. The backstory was that the world had been destroyed as result of an environmental catastrophe, and people had been transported through a wormhole into a new world. It was a world untouched by the industrial revolution, and the people had to ensure the new planet would avoid Earth’s fate. Groups of campers were tribes who inhabited their new home planet, producing useful items from materials with the help of the magical machine.

All the tasks were good. I liked best the ones where we saved the world.

ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK, 2003

The machine was a hut, approximately a meter wide and two and a half meters long, with a locking door and hatches in the walls. The machine illustrated the use of natural resources and recycling: insert seeds into a hatch and get cookies, or put in cotton balls and get a T-shirt. The materials helped the group with their tasks, and at the heart of the mystery was figuring out how the machine worked: how to correctly recycle what nature gives us. The machine was operated by Steve Davies, who crawled into it through a concealed entrance, so the campers could not see him come or go.

"I made it through the mornings on crossword puzzles, soda, and candy," Steve recalls.

As the theme drew to a close on the last days of camp, the groups were given keys to the hut in return for successfully completing tasks. They were told that in the hut they would find the reason for the overconsumption of natural resources and a solution

to environmental problems. The machine had spewed out products until the last moment, and the campers wanted to see how it worked.

When they went inside one by one to find the answer, they found an empty hut with a mirror. Nobody else was in the room, and the solution to everything could be found in the mirror.

The concealed entrance to the hut was behind the mirror, and Steve was able to crawl in unnoticed. He slipped behind the mirror to hide before the first campers opened the door.

"It was magical. The campers had to try and figure out how it all worked," Ari says. Steve confesses, however, that he did not stay behind the mirror to hide, though Ari still thinks he did.

"I actually crept out of there and went for a nap," Steve says. "The first thing I learned at camp was that if you see an opportunity to rest, you should take it."

The same mirror idea had been used previously, for example in 2001, when environmental themes were also discussed. In a dramatic climax, spirit beings carried a magical box across the lake to camp. During the evening ceremonies, everyone had the opportunity to peek into the box one by one. At the end of the successful adventure, the campers could see who was guilty of destroying the environment, and who could solve the problems. When they approached the spirit and opened the box, they found a broken mirror, split into two pieces. Staring back at them were two reflections of their own face.

Dousing the ghost of Pascal

Ari Hanninen felt it was important to maintain the element of surprise and not repeat the contraptions in consecutive years. Sometimes he would add to the previous year's structure. One year, Ari built a wooden platform across two sawhorses and set it at the end of the pier at the Rantalahti campsite. Two teams competed against each other, and the winning team could soak the losers with a dunk tank mechanism seen at old-time fairs: a floor that gives way, dumping the person on it into the water.

The last few days there, the staff members were dressed as superheroes and every group had a different "superpower." For example, my group couldn't speak, some other groups couldn't see or could only speak their native language and so on. It was really funny and challenging because it forced us to work as a team and find other ways to communicate.

CAMPER IN 2022, CROATIA, AGE 17

The following year, the lake was too shallow to safely dunk campers into it, and the idea was reworked. Pascal Lancelot, a staff member from France, sat at the end of the dock, and as the campers succeeded in completing their tasks, they could make him fall in the water by yanking on a rope. The third year, Pascal was no longer a staff member, and the staff came up with a third victim for the contraption: Pascal's Ghost.

Jere Santala sat in a wetsuit on top of the structure as Pascal had done. Former campers knew he would fall in the water when someone solved the task and pulled on the rope. This time, however, the structure did not have a dunking mechanism, and the joke was elsewhere. As campers sat on the porch of the lakeside sauna, they eagerly pulled the rope. No one had noticed that it ran from a tree branch to the roof. With a yank, a large bucket of water came splashing down – right on top of them.

SCOUTING SKILLS AND SWIMMING LESSONS

KONE children's camps adopted the scouting approach with its activities and competitions. Various badges were – and still are – earned in scouting, but the ones used at children's camp were the swimming badge and the camp badge, which showed how many times a child had attended camp.

Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa's scouting background probably inspired the Konekari camp's pedagogic thinking, even though the children's camps had more play and less badge earning than scouting did. In 1952, Osmo published *Kolkkapojan kirja ("A Scout's Book")* that listed what boys aged 8–11 should know. The book shows an alert, considerate young man, a patriotic hope of sorts, who is obedient at home, capable in nature, and always helpful.

A scout, like a soldier, had to know how to stand at attention, turn, and stand at ease, march with and without counting. He was good at sports, knew how to sew a button and build a fire, and was skillful at crafts. It was also important that he brushed his teeth, cared for his clothes, made his bed, and cleaned the yard. A scout could identify plants and birds, knew the basics of the Finnish flag, and could sing the national anthem. Doing wild tricks with courage and performing at the evening campfire were also important skills.

"When you grow up and find yourself needing a job, you'll see how much the shopkeeper or factory manager will appreciate your brisk, polite appearance," Osmo writes**.**

At the Konekari camp, military-like marching was not required, but many of the more peaceful lessons at children's camps stemmed from scout pedagogy: knowledge of nature, performing, caring for one's tent and belongings, and being a fair friend.

Learning to swim

Swimming lessons were a key component of the children's camps, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when many first-time campers did not know how to swim. For a long time, the only indoor swimming pool in Helsinki was the one on Yrjönkatu, and inland, swimming opportunities were possibly even fewer – wherever the nearest lake was.

Since the early years of the camp at Konekari in the 1950s, swimming lessons were a standard part of the program. By 1954, they were organized with at least two dedicated swimming instructors, often gym teachers or swim team coaches.

Lessons followed a structured progression. First came *dry exercises,* where campers practiced swim strokes on land. Then, they moved to shallow water before gradually venturing into deeper sections. A boat would take them out to the Marjaniemi diving tower, where they had to pass a test by jumping into the sea.

Swimming achievement badges – awarded for distances of 20, 50, 100, and 200 meters – were handed out during the morning flag raising ceremony. The highest swimming certificates – *Swim Candidate, Swim Master,* and *Primus Master* – were presented in a formal ceremony at the end of camp. A KONE director would deliver a speech, hand out the badges and certificates, shake hands with the young swimmers, and place laurel wreaths on their heads – a proud moment for many campers.

Tapani Väljä, who worked as a swimming instructor at the camp in the 1970s, recalls that the speeches before lessons were nearly identical each year. They typically began with a sobering fact:

"Every year, approximately 200 people drown in Finland. This is why learning how to swim is extremely important…"

Swimming achievements were a point of pride at camp, with the names of all badge recipients published in the KONE employee magazine *Hissilehti* or the camp's own *Hepokatti* magazine. Since many children returned to camp for several summers, they had the chance to take increasingly challenging swimming tests – starting with *Swim Candidate,* then advancing to *Swim Master,* and finally *Primus Master.* At the national level in Finland, knowing how to swim was considered an essential skill, and one of the camp's educational goals was to produce as many skilled swimmers as possible.

In the 1950s and 1960s, an additional badge was awarded to those who successfully swam around the island of Konekari – a challenging 800-meter distance. This achievement was not limited to camp; the badge could be earned outside of the program as well. Safety measures were carefully arranged, with rowboats stationed around the island to assist any swimmer who needed help. Many campers attempted the swim, and even if they failed to complete the

Osmo Vesikansa congratulates swimmers.

full distance, they still earned valuable points for their team by trying.

When the camp later moved to Tourun Torpat, the tradition continued, with campers attempting to swim across the Vehkajärvi lake.

Swimming remained a part of the children's camp program until the very end. In the 1980s, official swimming badges became available at the KONE Global Youth Camp as well, thanks to long-time staff member Raimo Alanko, a P.E. teacher. However, unlike at the children's camps, structured swimming lessons were not part of the youth camp's standard program.

The camp has since become so international that every year brings young people who do not know how to swim. Therefore, it is possible that future camps will once again offer swimming lessons in addition to ukulele and woodworking workshops.

John Simon.

A new era: changes in camp leadership

After nearly three decades as camp director, Aarre Mäki was set to retire in 1995, and a new leader was needed. John Simon, from the KONE Corporate Communications department, was asked to direct the 1994 camp. With a long history of working with youth in New York and experience coaching young athletes in Finland, he accepted the role and soon began implementing changes.

When Aarre took over as camp director in 1964, he inherited a well-established children's camp program from Osmo Vesikansa, having previously served as a staff member himself. The children's camps had followed the same routines from the 1950s through the 1990s: morning exercises, formal flag raising ceremonies, spirited competitions, games, and songs. The youth camps, introduced in 1979, had largely adopted the same structure, remaining unchanged for years.

Some staff members believed that clinging to old patterns had made the camp feel a bit stale. Campers from the 1980s and 1990s who had also attended scout camps noticed that while scout camps had gradually modernized and relaxed their approach, KONE camps still held tightly to long-standing traditions.

John too felt the camp was outdated. He believed in trusting the youth, loosening the rules, and engaging the staff in discussions about what themes and activities were most relevant to campers. This approach mirrored his experiences as both a youth counselor and a basketball coach – fostering independence, responsibility, and adaptability over rigid structure.

> I think I learned about similarities mainly, how so many people were similar. Though I think that my young nature caused me to miss a lot of nuances too.
>
> CAMPER IN 2011, THE NETHERLANDS, AGE 15

"Better if they just get to know each other"

When John Simon took over as camp director, he was advised not to organize too many activities before camp, to prevent the young people from getting to know each other too well. The reasoning? If they became too familiar beforehand, it would be harder to keep them apart at camp – boys would try to sneak into the girls' tents, and so on.

John found this mindset completely foreign.

"When youth come to Finland from abroad, the whole idea is for them to get to know each other," he says. To him, the most important thing was that the campers had fun. "We didn't want it to feel like just another week of school."

His first year was challenging. He had joined after many of the decisions about the upcoming camp had already been made. In addition, many of the staff members had served for years, making it difficult to introduce new ideas. John wanted to make the camp more relevant and engaging – both fun and educational.

Aarre Mäki's daughter, Silja Niemi, who had served as camp director for the two years before John, remembers the transition well. Initially, she was frustrated, feeling that the camp was being taken over by outside influences. But over time, she recognized that the camp had been in a rut and that modernization was necessary.

"Everything in its season; it was probably the right moment for changes," she reflects.

Staff members change, program becomes more unified

Silja left the camps at the same time as her father Aarre. She had graduated from college, started working, and could not justify using her few vacation days for camp. Many other long-time staff members found themselves in similar situations, leading to a near-complete staff turnover in 1995. That year, John Simon assembled an almost entirely new team.

John gave his new staff significant freedom in shaping the camp, and things began to evolve. One of the newcomers was Juho Niskanen, whose camp career did not in fact end with the great rice war of 1995. He and Ronja Verkasalo, who also joined around the same time, became key figures in developing camp programs. In 1999, Otto Akkanen joined them, and together, the trio continued refining and expanding the camp's structure.

"It was amazing to see how much responsibility John was willing to give us," says Ronja. "Some of our ideas were fantastic, others not so much, but the feedback was always constructive. John never shut us down outright."

Ronja became the camp's storyteller. They created characters, storylines, and mysteries that tied activities at the various activity stations together. These were immersive role-playing adventures where the campers played themselves while staff members took on character roles. Early on, the themes of these experiences began incorporating social and ethical discussions.

"Teens between 14 and 17 are deeply engaged with ethical questions and very open to examining the value systems they were raised in," Ronja explains. "It's a crucial age for self-reflection – getting them to think about what truly matters to them and what they want to do with their lives."

> Working in groups helped us learn communication, teamwork, patience, and listening. To be honest, I had more fun in our groups than during free time. Meeting people from other countries teaches you about cultures, languages, and taking responsibility.
>
> CAMPER IN 2000, USA, AGE 17

Education through adventure

When the camp program was being developed in the late 1990s, Juho Niskanen was studying to become a youth counselor. This allowed him to introduce the latest pedagogical trends into camp life. One of the most influential of these trends was Outdoor Adventure Education, which was gaining popularity at the time.

In his book *Seikkailukasvatusta Suomessa ("Adventure Education in Finland")*, Doctor of Education Seppo J. A. Karppinen describes how adventure education experienced a boom in the 1990s, drawing inspiration from Anglo-American and German traditions. The concept focuses on taking participants into nature and engaging them in exciting, unexpected challenges in small groups.

Professor Matti Telemäki, a key promoter of adventure education in Finland, elaborates in the book *Elämän seikkailu ("Life's Adventure")*, that the method encourages individuals and teams to complete tasks that require courage, trust, and cooperation. The key is to step outside one's comfort zone, knowing that a supportive group is there to encourage and assist in overcoming obstacles.

At KONE camps, multiple activity stations incorporate adventure elements, with activities such as climbing adding an extra thrill. In 2000, Juho became a certified rope activities director, and climbing gear was officially introduced to the camp. Today, climbing enthusiast and rope activities instructor Jukka Wiljanen frequently runs the climbing station. All such activities at KONE Camps are carried out with appropriate safety gear and supervision.

It's great to have the chance to do things I don't normally do. It makes the camp special.

CAMPER IN 2024, USA, AGE 16

One of the standout features is a high rope ladder with rungs spaced farther apart the higher one climbs. "Whenever we get up in the air, there's always a little shot of adrenaline," Jukka says. "Our climbing station is on top of a hill, so it also offers an incredible view." Campers can tackle the ladder alone or with a partner, encouraging teamwork and trust-building.

In earlier years, one of the most exciting challenges was a crate stacking competition, where campers built and climbed a towering stack of plastic crates. The goal was to see who could create the tallest stable stack, with records reaching up to 37 or 38 crates high. However, as Finland has largely shifted from using bottle crates for soda and beer distribution to aluminum cans, the crates have become obsolete – taking the competition with them.

A sense of danger helps break barriers

Educator Heli Clarke writes in the book *Elämän seikkailu ("Life's Adventure")* that a sense of danger is an important pedagogical tool. When participants experience inherent danger, they must abandon familiar habits. By exceeding their expectations and overcoming an ordeal, they gain deeper self-awareness. One of the key powers of adventure is that it forces individuals to push past their barriers and develop creative solutions.

Mikko Aalto, author of *Ryppäästä ryhmäksi ("From a Bunch to a Group")* emphasizes the role of groups in adventure experiences. When participants rely on one another, mutual trust grows, strengthening their psychological sense of security.

"Through fears, encouragement, support, and empathy, the group can become safer and more tight knit. Feeling scared together, in particular, and encouraging one another increases mutual trust and strengthens group spirit," Aalto writes.

As the group becomes stronger, participants develop essential life skills, such as heightened self- and situational awareness, recognizing and managing their own needs and emotions, understanding and responding to others' emotions, giving feedback, and committing to the group.

Another crucial aspect is reflecting on their experiences. Historically, adventure education focused on the outdoor experience itself. However, later research has shown that post-experience discussions between staff members and participants serve as powerful learning opportunities. Even more impactful is helping participants recognize how these adventures connect to life beyond camp.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA RESEARCH REVIEW 2022

Adventures require resources

As KONE camps transitioned toward adventure education, Finland was recovering from a recession, and everyone was counting their pennies. It was not an easy equation – providing adventures required funding. Budgeting for activities varied significantly; for instance, throwing darts was far less costly than setting up ziplines.

Juho recalls suggesting to John that they hire a company to build trapezes and cable courses at camp. The cost would have been thousands, possibly even ten thousand Finnish markka – a substantial portion of the already limited camp budget.

"John thought about it, then looked at me and asked if it was important," Juho says. "I told him it would be, and John agreed to it."

Looking back, John says the adventure setups were not as expensive as they initially seemed. Juho had industry connections, and the cost ended up being comparable to renting rubber boats and surfboards, as had been done at Tourun Torpat.

"The bigger challenge was buying tents for the camp," John adds. "Before I managed that in my second or third year, we borrowed old scout tents – and they leaked."

Moving away from competitions

The main activities at KONE children's camps had always been team competitions, a tradition that continued through the first decades of the KONE Global Youth Camp. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Camp Olympics were a key part of the program, with groups tracking their points on giant posters in the canteen. The Olympics remain a part of camp today, though they now last only half a day.

> The camp taught me so much about working with people who may not know the same language but we can still work towards a common goal. I now run a camp myself at work and love incorporating things that happened at KONE Camp into the camp that I currently run!
>
> CAMPER IN 2015, USA, AGE 17

While competition strengthens group spirit, it also creates tension between groups. In the 1990s, new staff members sought to move away from this competitive structure. John and his team envisioned a camp where groups would receive tips and tasks to help them solve problems – challenges that could ultimately only be resolved through collaboration between groups.

"The idea was for campers to gradually realize that they need to work together and share resources within and between groups," says Ronja Verkasalo, who wrote the early programs. "In the end, they'll see that all hundred participants must communicate and solve the puzzle together. They're not competing against each other – they have to cooperate to complete the adventure."

I could be less impulsive and listen more. I like being the center of attention and leading, but in the future I could take a lower profile while still being myself.

CAMPER IN 2024, ITALY, AGE 17

Teamwork is an important life skill

Michael Williams, a staff member since John's early days, emphasizes that teamwork is a crucial life skill. "It doesn't matter how intelligent, strong, or brave young people are – if they don't work together and communicate, they'll struggle to succeed in life. They need to get used to it," he says.

Michael notes that while campers naturally get excited about competition, winning is not the goal at camp – no one should be placed on a pedestal. He recalls being there when campers dunked Pascal off the dock into the lake. At the time, everyone thought it was fun to "punish" a staff member.

"But those games created tension between campers and staff, and we no longer want to encourage that," Michael explains.

That does not mean that campers and staff cannot have friendly contests – occasional soccer games and other small-scale competitions remain popular. The campers usually lose.

Simpler themes

Ambitious and complex themes continued well into the 2000s. By the 2010s, however, Juho Niskanen and a few other staff members had less time to focus on planning and writing themes, and the educational stories in the morning program became slightly less intense.

At the same time, the rest of the camp program became more varied and engaging for campers. Juho is confident that camp remains a meaningful and educational experience. However, from a youth worker's perspective, he notes that the pedagogical side once carried more weight and had clearer goals. He also feels that the responsibility for pedagogical planning tends to fall too heavily on him, as he works professionally with youth. He believes this responsibility should be distributed more evenly across the organization.

In past years, themes were sometimes planned with such enthusiasm that their pedagogical focus was lost along the way. Michael Williams recalls that some camp programs became so complex that even staff members – despite months of preparation – struggled to understand them.

"The theme might have been a bit too complicated in such cases," Michael says with a grin.

A simpler camp program is often easier to grasp, especially considering that most campers are navigating a foreign language. The theme should be accessible yet multilayered – some will engage deeply with it, while others will have a more superficial experience.

"The goal is to give everyone a good experience and a fun camp. It's okay not to understand everything," Juho says.

Sometimes, the simplest activities bring the most joy. At one camp, a slingshot made from bicycle innertubes attached to two poles in the yard became an unexpected highlight. Michael watched as two boys played: one aimed the slingshot, loaded with a rubber chicken, while the other stood a few yards away, bent over, ready to be hit.

"We designed the most complex equipment and programs for them – and this was the most fun thing," Michael says. "But even then, we learned that not everything has to be special or complicated to be fun."

I always remember the camp with a tear in my eyes, it has been the best experience of my life.

CAMPER IN 2022, SPAIN, AGE 17

Juho and Ronja plotting a theme.

Current camp director Carina Herlin agrees that, while the morning program is valuable, it is not the most important aspect of camp.

"Activities always carry an educational message, but I believe the greatest thing is providing a space for teens to be together and meet people from all over the world, from completely different backgrounds," she says. She is certain that even without a structured program, campers would still have a wonderful experience.

As Carina has visited many different KONE locations, feedback from young people and their parents has reinforced her belief that international connections are what truly matter to campers and their families.

"I visited India recently and met parents who told me excitedly how much their children had loved camp. The children had cried for a week afterward, saying they just wanted to go back," Carina says. "It reminded me so much of my own time at camp."

War Reparations and SOCIAL POLICIES

KONE began organizing summer camps in 1947 as part of a broader social policy program. The global youth camp has served various purposes – but always putting the young campers first.


AC/DC

AT TODAY'S KONE GLOBAL YOUTH CAMP, THE COMPANY LOGO appears on water bottles and some office supplies, but corporate advertising and branding are otherwise absent. Factory visits, once a staple of the program, have also been discontinued.

Interestingly, many campers from the 1980s and 1990s who were interviewed for this book had no recollection of these factory visits, despite their former significance in the program. On occasion, host families have still taken campers to the Tytyri mine in Lohja, where KONE tests elevators. Though an exciting place to visit, few campers have listed it among their favorite experiences.

Former campers express deep gratitude to KONE for continuing to organize these camps, noting that few other companies offer similar programs. When asked why they believe the company maintains the tradition, many staff members speculate that it serves as an employee benefit, fostering a "family feeling" within the company. Some suggest the camps help attract new employees while encouraging current ones to build long-term careers at KONE. Many recognize the tradition's deep historical roots, dating back to wartime.

While these explanations hold some truth, to fully understand why KONE organizes these camps, we must look to the past.

Mandatory and volunteer social work

When KONE began organizing children's camps in 1947, Finland and Finnish industry looked vastly different from today. The welfare state had yet to emerge, people worked long hours, and there was no daycare during school breaks.

At the time, companies assumed many responsibilities that are now handled by the state. By law, businesses were required to provide holiday pay and compensation, but most large companies also offered a range of voluntary social services.

Improving housing conditions was often the most significant aspect of corporate social responsibility. Finland faced a severe housing shortage, and workers lived in cramped conditions. Healthy and decent housing was a growing concern in social discourse. In response, companies purchased housing for employees and provided building loans. Owning a home and maintaining a garden were seen as essential to a healthy lifestyle. According to a 1948 report by the Government Institute for Economic Research, 64% of Finnish companies provided employee housing.

After housing, healthcare was another key social initiative. Many companies, including KONE, had their own healthcare staff, from nurses to doctors and dentists. Occupational safety had also been a major concern since the early 1900s. In addition to these essential services, businesses promoted recreational services, such as libraries, reading rooms, employee magazines, sports and other club activities. Access to holiday destinations and children's summer camps were also widely supported.

Susanna Fellman, a professor of economic history who has studied corporate social programs, writes in the *Scandinavian Journal of History* that large industrial companies in Finland played a significant role in social welfare from the early 1900s onward.

Many companies established funds to cover sick leave pay, funeral expenses, and pensions. Employees typically contributed membership fees, but companies also participated in funding these benefits. Personnel service offices within companies operated similarly, deducting a portion of wages to cover taxes, rent, insurance, and possible mortgages. The attitude was paternalistic: the company took care of the employees from cradle to grave.

It was common for companies launching operations in small communities to build homes for their employees, schools for children, and employ nurses and doctors for the community.

For companies like KONE that operated in urban centers, the needs were a little different: they had to attract good employees and keep them employed. Social programs helped achieve these objectives.

> It was important for companies to care for their employees because there was practically no other care available. When the employees were healthy, ate well, and knew how to do their jobs, productivity increased.
>
> SUSANNA FELLMAN, PROFESSOR OF BUSINESS HISTORY

America and religious ethics

According to the seminal corporate history book *KONE*, published in 2013, the company's social policies in the 1900s were exceptionally family-oriented and caring for their time.

The book's author, professor emeritus Karl-Erik Michelsen, offers a few explanations. While business leaders of the era often drew inspiration from efficiency-driven

KONE's personnel office in Hyvinkää in 1962.

FUN FACT

Heikki Herlin studied American leadership philosophies, which emphasized efficiency while also ensuring workers were not overburdened.

Germany, Heikki Herlin, KONE's future CEO, was more influenced by the United States. He worked there for a couple of years in the late 1920s, including a stint at the elevator company Otis.

"In Europe, the prevailing belief was that high salaries would reduce profits, but Americans saw efficiency as the key to increasing both profits and wages. The only obstacle to wealth was limited and inefficient production equipment," Michelsen writes.

Heikki Herlin was intrigued by the industrial capitalism practiced in the United States, where everyone seemed to have the right to decent housing, a car, and a good standard of living for himself and his family. He studied American leadership philosophies, which emphasized efficiency while also ensuring workers were not overburdened.

However, the most profound shift in Heikki Herlin's socio-political views occurred back in Finland, when his wife, Anna, introduced him to the Oxford Group.

This Christian revivalist movement, originating in South Africa and later expanding to the United States, focused on individual spiritual growth as a means of transforming communities and even entire nations.

The Oxford Group encouraged members to confess their moral weaknesses and emphasized self-reflection as the path to renewal and inner peace. In 1938, a more politically oriented movement, the Moral Re-Armament Movement (MRA), emerged alongside it. The MRA sought to awaken leaders in business, politics, science, and culture to the dangers of Hitler's and Stalin's totalitarianism.

By 1939, Heikki was deeply involved in MRA activities. He traveled to the US to meet with MRA members, translated the movement's *Rising Tide* magazine into Finnish, wrote articles for newspapers, and delivered lectures on national radio.

MRA's leadership philosophy encouraged humility among employers and insisted that every worker should feel valued in his or her job. While in the US, Heikki wrote in his notebook:

"The responsibility of people is now our most important task. This applies to everyone who works in factories and offices or is otherwise connected to the company. We must sign agreements with people, not unions. That is how we build selflessness, which is the answer to the threat of war."

Shortly after Heikki's return to Finland, the Second World War broke out, followed by the Winter War. During wartime, KONE was tasked with manufacturing grenade shells for the military. When peace was restored, the company resumed elevator production, only to face the Continuation War from 1941 to 1944.

Despite the turmoil, KONE remained committed to supporting its employees. Heikki believed that social assistance did not weaken profits but rather kept the factory operational at a time when labor shortages and war threatened production.

In 1941, KONE rented a space near the factory where employees could relax, play games, read magazines, and socialize – a concept reminiscent of today's youth camps. The company further expanded its social programs, offering additional child allowances, meal assistance, and housing support for employees. Families of employees who died in the war received orphan and healthcare assistance.

More progressive social policies

When the war finally ended, Finland was required to pay war reparations to the Soviet Union. Instead of money, the Soviets demanded industrial products, such as cranes. While Finland funded the orders, companies struggled to fulfill them. According to historian Karl-Erik Michelsen, the Soviet Union demanded cranes so large that they were nearly impossible for KONE to manufacture.

The heavy burden of war reparation deliveries, coupled with food and housing shortages, created immense stress for both workers and company leadership. Finland faced a severe labor shortage, as many working-aged men had died or been wounded in the war. Michelsen notes that signs of strain were evident at KONE, with widespread exhaustion, illness, and absences. In large shipyards and machinery workshops, the pressure sometimes escalated into crises that threatened to delay deliveries.

A long-standing assumption surrounding KONE Camps is that fulfilling the war reparation quotas might have been the reason for starting the children's camps. Employees had worked long hours for years and hardly had any holidays, and so they were offered the opportunity to send their children to a summer camp for a week with full board. While no written records confirm this theory, both Susanna Fellman and Karl-Erik Michelsen find it plausible.

"It sounds totally possible," Fellman says. "The work was hard in the metal industry, and I'm sure the staff had to put in a huge effort to finish the projects."

"Helping employees cope and giving them a chance to recharge certainly played an important role," Michelsen adds.

KONE purchases an island and establishes a children's camp

In the midst of the war reparation projects, KONE began investing in its social policies with renewed vigor. The camps seem to have been one way for the company to support its employees, and Heikki Herlin was finally able to implement his MRA-inspired social policies in full force.

FUN FACT

Whenever someone on the mainland raised a sign at the end of the pier, one of the children would row over to fetch them. Older children were allowed to use the motorboat. This was a coveted job, as the reward was sometimes a candy or banana.

Traveling to Konekari by boat from the factory in Hakaniemi.

An important turning point came in 1947, when Heikki hired Osmo Vesikansa, head of Finland's Boy Scouts and his friend from the Moral Re-Armament Movement (MRA), as the company's social director. Osmo was tasked with embedding MRA principles throughout the KONE organization.

Osmo expanded the company's social programs and launched the first children's summer camp in his very first year on the job. His son, Jyrki Vesikansa, believes his father was responsible for developing new social initiatives at KONE. Given that both Osmo and his wife Sirkka were passionate scout leaders, it is likely Osmo suggested the idea of a camp for the children of employees.

For the first two summers, KONE organized a small camp on the grounds of Jollas Manor in eastern Helsinki. Then, in 1949, the company purchased the island of Vasikkaluoto as a recreational area for employees, and the camp relocated there. The island soon came to be known as Konekari.

The brass band played, young and old ladies competed in a sweet eating contest, while the gentlemen tested their skills at apple peeling. Coffee and dancing on the outdoor stage rounded out the summer celebration for over two hundred KONE employees amid Konekari's lush surroundings.

HISSILEHTI EMPLOYEE MAGAZINE, 1956

Konekari served as a summer retreat for KONE employees living in Helsinki. The company renovated old buildings on the island, adding walls to create more rooms. Families could book a room furnished with bunk beds for a week at a time. This was a coveted luxury; Finland's summer cottage culture had yet to emerge, and most city dwellers did not have holiday homes.

Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa's children recall attending the camps as a privilege. The island was beautiful, the community close-knit, and the kitchen provided hot meals – a welcome comfort.

Karl-Erik Michelsen believes that the socially enlightened Osmo was very aware that workers' apartments were very small, their families were large, and their children spent their summers in the cities. This likely inspired him to have KONE purchase the island and establish the children's camp, offering families access to nature, fresh air, and swimming.

This vision likely resonated with Heikki Herlin, who had once enjoyed farming at Thorsvik Manor before the land was temporarily lost to the Soviet Union. According to

Michelsen, Heikki actually preferred farming over industrial work and likely wanted to give working families an opportunity to experience the countryside and nature.

"Osmo embedded this dream into the company through the camps and Konekari," Michelsen says.

A modern family business

Heikki Herlin and Osmo Vesikansa were shaping KONE into a small welfare state, with the children's camps as a key part of this vision.

"For Heikki, KONE was a family business – with a capital F. Bringing families into the company was very important to him," says Karl-Erik Michelsen.

Heikki took it upon himself to attend the baby christenings of his subordinates and was a sought-after godfather.

In his book, Michelsen writes: "The spiritual awakening of Heikki Herlin revolutionized KONE's business culture. He aimed to transform the Haapaniemenkatu factory into a modern, unified workplace where everyone worked together. In a short time, the strait-laced, technocratic master-of-science graduate became a soft, empathetic leader, molding KONE into a true family business that cared for employees' mental and social well-being."

Business historian Susanna Fellman notes in her research that large companies often provided services beyond the legal requirements, including child health clinics, household advisory services, sports activities, childcare, and summer camps. Employees generally welcomed these programs, and, according to Fellman, workers at large companies often had better work conditions, healthcare, and education than those at smaller firms.

"Investments in health care, education and safety, good working conditions, better housing, extensive maternity and childcare, uplifting social activities, and good sports facilities also became symbols of a modern company led by a modern progressive manager." Fellman writes.

"KONE invested more than others"

"Other companies also ran children's camps and vacation centers – it was commonplace," says Osmo Vesikansa's son Esko Vesikansa, who studied social politics. "But KONE stood out by how much it invested in them."

Esko spent his childhood summers at Konekari and later worked as a camp staff member in his young adult years. He believes that while KONE aimed to foster employee loyalty by being a good employer, its leaders had deeper motivations.

"They believed they could do some genuine good," Esko says.

According to Michelsen's book, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, KONE allocated 15–18 million Finnish markka annually to its social programs – nearly as much as the company spent on new machinery and equipment.

Against the red threat

One key benefit of having satisfied employees was that they were less likely to strike. According to Susanna Fellman, companies that offered social programs generally enjoyed a peaceful work environment and higher productivity than others. Karl-Erik Michelsen notes that this was particularly important to Heikki Herlin, who sought to counter the "red threat" and prevent the radicalization of young workers.

For Osmo Vesikansa, national unity was a central ideal. He aimed to build bridges between the "reds" and "whites," the opposing factions from Finland's 1918 civil war. Although Osmo was a city councilman for the conservative National Coalition Party, he maintained strong relationships with the Social Democrats and even spoke at their assemblies. After the Winter War, he became actively involved in the Boys of Finland movement, where both parties collaborated to establish a unified scouting program.

Though the movement dissolved in 1943, it laid the groundwork for the current youth department of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The effort also contributed to the unification of Finland's Scouting organization.

Imagination took center stage on costume carnival night. It was not a beauty pageant but an event that involved every camper. With eight different costumes to choose from, the transformations were so striking that recognizing familiar faces became a challenge. As the parade began, the camp filled with savage pirates, armed to the teeth, spirited athletes, brimming with energy, and laid-back country folk, strolling as if they had just returned from the hayfields.

HEPOKATTI CAMP MAGAZINE, 1956

KONE was the first company in Finland to organize family Christmas parties. During these celebrations, a group of campers would perform plays and other entertainment. Longtime staff member Hellin Yliherne took on the role of Mrs. Claus.

Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa with their children.

Not a religious camp

In the early years of camp, Osmo Vesikansa was active in both the Oxford Group and the Movement Moral Re-Armament Movement (MRA), but his children never considered their home particularly religious. There was a crucifix on the wall, but no grace was said at dinner, let alone hymns sung. Above all, the Vesikansas were a scouting family, and the children believe scouting had a far greater influence on the camps than the MRA.

"We had a lot of scouting-related and group activities all over Konekari, but we also had free time to sit on the swing, for example," recalls Osmo and Sirkka's daughter, Inkeri Karanko.

Winning was never the focus of camp competitions. Instead, the goal was to be fair, help others, and show kindness – raising children to be good friends to all.

At the first camp, a devotional was held after the flag raising ceremony, just like in scout camps, but the religious aspect was soon discontinued.

"Once, we had a tightly wound staff member who tried to get us to pray at mealtimes. It didn't happen, and she didn't continue as a staff member," Jyrki Vesikansa recounts.

KONE camps have always differed from scout camps in other ways too. When the camp was founded in 1947, a new book had just been published: Lauri Vuolasvirta's scouting-oriented *Leirikäsikirja (Camp Handbook)*. In it, Vuolasvirta criticized Anglo-Saxon-style camps, where tents were pre-pitched and meals were prepared indoors, making them feel more like holiday camps. By contrast, scout camps were built as miniature settlements in untouched nature, in line with the national-romantic ideals of the time.

Konekari fell somewhere in between a holiday camp and a scout camp. The campgrounds were prepared, adults pitched the tents, and meals came from the kitchen. However, conditions remained simple: children washed potatoes and washed dishes in the sea until a summer water pipeline was installed in the 1950s.

Birth of the welfare state

In the late 1950s, Heikki Herlin stepped down from the day-to-day management of KONE, gradually transferring power to his son, Pekka Herlin. The transition was finalized in 1964, when Pekka became CEO and Heikki assumed the role of chairman of the board, focusing on representation and social influence.

According to Michelsen's book, Pekka understood the importance of teamwork and community spirit very well, but he did not share Heikki's MRA-inspired values. For Pekka, social policy belonged to society.

"Pekka stressed that the company, and especially the Herlin family, paid enough taxes as it was. He felt the government should be able to run social programs with that money," Michelsen writes.

It created a sense of pride in company employees to have their employer offer something so unique. I know my dad was really proud that he could give me this opportunity through KONE.

JENNI OSBORN, CAMPER IN 1993, AUSTRALIA, AGE 15

Pekka and Antti Herlin visiting the children's camp at Konekari.

Historian Susanna Fellman notes that this generational shift within the Herlin family coincided with the emergence of Finland's welfare state, which was beginning to replace corporate paternalism.

"The welfare state began to be discussed in the late 1950s and was rapidly built in the 1960s," Fellman explains.

As political support for the left grew, these reforms gained momentum. Throughout the 1960s, corporate paternalism steadily declined, until it faded entirely in the early 1970s. Like many other companies, KONE scaled back its social programs, transferring several responsibilities to the municipalities of Hyvinkää and Helsinki. At the same time, Pekka began aggressively globalizing the company.

Despite these changes, KONE continued organizing children's camps, even as other social initiatives were phased out. The company also retained ownership of Konekari until 1970.

Michelsen describes Pekka's restructuring as a form of "patricide", as he dismantled KONE's social programs and led the company into a new era of globalization. However, he emphasizes that despite their differing views, Pekka and Heikki Herlin shared deep mutual respect. Heikki's international connections and diplomatic skills were invaluable in KONE's global expansion.

"The way I see it, the camps were allowed to stay on because they were a memory of the old times and a continuum for them," Michelsen says.

Michelsen also notes that Pekka had a softer side and maintained ties to his father's legacy. John Simon, long-time camp director and author of *Kone's Prince*, Pekka's biography, agrees.

"Pekka valued traditions, and the camps were an important KONE tradition," Simon states.

Antti Herlin, Pekka's son and current board chairman of KONE, shares this perspective. He mentioned to Pekka the idea of discontinuing the children's camps in the late 1990s. Pekka, believing this meant ending the camps entirely, was strongly opposed to the idea.

Rebranding "barbaric" Finland

Aarre Mäki succeeded Osmo Vesikansa as camp director. Initially recruited as Osmo's assistant, his journey began with a phone call in 1962. Osmo contacted the Boy Scouts office, asking if they had a suitable candidate for the role of assistant to the social director.

"I contacted him based on the phone call and was immediately hired," Aarre recalls.

Aarre was an active scout, experienced in leading skiing camps in Lapland. He first worked as a staff member at KONE camps before stepping into the role of camp director after Osmo's passing.

Aarre remembers that Pekka Herlin had a business motive for maintaining the camps: he wanted to raise Finland's profile within KONE, which was rapidly expanding internationally. The global youth camp served as a way for international employees and their children to experience Finland firsthand and to "smuggle" Finnish culture into their homes abroad.

At the time, Finland was relatively unknown in Europe. In countries such as France, it may have been difficult to accept that a new owner from the "barbarian" North had taken over one of their major companies.

"For a long time, KONE had trouble recruiting foreign experts and managers to come to Finland from its subsidiaries abroad," says John Simon, who worked in KONE's Finnish business office for years.

There was a growing need to brand Finland as a familiar and desirable destination – a place where employees could relocate comfortably and confidently send their children. In the early days, many campers were children of managers at KONE headquarters and its subsidiaries, which John believes contributed to the internationalization of corporate culture.

Branding Finland through homes and traditions

In practice, awareness of Finland was promoted by having campers spend a week with Finnish host families before arriving at camp. The campers also visited KONE facilities and Finnish sights. The program included tours of Helsinki and often Porvoo, as well as trips to the Nuutajärvi glass factory and a local museum near the campsite.

Some campers recall the excitement of watching glassblowing at the factory. However, after multiple visits over the years, some began to find it repetitive. The traditional garden swing outside the local museum, on the other hand, remained a favorite. The bravest campers would even swing a full circle "over the top".

"At the end of the excursion, we had to take an incredibly long walk back to camp," says Terhi Salminen, who attended camp in the 1980s and 1990s. "It kind of felt like the

Iiris, Jussi and Emma Herlin as staff members.

army. We had to do sports every day, and if we didn't get enough exercise otherwise, the bus would leave us a mile away so we had to walk."

At camp, staff often organized a Finland Day to introduce campers to Finnish dishes and customs.

Campers' opinions on the success of branding KONE and Finland vary. Matts Falck from Sweden says the camp was perfect and he had fun, so he was left with a good impression of KONE. He later worked for the company for three years as a summer employee.

"My dad had worked at KONE his entire life, so I had, of course, heard of it. But the camps were how the company's brand grew for me."

Eric Polli from Belgium is more skeptical.

"Finland wasn't very well known back then, and we mostly talked about our experiences among ourselves as teens. Adults heard them as vacation stories, so I doubt they made much of an impact. In small circles only," he says.

The camp in later years

John Simon succeeded Aarre as camp director in 1994. During his tenure, the camps played a role in KONE's internal branding. Information about the camps was spread through internal communication channels, reinforcing KONE's family-oriented image. Employees often cited the camps as an example of why working at KONE was more than just another job. However, the camps were never used to polish the company's brand externally.

John recalls that the early 1990s were a challenging time. Financial performance declined year after year, yet he wanted to expand the camps. The camp had a set budget and was eventually incorporated into KONE's communications department, but the director of communications was unsure whether funding could be increased. Despite its long tradition, the camp's position within the company hierarchy remained unclear.

At camp, the Herlin family name was never prominently featured. However, after Antti Herlin succeeded Pekka as CEO, the camp's status improved when Antti's children attended camp, and the family began hosting campers.

"We started having discussions on what was expected of the camps," John says. "I felt then that the future of the camps was secure."

Following John, Antti's son, Jussi Herlin, took over as camp director. He agrees that by the 2000s, the camps were well secured. His more than ten years as director further strengthened the camp's position. Although Jussi's current responsibilities at KONE occupy most of his time, he remains involved as a mentor and staff member, continuing his family's legacy of support for the camps.

Well-liked and reasonably priced

The global youth camp is fairly well known within KONE. As board members, Jussi Herlin and his sister Iiris Herlin have frequently heard positive feedback about the camps during their international travels. Many children of employees, or those of their colleagues, have attended, and parents have deeply appreciated the opportunity.

The camp has been easy to defend, partly because Juho Niskanen, a youth social work instructor and long-time camp staff member, has consistently praised its exceptional quality.

"The camp has also had a conservative budget," Jussi Herlin says.

That said, budget constraints have rarely been an issue. Staff members who have worked at camps funded by other organizations note that KONE provides ample financial support. "I venture to say the budget is several times larger than those of camps run by municipalities or NGOs," Juho Niskanen says.

By the time Terhi Salminen joined the KONE camp staff in the 1990s, she had already helped organize large-scale scout camps. "Planning the KONE camp and the scout camps had a lot in common, except for KONE's budget being ten times larger," Terhi says.

For example, the funding for meals and craft supplies per child was many times higher than in scouting. "That was very liberating for a young scout leader and showed how much the company valued the camps," says Terhi, who now works for KONE.

At the time, she had not fully considered the difference in scale between KONE's corporate budget and the financial realities of scouting, which relied on grants, membership fees, and small camp fees. For her, it was simply a relief to finally plan freely without constantly cutting back or stretching resources.

> **The camp isn't very well known here at KONE. You see it on the bulletin boards, but it's just one piece of news among many. I always start advertising the camp in February.**
>
> MINNA LAINE, FORMER CAMPER, KONE HYVINKÄÄ

Spreading the word

The camps have maintained independent status within KONE, with camp directors having free rein in running them.

Within KONE, internal communication about the camps is active, ensuring that employees are aware of the opportunity to send their children. Employees in Finland are also encouraged to serve as host families.

"Word spreads within the community, creating a positive atmosphere and a stronger sense of commitment to KONE as well," says Iiris Herlin.

In recent years, more effort has been made to promote the camps externally. They are now advertised on social media and at various events.

"For a long time, true to the Finnish way, we didn't want to make a fuss. The camps were going well, and we felt that going public would only take away from them," says Jussi Herlin. "Now we see that it's worth making a little bit of fuss over good things."

Today, branding Finland at the camps is done with a sense of humor. Campers from abroad are encouraged to try Finnish traditional foods, from meat jelly to blood sausage.

"The most important thing, to me at least, is promoting global citizenship and empathy," Jussi Herlin says. "As for the greatness of Finland, the country can speak for itself."

We know the camps well here at KONE, and it's been advertised more in recent years.

TIMO SKOG,
FORMER CAMPER,
KONE NEW ZEALAND

WHO INVENTED CHILDREN'S CAMPS?

What spurred the idea of organizing camps for children and youth in the first place? Who came up with the idea of taking a large group of young people into nature, and why? The answer can be found in the United States of the 1880s, writes Abigail Van Slyck, Professor Emeritus of Art History, in her book *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890–1960.*

At the time, a "back-to-nature" trend was prevalent in Europe and the United States, promoting an idealized and rather middle- and upper-class vision of a good childhood. The notion was that children frolicked under the watchful eyes of stay-at-home mothers, free from work and worries – a far cry from the reality among poorer families. Modern urban life was seen as depriving children of essential experiences in the vast outdoors, posing a threat to their health and vitality. Camps were intended to remedy this.

Van Slyck writes that another driving force behind the establishment of camps was the significant immigration to the United States from non-English-speaking countries. Immigrant families were often large, and idle boys, in particular, were a source of concern. Camps were a way to get young people off the streets and, perhaps, integrate them into American values and aspirations. Early camps mimicked the lifestyle of pioneers, teaching skills such as fishing, fire-making, open-fire cooking, handicrafts, and eventually even living in log cabins.

Gender roles and military aspirations

According to Van Slyck, summer camps were initially exclusively for boys. Camps removed boys from their mothers' care and provided them with masculine role models. Through rough games, long marches, sports competitions, and gymnastics, boys were toughened into men.

The First World War (1914–1918) reinforced the military-like nature of camps and sparked the establishment of camps for girls as well. At these camps, girls learned essential skills such as food preservation and first aid. At the same time, the camps boosted their self-confidence and independence, offering a glimpse into an active life beyond the home.

After the First World War, the appeal of militarism faded in the United States, but in Europe and Finland, the war remained deeply ingrained in people's minds. Historian Susanna Fellman notes that this is evident in the history of Finnish scouting, as well as in the sports activities offered by companies. KONE, for example, had several sports teams.

"It was important to be healthy and ready to defend our country," Fellman says. Supervised outdoor recreation for young men was also beneficial because it ensured that their activities were monitored. If left unsupervised, they might get into trouble – or even discover the "devil" that is alcohol. Fellman points out that such concerns about the physical condition of young men have once again intensified in society.

Finnish camps from the youth movement to scouting

The history of camps in Finland follows a similar path. In the early 1900s, various organizations wanted to bring young people into nature in order to build character and foster loyalty to their country, writes university professor Juha Nieminen in the book *Seikkailukasvatusta Suomessa ("Adventure Education in Finland").*

The temperance movement, religious youth movements, and youth clubs, to name a few, took young people on nature excursions to help them get to know God's creation and where their ancestors had lived. Nearly all adults had roots in the countryside, but the children in the city had only weak connections to nature.

The scouting movement was founded in Britain in 1907 and quickly spread to Finland and the United States. By the 1910s, there were already dozens of scout troops in Finland, as described in the book *Suomen Partioliike 1910–1960 ("Finland's Scout Movement, 1910–1960").* The book was written by Osmo Vesikansa, KONE's social director and a devoted scout.

The militaristic nature of scouting did not sit well with Russia, which was attempting to Russify Finland at the time. As a result, scouting was banned in Finland from 1911 to 1917, when Finland gained independence.

If we attended every camp possible and then worked as staff members at every camp possible, we must have had a good time.

KIRSI VÄLJÄ, CAMPER AND STAFF MEMBER IN THE 1960S

Scouting historian Marko Paavilainen writes in the historical work *Aina valmiina ("Always Prepared")* that when scouting resumed in 1917, it was a "white", militaristic, and bourgeois movement in Finland, which made it unpopular with the labor movement. Many boy scouts soon joined right-wing civil guards, and during the Finnish Civil War of 1918, the boundaries between scout troops and civil guard units were often blurred.

After the war, the scouting movement deliberately distanced itself from militaristic activities and aimed to unify and heal the nation. Scouting was positioned as an inclusive youth organization that did not question the children's backgrounds or their parents' political affiliations. Scouting regained popularity in the 1920s, with its pedagogy built around nature experiences and teamwork.

During the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, outdoor and group activities attracted many organizations working with young people. The labor movement was particularly active, and in 1935, the Finnish Social Democratic Temperance League published its *Nature Excursion Guide for Young People* in 1938. According to the book, camp activities fostered young people's creativity and imagination.

The 1930s were a significant era for the international scouting movement, and scouting leadership training was also developed during this

time. In England, the three-part Gilwell training program was introduced. The first stage consisted of a one-year theoretical correspondence course, followed by a practical camp course, and finally, supervised work in actual scouting activities.

Osmo Vesikansa participated in Finland's first Gilwell course for Cub Scout leaders in 1939. Later, he completed the general Gilwell training for Boy Scouts in England and training for Rover Scouts in Sweden. The scouting program also offered several special training courses, such as troop leader, district leader, elf and cub leader training, and crafts, camping, play, orienteering, campfire, camp leadership, and religious activities.

With this background, Osmo Vesikansa played a key role in establishing KONE's children's camps. As a result, nearly all scouting principles, with the exception of religious activities, were integrated into KONE's camps.

Far from militaristic in practice

Although the origins of the camp may seem patriotic, old-fashioned, and even militaristic by today's standards, the lived experience of KONE's children's camp was quite different. Participants' memories are warm and heartfelt, filled with games, competitions, and singing. Osmo Vesikansa recalled the summer camp of 1952 in the camp magazine *Hepokatti*:

We at KONE's summer camp truly had the Weather Spirit on our side – you remember, don't you, that rain only interrupted our activities once throughout the entire camp? It happened at the older children's camp late at night, after we had already retired to our tents. Some woke up scared, as the storm took a heavy hand to the tent's light fabric.

Mostly, however, the sun smiled on us, and we had the best time running around the island, playing Indians or competing in the Camp Olympics. The ocean water was so warm we wanted to go swimming several times a day. We did stop for meals and worked in our groups; chopping wood, carrying drinking water, setting the table, washing and drying dishes, or being… lazy. Not too lazy, though, as we each had to collect achievement beads for our groups – and collect beads we did.

I could go on reminiscing about camp to fill several issues of Hepokatti magazine, but I will conclude here by giving thanks once more for the happy summer camp days in Konekari. I wish you all excellent results in your school endeavors and be well until next summer. We'll then meet again at the Konekari camp, won't we? Nasku.

HEALTH AND SAFETY at Camp

The camp aims to be a safe place for everyone. The rigid rules of the early years were considered strict, but there may be some legend in those stories. Today, there are fewer rules and more responsibility.

"THIS IS THE MEETING PLACE IN CASE THE FIRE ALARM GOES OFF. Over there is the beach. *No swimming allowed* without the permission and supervision of staff members. And remember: No leaving the camp boundaries!"

Camp manager Jere Santala gives instructions expertly and asks repeatedly if everyone has understood the rules. When lost items are handed out at the evening program, staff member Michael Williams announces every time, "We're not your parents; take care of your stuff."

The spirit of the camp is to give young people responsibility while the staff members are there to ensure a safe and enjoyable adventure. There are only a few rules, and experience has shown that when young people are trusted, they are almost always worthy of that trust.

Camp nurses

KONE camps have almost always had healthcare personnel onsite. As early as the Konekari camp in 1949, the staff has included healthcare professionals. The company's nurse and doctor regularly visited the children's camps.

In the early days of the camp, children were also taught good healthcare practices, including brushing teeth, hygiene, and healthy eating. Later, youth were introduced to first aid skills and risk minimization. Since KONE's occupational health services were outsourced in the 2000s, the camp has found other ways to ensure health supervision by appointing camp nurses. Usually, two staff members with healthcare training

Konekari was a veritable jungle of ticks. Staff member Herne had the job of removing ticks from the campers, and the removal method no longer makes sense. Herne fetched butter from the kitchen, spread it on the tick, which spat everything out and left. Fortunately, Lyme disease didn't exist back then.

ILONA AUTTI-RÄMÖ,
CAMPER AND STAFF MEMBER
IN THE 1960S

are responsible for healthcare and work in shifts. When current camp director Carina Herlin started as camp nurse, she worked alone, but experience has shown that it is a two-person job.

"We've had a few stomach flu epidemics, but fortunately none in recent years. During COVID, we had two campers and a staff member in quarantine for a couple of days. It's good for everyone's safety to have two people responsible for healthcare at camp."

Importance of pre-camp forms

These days, camp healthcare begins with a pre-camp information form on which parents provide details about their children's allergies, illnesses, and medications. In recent years, they have also been able to include information about the child's social

behavior or other psychological factors that might be important for the camp staff to consider. These details are only available to the camp nurses, the camp director and the camp manager. "It's important for us to know if someone needs special support or attention," says Carina.

A camper entering the first-aid room may be surprised to see the amount of supplies available. These include typical over-the-counter medications, and prescription items, such as asthma inhalers and EPI pens for severe allergic reactions.

Minor incidents are common at camp: headaches, stomachaches, colds, sprained ankles, scrapes from falls, splinters, and itchy mosquito bites. Some campers also forget to drink enough water, which can lead to dehydration.

"At our previous camp location, the lake had sharp-edged mussel shells that caused cuts, so we often had to tape up campers' feet after swimming," Carina recalls.

In case of more serious incidents, staff members are prepared to take campers to a healthcare facility or call for assistance. Over the past few decades, this has occasionally been necessary for cases such as fractures, asthma attacks, and even a mouse bite. Fortunately, major accidents have been rare. At Konekari in the 1960s, a child was scalded by hot water from the sauna's boiler, though some people recall it happening outside of camp. In the 1970s, someone on kitchen duty at Tourun Torpat spilled boiling water on himself, then dashed into the lake to cool off.

> The people overall were just so kind. The camp nurse especially made me feel very safe on my admittedly frequent visits because of some issues I had.
>
> CAMPER IN 2023, GERMANY, AGE 17

Finland is safe

In recent years, camp organizers and parents have started holding video calls before camp, allowing parents to voice their concerns about their children's safety.

"In most parts of the world, child safety is a daily concern," says Carina Herlin.

Parents often ask about excursions to Helsinki and whether an adult will always be supervising the children. During the video calls, camp organizers reassure them by explaining Finland's culture of trust and independence, that it is common for parents to leave a baby napping in a stroller outside a café or for first-graders to take public

Sat with the staff for breakfast. After breakfast I got onto the bus, slept for a long while and reached Helsinki! Very beautiful, calm, and peaceful. Saw the host family, did some tasks, drawing on a sidewalk, etc. Saw two beautiful large churches and the heart of Helsinki. Saw the president's building and two guards who I thought were statues.

DIARY OF A CAMPER FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, 2024

transportation to school on their own. While some parents find this surprising, it usually reassures them that Finland is a relatively safe place. Even the tap water is drinkable.

"Not all big cities are safe for teenagers to walk alone, and in some cultures, young people have very little freedom," Carina adds.

Emphasis on psychological safety

The role of camp nurse extends beyond physical health; nurses also provide emotional and mental support for the youth. They listen to those feeling homesick or lonely, help ease school-related pressures, and offer comfort when hearts are broken. Many staff members agree that the biggest shift in the past decade has been the growing awareness and sensitivity toward psychological wellbeing.

"We were among the first to actively discuss psychological safety," says long-time camp nurse Oona Tchitcherin. She notes that some jokes and activities from the early 2000s would no longer be considered appropriate today.

Running a global camp with over a hundred teenagers from diverse cultural backgrounds presents unique challenges. Sensitivity must be woven into every detail, no matter how small.

Oona recalls that when she first worked as a staff member in 2008–2009, it was completely acceptable to have campers do push-ups, and those who were unable to complete the required number fast enough were playfully sprayed with water pistols. At the time, it was seen as harmless fun, but in hindsight, it left some campers feeling excluded.

"Nowadays, we approach activities through the lens of inclusivity and equality. If a game doesn't meet those standards, we leave it out."

Helping campers forget their worries

Some former campers have shared that they were struggling with grief or mental health issues during their time at camp. Many of them also say that camp provided a sense of safety, allowing them to momentarily forget their worries and simply enjoy being there. However, this has not been the experience for everyone. Some have felt overlooked or that their struggles went unnoticed.

"I didn't speak up because I didn't want to ruin the experience for others," says a camper from the 1990s, who had lost a loved one shortly before camp. They recall feeling left alone in their grief.

From 2010 onward, greater efforts have been made to ensure that no one feels excluded. Staff members were at one point assigned their "own campers", four young people each, to whom they would pay extra attention.

"The idea was that if someone was consistently alone, staff would notice it," Oona says. She believes it was a valuable experiment that increased awareness and encouraged staff to ensure every camper felt seen.

Being quiet is not a disorder

"Want to make another round?" "Sure!"

On the last evening of camp in 2024, staff member Krzysztof Bernfeld and a camper who also enjoyed silence strolled around the camp repeatedly, engaged in quiet conversation.

In any large group, there will always be those who seek the spotlight and those who prefer to withdraw – and everyone in between. The quiet ones may have something on their minds, or they may simply enjoy observing. Krzysztof recalls being a quiet camper himself, appreciating how camp director John Simon took the time to listen to him with genuine interest and spoke to him as an equal. He enjoyed camp, even though he often wandered alone or in the company of just a few friends.

"We tend to approach quiet teens as if something is wrong," Krzysztof says. "We speak with a soft voice and become overly sweet and empathetic. But teens immediately pick up on that patronizing tone, and it makes them uncomfortable."

He makes it a point of noting the more reserved campers and striking up conversations when the moment feels right. Other staff members say he has a knack for spotting those who tend to keep to themselves. Krzysztof himself does not see it as anything special – he simply enjoys talking to introverts.

"They usually have really fun and insightful conversations."

His walking companion from 2024 was doing just fine. Their conversation drifted into humorous stories and sharp observations about intercultural communication.

Some of the campers are annoying, but it's part of the experience. You have to be mature enough to ignore them.

CAMPER IN 2024, INDIA, AGE 16

"Some teens just connect with certain adults – just like people do in general," Krzysztof notes. "That's why it's great to have 30 staff members who are all different."

Many staff members agree, saying that a diverse staff allows everyone to find someone they feel comfortable talking to.

You can be yourself

At camp, everyday life and familiar reference groups fade into the background, giving campers the freedom to be whoever they want to be. The goal is to create a safe and accepting environment where everyone feels comfortable.

"Campers can feel quite vulnerable," says camp director Carina Herlin. "They're in a new place, far from their parents, and surrounded by strangers. For many, it's their first time traveling alone. I can't think of anything more important than ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for them."

Vignesh Sugumar.

> The environment was so different from high school. At camp, I didn't experience bullying, exclusion, or pressure for what was considered 'embarrassing'.
>
> CAMPER IN 2013–2015, FINLAND, AGES 15–17

The need for safe spaces is even more pronounced among minorities. Campers and staff members alike come from diverse backgrounds, including different gender identities and sexual orientations.

"Over the years, I'm sure we've had diversity without even realizing it," Carina adds.

Research has highlighted the importance of summer camps for gender and sexual minorities. A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration* found that young people belonging to gender minority groups face significant challenges during the school year, making summer camp a particularly valuable and positive experience – provided that all campers feel included.

Experts emphasize the importance of considering minority perspectives in camp planning and training staff to recognize discrimination, respecting preferred pronouns, and fostering inclusive conversations about gender identity. Having staff

members who can lead discussions on these topics and serve as trusted adults helps create a sense of security, reducing bullying and exclusion.

For many young people, camp can be a place of self-discovery. In a safe environment, they may gain a clearer understanding of their own identity and preferences, free from external pressures.

Choose your pronouns

KONE camps have long fostered an accepting and inclusive atmosphere, with campers and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. Since gender norms and expectations vary across cultures, the camp makes a conscious effort to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. While the girls' and boys' tents and luggage storage areas are traditionally separated, staff members are always open to conversations and finding arrangements that respect each individual's comfort.

"Some of these young people don't experience the same acceptance and patience in their home countries or schools as they do here," says camp director Carina Herlin. "Camp gives them a chance to be themselves. I believe the bonds between campers grow strong because everyone gets to start fresh, without past labels or expectations."

In 2023, the camp's Funnybook, which features photos of all the participants, included the preferred pronouns of staff members for the first time.

"Going forward, both staff and campers all share their preferred pronouns," Carina says. "As role models, making pronouns visible is a small yet meaningful act of solidarity for those who find the matter important or sensitive."

The topic has sparked discussion among staff, much as in broader society.

"As a white, heterosexual man, I've never had to think about things like pronouns," says Jere. "I've always been accepted as I am. So for people like me, it can be difficult to understand the experiences of those who haven't had that privilege. That's why we're putting extra effort into making camp a truly safe space."

Research has consistently shown that gender and sexual minority youth are at higher risk of mental health challenges due to bullying and discrimination.

For Finnish speakers, understanding the significance of pronouns can be challenging, as the Finnish language lacks gendered pronouns and articles. However, English is the camp's common language, meaning everyone is automatically assigned a gender through speech.

Sometimes, campers request to be called by a different name than what appears on their official documents – perhaps a traditionally male name instead of a female one, for example. These requests are honored without hesitation. While changing a name at camp may seem like a small gesture, for some campers, it marks the first time they can define themselves on their own terms.

Evolving humor and inclusivity

Videos recorded at KONE camps reveal that some jokes have stood the test of time over the decades. For example, a Hawaiian Hula dance gracefully performed by a group of male staff members in grass skirts was a source of entertainment in both 1960 and 1991. The camp magazine *Hepokatti* even advertised an "over-the-top blockbuster play" *Boys in Skirts* as early as 1952. However, in recent years, a conscious decision has been made to avoid humor based on gender identity.

This increased sensitivity does not mean that all joking around and silly costumes have been abandoned. Staff members can still dress up in playful outfits, donning dresses, fake beards, or other accessories to bring their characters to life. The difference now is that the humor is no longer rooted in outdated gender stereotypes. The joke needs to be found elsewhere.

Discussions around sensitivity and inclusivity are ongoing, reflecting a broader societal shift toward greater awareness and understanding. Staff member Oona Tchitcherin sees these conversations as valuable and necessary. With campers and staff memebers coming from diverse backgrounds, a group of more than 30 people will not think the same way, of course, yet they all share a common goal.

"The theme needs tweaking, but at its core, we are all working toward psychological safety," Oona says.

Krzysztof Bernfeld thinks it is good that the staff members have different personalities.

I remember a boy in my tent bullying me. I got all the support I needed from the staff, and people genuinely cared. It helped me to trust the camp organization.

TORSTEN SEIDEL, CAMPER IN 1988–1989, GERMANY

Carina Herlin is keen to increase inclusivity at the camp.

For camp director Carina Herlin, fostering inclusivity is a priority for the future. She acknowledges that for some, camp is simply a summer adventure with an international group, but for others, it holds a deeper meaning.

"That's why I want to create a positive, caring, and fun environment."

Gentle discipline

While occasional disruptions do happen at camp, they are usually minor. Former camp director John Simon recalls an incident in the 1990s when some teens displayed racist attitudes, prompting the staff to step in and stop the bullying. While such incidents are less common today, challenges still arise.

"Sometimes, knowing that their parents are far away leads some teens to reinvent themselves in ways that aren't always ideal," says camp director Carina Herlin.

At times, campers may be unkind to one another, and occasionally, someone oversteps personal boundaries. When this happens, the issue is addressed privately and respectfully. Rather than using public reprimands, staff members pull individuals aside for a talk, explaining why certain types of behavior are not acceptable. If necessary, a phone call to parents may have to be made, but most conflicts are resolved quickly and calmly.

"We respect the youth – we're not their parents or their teachers," says camp manager Jere. "Our job is to make camp a great experience for the participants, not to turn against them. Boundaries exist, but their purpose is to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable time."

Goofing around on the roof

Discipline at camp leans more toward understanding than punishment. Staff member Daniel Norin recalls a perfect example from 2024. One morning, he came across a small group of campers who had climbed up a fire ladder onto a low roof. It was a reckless move, slightly dangerous and, of course, forbidden. He told them to climb down.

"They walked over to me, clearly trying to come up with excuses or a strategy to explain themselves," Daniel says. Instead of scolding them, he simply asked, "How are you guys doing?"

The campers, caught off guard, hesitated. "Uh… doing okay," one of them finally replied.

Daniel reassured them that he could keep the incident a secret. Relieved, the campers nodded.

"But I have to call your parents," Daniel added. He saw panic flicker in their eyes.

Then he chuckled. He was joking.

"Should I have yelled at them first thing in the morning? They already knew they had done something dumb, and I don't think they ever did it again."

CAMP RULES

1. Leaving camp without permission is not allowed.

2. Swimming or entering the water is only permitted when a staff member is present.

3. Smoking and electronic cigarettes are allowed only in designated areas.

4. No visiting other tents or lingering inside your own tent during the daytime.

FROM ARMBANDS TO CROWD CONTROL

In the early decades of the children's camps, those who attended recall that discipline at camp was typical of the time. Order was maintained, but children were already accustomed to standing in line and following strict routines at school.

"I think the children's camps ran smoothly, and that doesn't happen without someone keeping order," says Esko Vesikansa, who attended camp in the 1950s. Those who misbehaved were given a lecture and had to wear a black ribbon around their arm – a social punishment no one wanted.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, discipline at camp followed a familiar pattern. Camp director Aarre Mäki handled the serious talks, while Hellin Yliherne comforted those who were upset. Some campers remember Aarre as a kind man; others recall him as a strict leader who occasionally lost patience with unruly behavior.

"I remember Aarre getting mad when we goofed with the lyrics of the flag raising song," chuckles Minna Karhunen, who attended camp over several summers.

Aarre's authority left such a strong impression on Minna that even later, when they were both involved in local politics in Hyvinkää, she still found him a little intimidating. This was despite the fact that Minna was the municipal government chairperson and Aarre a city councilor. They were also good friends – and still are, Minna adds.

For Aarre, maintaining control and upholding traditions was essential to creating a safe camp environment. When the first youth camp was organized in 1979, *KONE News* published a detailed article about it.

"I don't know if we would have had as many international participants if they had known there were strict rules and norms at camp," Aarre said in the article. With campers from eight different countries and a hundred different home environments, conflicts were inevitable, and some of the young people wanted to make their own rules.

"Not everyone understood why things were done a certain way, but most saw the need for common rules."

Finnish campers were often seasoned veterans, having previously attended children's camps and grown familiar with KONE camp traditions.

"I knew what to expect. The foreign campers often complained that there were too many rules – like having to run every time the whistle blew," Mette Pynnönen commented in *KONE News.*

Stefan Mackensen from West Germany agreed, initially finding the rules overly strict. However, looking back, he does not recall much disruptive behavior.

"Aarre had a scouting background, where order is important. We were a hundred lone cowboys without rules – it was all new to us."

One tradition that particularly stood out to international campers was the practice of standing at attention before meals. For those without a scouting background, this was unfamiliar.

"It felt strange. In elementary school, we had stood in line, but after that, people just stood wherever they wanted," Stefan recalls.

Aarre: It was restless at first

Aarre Mäki recalls that the early youth camps were full of energy, and he worked hard to keep everything under control.

After the first global youth camp, Aarre made a few key adjustments to better manage the group. First, the number of campers was nearly halved, while the number of staff remained the same. Second, groups were mixed to ensure as many different nationalities as possible were represented in each team. These changes helped calm things down.

"It's a big risk to take 50 young people from Finland and 50 from abroad and throw them together," Aarre chuckles. Nevertheless, he does not recall any major incidents. He would have considered it a failure if he had ever needed to send someone home early. The international campers quickly learned how to stand in line – especially once they realized that meals would not be served until the lines were straight.

"It wasn't too strict," adds Aarre's wife, Pirkko Mäki, who worked many times as a staff member at the children's camps in Konekari. "There was always a really nice spirit there."

Aarre Mäki (wearing cap).

The atmosphere was too military-like. The staff members were too strict towards the 16–18-year-olds.

CAMPER IN 1993, FRANCE, AGE 17

The staff were a bit strict, but also really fun when the right moment came. There was too much food!

CAMPER IN 1993, GERMANY, AGE 17

Camp discipline: myth or reality?

Aarre Mäki believes that in Hyvinkää, at least, KONE camps had a reputation for being places where it was best not to misbehave. He wonders if this perception deterred some of the more difficult youth from even applying. As for the international campers, after traveling long distances to Finland, they were eager to make a good impression.

Staff members from Aarre's time do not recall the camp rules as overly strict or militaristic. Jouni Mäkäläinen, who attended in the early 1980s, says that while rules were in place, they were reasonable and beneficial.

"It was a well-led camp, which I saw as a plus. The atmosphere was great," Jouni says. He does not recall any conflicts between campers and staff members.

Rolf Relander, who started as a camper and later became a staff member, believes that the discipline was more myth than reality.

"As campers, we liked to exaggerate how strict it was – how we had to pitch tents and stand in line," he says with a smile.

Camp director Aarre's disciplinary talks were feared in the way a school principal's might be, but they were not truly intimidating. Sneaking out of the tent in the night would get you sent to Aarre's office.

"Leaving your tent in the middle of the night was an absolute no-no," Rolf recalls. "It sounded like a big deal, but looking back, it wasn't that bad – just stumbling around tree stumps in the dark. The worst that could happen was tripping and falling."

Smoking cigarettes

Until 1995 in Finland, 16-year-olds were legally allowed to smoke, as was the case in many other countries. At camp, the covered grilling pit at Tourun Torpat became a popular smoking spot. According to Minna Karhunen, the French campers in particular smoked a lot. Still, many campers – like Minna – gathered around the smoking area even if they themselves did not smoke, simply because it was where the best stories were told.

"I remember trying to learn French curse words, and everyone laughed until they cried," Minna recalls.

Camps still have designated smoking areas, but in 2024, the space seemed to go entirely unused. Former camp director Jussi Herlin says it still makes sense to have a designated smoking area for cigarette and e-cigarette users. Without it, some campers might sneak into the woods to smoke, which poses greater risks. Occasionally, families have been asked if their children smoke, and if they do, permission slips have been requested. However, this approach has its own challenges: those who do not want their parents to know they smoke would likely just sneak off in secret.

For safety's sake, it is better to discourage campers from wandering into the woods alone. That is why having a designated smoking area remains a good idea, even if it is no longer used.

A whiff of whiskey

No campers have been caught using illicit substances in recent years, though there have been a few suspicions. Historically, alcohol consumption has also been rare at camp. Silja Niemi recalls only one incident from the 1980s.

One night, after the staff had finished guiding the campers into their tents, Silja – who was on night duty – suddenly heard an unusual sound, like glass clinking against a table. Curious, she went to investigate and found a camper with a bottle of whiskey and a shot glass. Without hesitation, she confiscated the bottle.

The next morning, the staff debated how to handle the situation. Meanwhile, whispers spread among the campers – many speculated that the staff would end up drinking the whiskey themselves.

At the flag raising ceremony, Silja called the camper forward and let him smell the bottle, proving it still contained whiskey. Then, in front of everyone, she poured the entire liter onto the ground.

"That turned out to be a mistake," she laughs. "The smell was unbelievable – the whole camp reeked of whiskey for the rest of the day."

Silja also believes that enforcing an age limit helped maintain order at camp. In the early 1990s, two 18-year-olds were allowed to attend since they had only recently heard about the camp and wanted to join. Everything went smoothly – until the last night.

"They suddenly declared that they were adults and that no one could tell them when to go to bed," she recalls.

While they were eventually convinced to follow the rules, the experience reinforced the importance of maintaining the camp's age limit.

I met a very cute French guy that I ended up falling in love with. We ended up in a long-distance relationship some years after the camp.

CAMPER IN 2011, DENMARK, AGE 14

Balancing tolerance and moral values

Youth camps are always full of sparks and drama – glances exchanged, whispers shared, and inevitable crushes forming. Over the years, the camp has addressed this reality with varying levels of strictness and understanding.

After the 1994 camp, some of the young people expressed frustration in their feedback, feeling that the staff had been too watchful over interactions between boys and girls. They complained that they were not even allowed to talk to each other freely and that visits to each other's tents were closely monitored. To them, it felt "ridiculously old-fashioned" and suggested a lack of trust. They also pointed out that other camps were not as strict.

"When you send a bunch of 15- to 17-year-olds into the woods for a week, there's naturally going to be this sort of age-appropriate, super fun tingling," says Terhi Salminen, who attended camp in the early 1990s.

> Developing a crush is funny as there is no real ability to have private time together. During camp it was really upsetting as people tease you if you try, but the memory is really funny.
>
> CAMPER IN 2011, THE NETHERLANDS, AGE 16

Of course, it has not always been considered just a little harmless fun. Staff members recall an incident from the early 1980s, when a young man was discovered in the girls' tent just before the wake-up call. The Finnish girls had left their mark – his neck was covered in hickeys, with no unbruised skin in sight. Since it was the last day of camp, the staff decided that as punishment, the girls would be sent home early. However, in keeping with the moral standards of the time, the boy – clearly just as involved – was allowed to stay and wait for his bus to the airport. His only consequence? Painkillers for the hickeys.

When John Simon took over as camp director in 1994, he admits he was "American enough" at the time to feel that sexuality had no place at camp and that responsibility for it had to be taken seriously.

"For example, finding out that one of the campers was pregnant would have been a difficult situation to handle," he says.

Another concern was the experience of international campers. Even if they were not directly involved in anything, the last thing the camp wanted was for them to return home and tell their parents they had witnessed or overheard something

culturally inappropriate. This was another reason for maintaining separate tent areas for boys and girls.

Finding the right balance between tolerance and moral values has always been a challenge, but today, the focus is on ensuring both the physical and mental safety of campers. If someone were to show up with bruises on their neck now, it certainly would not be a reason to send them home.

Legendary shenanigans

Sometimes, a camper's playful antics transform that person into a legend. A perfect example concerns Eric Polli, a four-time camper whose shenanigans were fondly recalled in *KONE News* years later. Half Belgian, half Italian, Eric was a natural connector within the large group, fluent in French, English, Flemish, and Italian. He was also an undeniable extrovert.

"Eric was a prankster, but he wasn't difficult or mean," says Minna Karhunen, who was friends with him. Their group was always where the action was – whether good or mischievous. According to Minna, their rule breaking was fairly harmless: splashing water at each other during potato peeling duty or poking holes in soda bottle caps to spray each other's faces.

"We didn't listen, and we definitely ignored instructions," she admits.

Each group had its own assigned table in the canteen, but Eric would regularly wander off to visit others – sometimes even sitting in a girl's lap – forcing the staff to shout, "Polli, get away from there!"

"His antics were completely harmless but definitely the kind that made people scream," Minna laughs.

Eric has warm memories of camp, especially the friendships, the quirky Finnish traditions – like the food and the sauna – staying in cabins, flirting, and the strict rules on alcohol. As for giving the staff members gray hair, his response is simple: he was just lively and curious.

Eric Polli wearing a grey T-shirt and carrying a girl in his arms.

"My mother used to say I was a kind little devil," Eric says.

Eric admits that he was probably a (kind) nightmare for camp director Aarre. Minna recalls moments when Aarre would march Eric off by the ear after yet another prank – but always with a twinkle in his eye. Despite his mischief, the staff members were quite fond of him.

"I guess they appreciated my skills since they invited me back as a staff member once I was too old to be a camper!" Eric says.

One of the core goals of camp is to help young people become more independent and take steps toward adulthood. According to Silja Niemi, Eric settled down considerably during his years as a staff member. For Eric, camp was a place to gain more independence – even though he was already an independent teenager.

"But growing up – I'm still working on it."

Aarre seemed strict, but at the time, I didn't think of adults as being responsible for my safety. We had the freedom to move around – as long as we stayed within the boundaries.

MINNA LAINE, CAMPER IN THE 1980S, FINLAND


TIONAL YOUTH CAMP

Fun-Loving, Camp-Loving STAFF MEMBERS

Camp staff members today form a close-knit group of friends. They come to camp to help create an unforgettable experience for the young people, but also to have fun and see each other.

Nobody could handle such a demanding workload without an incredible team to rely on.

JERE SANTALA, CAMP MANAGER

IT IS EASY TO SEE AT CAMP THAT THE STAFF MEMBERS GENUINELY enjoy each other's company. They walk around together, help each other out, and exchange smiles even when they are in a hurry. Despite having private rooms available, many choose to share accommodation.

Each staff member has a specific role in keeping camp life running smoothly. Some lead group activities during the day while others manage different activity stations. Even when the campers have free time, staff members stay engaged: some organize outdoor games, others assist with arts and crafts, and several remain by the lake to act as lifeguards. When they are off duty, they often walk among the young people and strike up conversations, making sure everyone feels included.

"Staff members make things possible," says long-time staffer Jukka Wiljanen. "We make sure activities happen and that no one is left out. We organize climbing and soccer, take campers surfing and on nature walks, and teach them which berries are safe to eat."

A close-knit group

Staff members agree that the campers are the top priority. Nearly all of them are former campers themselves, and they return year after year to ensure that today's campers have just as great an experience as they once did.

But it is not just their love for camp that brings them back – it is also the friendships they have built with each other. They take their responsibilities seriously, but not too seriously; the staff members also know how to have fun. Over the years, they have

I love wearing costumes and playing the fool. It helps adults, as well, to bring balance to normal life by dressing up in costumes and roaring.

MIRKA JOKINIEMI, STAFF MEMBER

become a close-knit group, keeping in touch between camps and visiting each other when traveling. The camp only lasts a week, but because of its intense and immersive nature, bonds are created that would take much longer to form in everyday life. When the staff members reunite, it feels as if they are picking up right where they left off.

A strong bond among staff members is also essential to the success of the camp. The campers can easily detect authenticity; if the staff members were not genuinely enjoying themselves, the young people would see right through it. Team spirit means not only working together but also supporting and looking out for one another.

"I believe the spirit of the camp is something the campers can feel," says Jere Santala. "That energy allows us to create an atmosphere that tells them there's something truly special about being here."

Neverland keeps adults young

Staff member Jiry Boute from Belgium calls the camp Neverland, a place where adults never grow old. There is no need to maintain a serious work persona, and if staff members walk around in pink wigs or fake mustaches, no one bats an eye. Normal life resumes between camps, but once a year, staff members slip back into their youth, where they can goof around and play. The group remains largely the same year after year.

Daniel Norin from Sweden believes that taking time away from daily life is essential.

"I'm adamant about waiting until after camp to return to my work responsibilities. At camp, I recharge and take a break. In everyday life, I don't have much time to reflect – on life, priorities, and what's truly important. Even on vacation, I have a long to-do list. But at camp, I occasionally stop and ponder what really matters. Even though I'm tired when I go home, I leave with a fresh perspective."

A "murderer" in the midst

Anna Miettinen, who worked as a staff member from 2007 to 2009, says she fully embraced the "staff craziness" and thoroughly enjoyed it. However, she has since reflected on the role of fun and how it can be a double-edged sword: the campers must always be the priority.

"Some of them travel all the way from China to sleep in the Finnish woods. I wonder if I was always sensitive enough to their needs."

Anna believes that having fun and caring for campers are not mutually exclusive, but the campers themselves are the main reason for being at camp. Occasionally, this has needed to be addressed.

In the 2000s, staff members sometimes played secret games among themselves. One of the most infamous was "Murderer." Each staff member was randomly given a photo of another staff member, who became their target for "murder." A "murder" was committed by gripping the target's wrist unnoticed. The "killer" would then inherit

their victim's list of targets. The game was to remain completely secret from the campers. The game helped staff members stay on their toes and offered a distraction from exhaustion, but at times, it did get out of hand.

"As the game progressed, you couldn't trust anyone," says long-time staff member Steve Davies. Staff members walked in groups of three to avoid being left alone with a "killer".

"It was fun until we were afraid to fall asleep, worrying someone would come to 'murder' us in the night. I once blocked my door with a wardrobe just to get a few hours of sleep," Steve recalls.

In recent years, staff members have been asked to ease up on their own games so as not to distract from the campers' experience. It was not practical when staff refused to help move heavy equipment out of fear of being "murdered." Now, games are reserved for the time after the campers have left. Staff members stay on for one more night to reflect on their camp experiences and lessons learned. That is when the games can resume.

Mischief and pranks

Occasionally, harmless pranks add to the fun. Indian staff member Vignesh Sugumar enjoys playing tricks on campers, often involving a well-timed splash of water. One of his favorites is slipping a Mentos candy into a plastic water bottle and asking campers to smell the "special scent" – only to squirt water in their faces. Another is a "magic trick" where he pretends to make a coin move into a bottle, resulting in the same soggy outcome. Mostly, however, pranks are pulled among the staff members themselves.

Daniel Norin admits that when he gets bored, creative ideas for pranks tend to pop into his head.

"We've known each other for a long time and know everyone's boundaries. That enables us to cross them a bit."

He acknowledges that inside jokes and pranks can be confusing for new staff members. Watching an adult glue someone else's underwear together might seem bizarre

Taina Ojapalo.

I became friends with a lot of the staff members. They were around 25 or 30 years old, and we spent a lot of time playing tennis and hanging out. There were two boys from England with heavy Cockney accents – they were hilarious. I don't think I've ever laughed so much in my life.

MATTS FALCK, CAMPER IN 1986, SWEDEN

Often you don't even need to do anything. Just mention the word prank and smile, and people panic.

STEVE DAVIES, STAFF MEMBER

at first. Those who avoid pranking others are usually spared as victims – but once you join in, you inevitably become a target.

One of Daniel's favorite pranks involved a small device that reacted to light. During the day, it was silent, but in the dark, it emitted an irritating mosquito whine or dripping water sound. Daniel hid the device inside the ceiling light in Steve's room, so whenever Steve turned the lights off, the noise began. When he turned the lights back on, the sound disappeared.

"Of course I found the device as it was in my room," Steve says.

Steve had a room all to himself, but Daniel, Jere, and Emma Herlin shared one. To get revenge, Steve attempted to hide the device outside their window, keeping it out of sight. Unfortunately, it fell between the windowsill and the wall, making it impossible to retrieve.

"I guess they couldn't sleep for a couple of nights, until the batteries ran out."

A little more mischief unfolded at that same camp, but Steve decided to go all in on the last night. He completely trashed his own room, flipping the bed upside down, tossing the mattresses around, and hiding his suitcase in another room. Then, he took it a step further. He snuck into Daniel, Jere, and Emma's room, gathered all their belongings, including their bedding, and moved everything to the room where he had hidden his own suitcase, locked the door, and ran outside in a fury to confront his three friends, who were on duty.

"Where's my stuff?" he ranted. "You've destroyed my room!"

The three insisted they were innocent. They inspected Steve's wrecked room and then checked their own – only to realize that their belongings had also disappeared.

"I won their trust, and we decided to find the culprit together," Steve says.

With the camp schedule packed, there is not much time for pranks. Steve got busy and completely forgot about his trick. That night, he was on disco duty until 3 o'clock in the morning. when the first bus left for the airport. By morning, it suddenly hit him: he had never returned their belongings. When he finally unlocked the room and started returning the "stolen" goods to his friends' room, he found Jere, Daniel, and Emma curled up on the floor, sharing a single towel as a makeshift bed.

"I didn't dare tell them it was me until after camp," Steve admits.

Mandatory rest time

Staff members work long days at camp, typically starting with breakfast around 8 o'clock in the morning and continuing until midnight, by which time the campers have gone to bed. In the 2000s, staff often held late-night meetings to plan the next day's schedule.

In more recent years, more attention has been paid to the wellbeing of staff members. Oona Tchitcherin recalls how, during the Rantalahti era, staff members were given crates of energy drinks to keep them going. Camp nurse Hannele Monto put a stop to it, calling it senseless and dangerous. She insisted that rest would be better than relying on energy drinks.

The staff members are super cool. I've known them since I was pretty young, and it gets me excited to come back.

CAMPER IN 2024, FINLAND, AGE 17

"They were long days: first the camp day, then the night meeting, followed by building the next day's stations," Oona says.

Since then, midnight meetings have been discontinued. Now, staff members discuss plans as needed after lunch or dinner, with WhatsApp group chats handling much of the communication throughout the day. If planned well, mornings usually allow enough time to set up the activity stations.

To help ensure staff wellbeing, scheduled breaks are now built into the day. These serve a two-fold purpose: for some, breaks are a reminder to rest, while for others, they are a reminder to spend time with campers even when they do not have a specific assignment.

"This way the workload is more equally divided and manageable," says camp manager Jere. "And it gives staff members permission to take a nap."

Jere admits that the idea of midday breaks stemmed from his own need to nap occasionally. He wanted to create an official rest period, free of guilt.

This shift reflects a broader change in society, where the importance of sleep and recovery is increasingly recognized. Today, it is understood that pushing full speed ahead, non-stop is not necessary – or sustainable.

> Everything is on WhatsApp these days. I'm old school and would rather see my schedule in a folder. On waterfront duty, I don't usually have my phone with me – and I prefer looking at people rather than at a screen, anyway.
>
> STEVE DAVIES, STAFF MEMBER

Improvements in administration

The structure and administration of the camps remained largely unchanged from the early days until the early 1990s. After John Simon took over as camp director in 1994 and introduced changes to the program, the camp structure has once again remained relatively consistent. The program itself has continued to evolve gradually, shaped by input from a large group of staff members.

"Camp has changed organically. John gave a lot of responsibility to some of the staff members in his day, and they have since improved the contents on their own," says long-time camp director Jussi Herlin.

In recent years, the management of finances and administrative processes has become more structured. Tapani Väljä recalls that in the 1970s, staff members were simply paid in cash at the end of camp. Today, they have formal employment contracts, and the safety manager ensures that safety plans, risk analyses, and staff instructions are regularly reviewed and updated. The introduction of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) also brought new protocols for handling personal information, further modernizing camp administration.

Open decision-making

As camp director, Jussi Herlin aimed to listen and be open, giving everyone a chance to speak before making necessary decisions.

"I've tried to be approachable and make people feel like they don't have to be scared of making mistakes."

A conscious effort has been made to maintain a low camp hierarchy. Camp directors carry tents and wear funny costumes, just like everyone else. Ideas proposed by the youngest staff members hold the same value as those of the most experienced corporate leaders. Many staff members appreciate this approach.

"I used to think a lot about hierarchy," says Vignesh Sugumar. "The concept doesn't exist here. Camp has changed the way I interact with teens, as well as in my work life."

Freja Hansen from Denmark values the fact that Jussi immerses himself in camp life, despite his leadership experience both at camp and at KONE. "It makes me feel like we're family and equals," she says.

To Freja, this culture reflects positively on KONE, showing that people in a global business can feel like equals. While there is structure when needed, decisions are made in a way that respects everyone's input. Current camp director Carina Herlin shares that, in recent years, management has worked to open up the decision-making process. When she first joined as a staff member in the early 2000s, decisions were made in smaller circles.

"We have now wanted to make it more democratic," Carina says.

From camper to staff member

By the end of camp, almost every camper expresses a desire to return as a staff member someday. For many years, campers who aged out could immediately transition into a staff role the following year.

When Silja Niemi first became a staff member in 1984, she was just 17, the same age as some of the campers.

"I didn't try to take on a big role, and my age didn't come up very much with the campers," she says.

Silja, the daughter of long-time camp director Aarre Mäki, had been around camp since childhood – even before she was old enough to attend as a camper. Today, such a quick transition from camper to staff member is not common. The age gap between

Staff member Ella Nyström is a friend to campers.

staff and campers is carefully maintained to avoid overlap, as some campers might still be from the same group as potential new staff members. As a result, the minimum age difference between campers and staff is now at least a few years.

Ella Nyström was 19 when she first worked as a staff member in 2017. Transitioning from camper to staff member was challenging for her, as she was closer in age to the campers than to the staff. She initially struggled to establish authority, feeling more like a peer than a leader.

"I was incredibly nervous the first year," Ella says.

Despite the challenges, Ella has maintained a friendly approach as a staff member. She believes this helps campers feel comfortable opening up when they are struggling.

"It's good to vent if someone's sad or angry after feeling that they've been left out. I'm more helpful as a friend," Ella adds.

It's been eight years and I still want to be a staff member.

CAMPER IN 2016, ISRAEL, AGE 16

Jussi Herlin is still active at camp as a staff member.

> On the last day, every camper asks how they can become staff members. I did, too. When you leave the camp bubble, you want to spread the feeling.
>
> NINA SILBEREISEN, STAFF MEMBER , GERMANY

Other staff members in their twenties share her perspective: While it can be difficult at times to assert authority, younger staff members often have an advantage: campers may find it easier to talk to them about personal issues.

Pathways to becoming a staff member

There are several ways to become a camp staff member. While most are former campers, there are also KONE employees, who help maintain the connection between the camp and the company. Occasionally, through various circumstances, staff members join without having been either campers or KONE employees.

When long-time staff members are asked how they ended up at camp, the most common response is: "John asked me." As camp director, John Simon had a keen recruiter's instinct. Whenever he came across an individual, inside or outside KONE, who he felt would be a good fit, he invited them to join the staff. He also extended invitations to former campers in whom he saw strong potential.

"Often even the challenging campers can make good staff members," he says.

In earlier decades, staff members were mainly recruited from teachers, scout leaders, and KONE employees, but former campers were also brought in as soon as they were old enough. As KONE has become more global, the goal has been to have staff members representing all the major language groups. It helps to have people who can speak French, German, Italian, Chinese, and some of the languages of India.

"When a camper knows that I speak their language, they'll have an easier time talking about any issues they're facing," says Vignesh Sugumar. "It also helps me engage with them and prevent small cliques from forming."

Vignesh has also noticed that Indian parents frequently ask him for more details about the camp, which helps provide more information to campers in advance and in their own language.

More open and fair recruitment

The number of staff members has grown significantly over the last couple of decades. The smaller Rantalahti camp required fewer staff, while the larger Siikaniemi camp has grown in size, creating a need for more staff members.

In the 2000s, a core group of staff members returned year after year, with newcomers joining only if they asked at the right time – usually when lists for the following summer were being drafted. Occasionally, host families inquired about how to become staff members.

For a long time, there was no shortage of willing staff, but COVID changed that. During the pandemic, many former staff members moved on with their lives; some

changed jobs, others had children, and many started studying. Suddenly, the camp was facing a staff shortage.

"For the summer 2022 camp, we needed a dozen more staff members and had to launch a recruiting campaign," says camp manager Jere Santala. "We sent emails, social media messages, and asked for applications with CVs."

The response was overwhelming, and Jere even took the opportunity to help many young applicants understand what a CV is and what should be included in a job application. While not all applicants were accepted, the experience may well benefit them in future job searches.

Moving forward, recruitment will become even more open and structured. Rather than relying on word of mouth or good timing, future staff members will be selected through a clear application process.

Similarly, ending a staff position will also be handled more openly. Occasionally, staff members may need to be informed that the job is not the right fit for them. The goal is to approach these conversations transparently and fairly with clear explanations.

Being a new staff member can be intimidating

Recruiting a large group of new staff members all at once came with a valuable lesson: it is better to bring in new staff members gradually, a couple at a time, and at more frequent intervals. After the big recruiting campaign, the camp suddenly had ten first-time staff members, making up around a third of the team.

"They were pretty shy, and we tried to encourage them to ask questions and challenge us old goats," says Jere Santala.

"I was nervous," says Magda Kotowska, who joined as a staff member that year. Though she knew some of the staff, some of whom had attended camp with her, she still felt anxious. To help ease the newcomers in, Jere took them out for dinner upon their arrival in Helsinki.

"It helped build a sense of camp spirit before camp even began."

Magda Kotowskaa, on the left, was nervous at first working as a staff member.

> It's important to show that you're there for the campers, providing a fantastic experience for them. The other staff members then accept you as part of the group and like to help you.
>
> FREJA HANSEN, STAFF MEMBER FROM DENMARK

Magda felt that first timers were treated with respect and welcomed into the team. "I ended up having more fun as a staff member than as a camper," she says.

Freja Hansen, who had joined a bit earlier, recalls that during her first year as a staff member, she focused on observing and asking questions. Even in 2024, her third year, she still found herself asking questions.

"I find that people like to teach you if they see that you're curious. I can also share my own ideas, and they're taken seriously. It encourages me to return again and again."

New staff members face pressures

Canadian researcher Mandi Baker, who has written extensively about summer camp staff, refers to the job as "impossible." Young staff members are often expected to provide meaningful, safe, fun, and positive experiences, represent camp values, and maintain a cheerful attitude – all while earning modest pay. Staff members have a lot

Jukka Wiljanen, Juho Niskanen and Daniel Norin.

of responsibilities that can feel heavy sometimes, Baker writes in her book *Becoming and Being a Camp Counsellor.*

Magda Kotowska admits that the pressures of being a staff member can feel overwhelming, especially at first. "I was afraid something would happen that I wasn't prepared for because I had never worked in a job like that."

For Magda, one of the biggest concerns was ensuring safety while still allowing campers to have fun. She also felt pressure to perform well, knowing she had been chosen for the role.

Summer camps offer young staff members the chance to step into new roles, from responsible role models to goofy entertainers. In 2024, for example, Magda drew up the preliminary work schedule for the morning program.

"It was harder than I expected, but fun in a way. I would never have done something like that in my normal life," she says.

At KONE camps, staff members have a lot of freedom in planning activities at their activity stations. While experienced staff find this routine second nature, newcomers often struggle to come up with engaging and creative ideas. Improvisation skills are handy too, especially when campers are feeling down and need a boost in morale.

Many who work with children emphasize the importance of having a 'bag of tricks' to draw from. While teenagers respond differently than younger kids, the principle remains the same: staff members must read the group dynamic and quickly come up with something that works. One fun approach to preparing for camp is playing games at planning meetings, allowing staff members to test new ideas together.

A camp environment that encourages improvisation helps staff develop valuable skills, says recent staff member, Ella Nyström. In her daily life, she prefers to plan ahead, but at camp, things can change instantly, requiring her to adapt on the fly.

"There's no need to stress. It's rare that things don't work out."

Ella believes it is important to push young people out of their comfort zone and provide them with opportunities for success. Sometimes, that means staff members must step out of their own comfort zone, too.

The close-knit group welcomes helpful newcomers

Staff members who have only worked a few summers acknowledge that the group is tight knit, but they still welcome new faces. However, working at camp is not for everyone.

Being a staff member requires a specific personality and attitude. You must be willing to put yourself out there, work long hours, offer to help others, laugh at even the dumbest pranks, and take camp seriously enough to give 120 percent. Occasionally, new staff members struggle to fit in or are not as dedicated as expected. Many long-time staff members admit that the group can seem too close knit for outsiders to break into.

I liked it when the staff members acted more like our friends than supervisors. They played games with us, for example. But they also kept order and implemented rules.

CAMPER IN 2000, USA, AGE 17

"We need to pay more attention to this," says Mirka Jokiniemi.

When Mirka first joined staff in 2005, she was told she could "go and do as she saw fit." But that is not easy when you have no idea what is expected, what the program's purpose is, or whether you need sponges, eggs, or costumes at the activity station.

"Improvising is easy after fifteen camps, but it's difficult for a beginner. It's like starting a new job where they hand you a computer and say, 'Get to work.'"

These days, new staff are not left to figure things out alone. There are preparation meetings before camp, where they learn about their duties, and newcomers are paired with experienced staff members. Still, there is always room for improvement.

Long-time staff member Juho Niskanen acknowledges that the group can form close-knit cliques.

"Some people here are related to each other or are godparents to each other's children. Naturally, some will have closer relationships. But if you have any experience working with youth, you'll quickly get the hang of it."

Juho believes that anyone with social skills will be welcomed and can quickly pick up the camp's unique 'language'.

"Those who sit on the sidelines will likely stay there. But if you jump in, actively participate, and help – even with the dirty work – doors will open, and you'll be met with thankful smiles."

When the miles get heavy

At some point, every staff member realizes they are too old for the game. Ari Hänninen recalls deciding at least seven times that he was done with summer camps – only to return each year. Eventually, he retired when the camp moved from Rantalahti to Siikaniemi, a transition that required many adjustments. "I felt like my job there was done."

Mirka Jokiniemi too has long considered whether she will have the energy for next summer's camp. "I'm not able to be there for the children like I used to be, to help them feel safe and secure," she says.

Mirka's camp days are long, stretching from morning arts and crafts workshops to evening campfires, where campers learn to make bread on a stick, among other activities. Her cheerful presence begins the moment she steps out of her room in the morning and lasts 15 or 16 hours until she finally goes to bed.

"The days are so long that I'm simply too tired to be readily available," she says. "No chance I'll take a night shift."

To sustain herself mentally, Mirka takes short breaks. During gaps in the schedule, she takes a swim or spends time alone in her room, recharging so she can be fully present for the campers the rest of the time.

When the campers head home and staff stay behind for their final review night, exhaustion often catches up, sometimes in unexpected ways.

"During the 'party day' of the last camp, I went to my room to grab my swimsuit and decided to lie down just long enough to check my phone. I woke up the next morning, glasses twisted on my face, phone on the floor, and still fully dressed. It was a great party," Mirka chuckles.

Osmo Vesikansa, Sirkka Vesikansa and Lunkku Lundgren.

A THREE-WEEK SUMMER JOB

These days, a staff member's role lasts a bit more than a week, including preparations and meetings. Most do not focus on the financial side – if anything, they come for the experience, not the paycheck. Travel expenses are covered for international staff, while Finnish staff receive an equivalent stipend. The goal is to attract people who are passionate about camp rather than those motivated by money.

It was not always this way. For many years, two children's camps were held back-to-back, with the same staff working both. There was only one day in between for cleaning up and resetting. When the global youth camps were introduced, the workload increased to three consecutive camps.

At the time, KONE paid staff members a fair wage, making three weeks of camp a financially attractive summer job. Esko Vesikansa, who worked as a staff member in the 1960s, recalls being surprised at how well he was paid, especially compared to his friends working road construction, laying asphalt.

"I later understood why. As a swim instructor, I was responsible for keeping a hundred children alive."

In the 1970s, staff member Tapani Väljä remembers that younger staff found the pay excellent.

"But Herne wasn't happy," he grins. While young summer workers were satisfied with their earnings, Hellin Yliherne, an established teacher, found the pay rather meager.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, staff members were not required to plan the camps in advance, as the camp structure was already well established. The camp director, a coordinator (if needed), and KONE admininstration handled logistics, allowing staff members to focus solely on their roles. Jouni Mäkäläinen, a staff member from the 1980s, recalls arriving just one day before the campers, only then discovering who else would be on staff that summer.

Despite the differences in preparation, the staff's responsibilities were similar to those of today. They ran activity stations, acted as lifeguards, helped make T-shirts, organized games, and spent time with the young people. One rotating role was "the Sunbeam", a staff member responsible for keeping everything on schedule. Without smartphones or the internet, this job required an old-school tool: a whistle worn around the neck. When it blew, that was the signal to line up or move to the next station.

Over the decades, the camp has had a mix of permanent staff and younger members who came and went. Familiar names from the early camps included Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa, Antti-Veikko "AV" Nikulainen, who played the accordion, Arvo "Lunkku" Lundgren, a jolly entertainer, Leena "Lele" Lehtonen, a swim instructor, and Hellin "Herne" Yliherne, who was like a mother to many. Later, long-time camp staff included the likes of Rami Alanko, a P.E. teacher, Mariatta Hakkarainen, the "kitchen goddess", Hannele Monto, the camp nurse, Martti Kerniö, the "ant professor", and, of course, Aarre Mäki and his daughter Silja Niemi, both iconic camp leaders.

Today's staff members are often baffled to learn that former staff endured three full weeks of intensive camp life. The experiences of those who worked during that era, however, vary greatly. Silja Niemi, who coordinated camp in the early 1990s, recalls feeling physically drained after the long stretch.

"Even now, I know I'm stressed when I dream about camp in my sleep," Silja says. In her dreams, she is overcome by an oppressive worry, wondering if everything is in order or if any campers are missing. Though no one has ever actually gone missing, the nightmarish feeling still lingers even 30 years later.

Jouni Mäkäläinen, who attended the same camps, had a completely different experience. He worked summers at KONE as a custodian, and when his summer job ended with three weeks at camp, he saw it as a welcome and refreshing change of pace.

"It was the highlight of summer," Jouni says. Though the days were full, he felt that camp gave more energy than it took.

Rolf Relander, who worked as a staff member in the late 1980s and early 1990s, agrees. For him, working at camp was a fun way to extend his summers and reconnect with staff he had known as a camper. He enjoyed organizing activity stations and even goofing off on stage.

"It was easygoing; there was definitely no stress," he says. "I don't recall being exhausted in any way afterward."

Before the time of pranks

None of the former staff members from earlier decades recall playing pranks on each other, let alone on campers. Silja Niemi, a staff member in the 1980s and 1990s, says they were simply too busy to even think about pranks.

Some of the staff members were also older; for example, Hellin Yliherne had already been retired for some time, and many of the teachers on staff were well into their years. Silja also remembers her father, Aarre Mäki, who worked in Hyvinkää during his later years, driving to camp in the evenings just to make sure the staff members were asleep. Despite the long days, staff members got along well together and enjoyed quiet moments of relaxation after the campers went to bed.

"We had staff member parties," says Jyrki Vesikansa, recalling the 1950s. Instead of pulling pranks, staff members spent their downtime playing cards. "Marjapussi was a popular traditional card game, and we even played a tame version of strip poker," he adds with a grin.

Herne: No gap between staff members and the children

One of the most beloved long-time staff members was Hellin Yliherne, whom everyone affectionately called Herne. She joined the camp staff in 1961 and in 1985 gave an interview to *KONE News.* She described the camp's unique spirit, one that had endured for a quarter of a century.

"There is no gap between the staff members and the children," Herne said. "The staff members identify with the children."

Herne believed it was crucial for every staff member to embrace the camp spirit, where no one was above another. "Everyone is equal; one person is good at one thing, another at something else. We work to complement one another. That's how it should be. If a staff member were to keep a skill or piece of knowledge to himself, everything would crumble and fall. Nothing would work."

Herne is remembered fondly by all who knew her. She was warm, comforting, and an

enthusiastic song leader. She also played Mrs. Claus at KONE Christmas parties, despite never being directly employed by the company.

"A person full of life," says Herne's grandson, Lassi Tapola, himself a former camper. "Full of spark and energy."

Herne told *KONE News* that there was a good spirit at camp, and everyone participated in everything.

"Nobody ever refuses to participate. Nobody tells another that they weren't good at something or that they were to blame for a loss."

One particularly touching example of this camp spirit occurred in the mid-1960s, when a disabled camper attempted to earn his swimming badge by swimming around the island of Konekari. As he reached the final stretch, exhaustion took over, and he sank underwater. He was rescued quickly, but what happened next was truly special: his fellow campers gathered to request that his effort be accepted. After some deliberation, the staff agreed, and he was awarded the badge.


Levi's

LAST DAY *of Camp*

The last day of camp is filled with a wonderful sense of togetherness. As the final night arrives, tears flow. Staying in touch is easier than ever today, and many camp friendships last for years, sometimes even a lifetime.

Everyone here is a ***bomber*** and they should be proud of it.

CAMPER IN 2024, ITALY, AGE 17

I've learned new words here. For example, the Italians say someone is a ***bomber***, when they're a hero.

CAMPER IN 2024, INDIA, AGE 16

AS CAMP DRAWS TO A CLOSE, TIME FEELS AS IF IT HAS BOTH FLOWN by and slowed down. A single week somehow feels as though it has held decades of experiences. The atmosphere on the final day is warm yet wistful, but there is still time for a few more moments to unfold.

Studies suggest that time seems to pass more quickly with age, which may explain why parents feel as though they just dropped off their teen – while for the campers, the week has been a transformative journey.

The last day of camp is often the most beautiful to witness. The young people have bonded deeply, and even the most timid campers have found a few close friends. The campgrounds are alive with different groups making the most of their final moments together. Some are playing sports or swimming, others are crafting gifts to take home, and a few walk quietly in pairs, cherishing the time they have left.

They know this exact group of people will never be together again, and they are determined to soak in every last second. Camp lore speaks of the "camp bubble", a unique world separate from reality that is at its most tangible on the last day, when no one is quite ready to leave.

Planning the camp arc

Camp ends when the campers are at their happiest. Since the very beginning, newspaper articles about camps have echoed the same wish: that camp should last longer. Few want to leave when the time comes, and that feeling is intentional.

If camp were extended, boredom and undesired moments might creep in. The short, intense experience creates the sense that these were some of the best days of a young person's life, filled with unforgettable friendships.

Staff member Juho Niskanen explains that in camp theory even a six-day camp is considered long, and breaking it up with variety is important. For years, field trips were taken to nearby museums, and in 2024, a Helsinki Day was scheduled for Thursday, just before the last day of camp.

"It's good to have repetition at camp, of course," Juho says. Routines help campers settle in quickly. They soon learn the meal schedule, when organized activities take place, and when it is time for free time and sauna.

"But then it's good to break the routine to prevent camp burnout."

Juho is pleased with the rhythm of the 2024 camp schedule. The first three days follow a "normal" camp routine, where campers work together to solve an educational murder mystery involving a unicorn. Helsinki Day provides a midweek change of pace, followed by a final camp day and night, when campers are free to stay up as late as they choose.

The best camp memories: people and global friendships

In the feedback and comments collected for this book, two things stand out as the most cherished memories: the people and the joy of making friends from all over the world.

"People here are very excited and extremely extroverted," says a camper from China, who attended camp in 2024. "I've met very nice people and exchanged opinions. We've talked about history and a bit about politics. Everyone is nice, and we respect each other's religions and opinions, even though we think differently. We listen, then talk."

Former campers often mention that camp helped them overcome shyness and build confidence. Many say they now find it easier to make friends and speak in front of others, while others note that camp broadened their worldview.

Removed all tents, cleaned the waterfront, well there was nothing but, eh, effort? Then I went to arts and crafts, made keychains and a yarn charm. Had lunch, turns out potatoes and fish were surprisingly good for me. Had some group competitions, very fun.

DIARY OF A CAMPER FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, 2024

A common theme among campers is a newfound interest in travel and international experiences. Many express a desire to study or work abroad, driven by their exposure to different cultures and perspectives at camp.

Camp director Carina Herlin emphasizes that there is no way to fully prepare for a global camp experience – you simply have to live it.

"Once you've been through the ordeal together with other campers, you've probably grown up a bit, and it'll be easier to be open when meeting new people."

She believes that this transformation is at the heart of the camp experience.

"That's the main goal of the camp program: tolerance, communication, teamwork, a desire to learn, and challenging one's own assumptions."

VISITORS DAY

From the very beginning, Visitors Day was an essential part of the children's camp, giving parents and families a chance to visit and see camp life firsthand. It was also a day when campers made sure their tents were spotless, hoping to win the flag for the cleanest tent.

Campers put on a special program for their parents, featuring singing and other entertainment. In the 1950s, parents visited camp as many as three times: once for a daytime celebration, then again for the evening campfire, and finally for the closing ceremony, where swimming badges were handed out. By 1959, Visitors Days were reduced to two, and by the early 1960s, it was cut down to one mid-week visit. However, this change caused unintended problems.

"Up until then, the children weren't the least homesick, but when moms and dads were about to leave camp, the children cried," says Kirsi Väljä, who began her camp career in 1962.

Some parents struggled to convince their children to stay, and the youngest campers often left with their parents. To prevent homesickness, Visitors Day was moved to the last day of camp. This allowed children to proudly receive their swimming badges in front of their parents before heading home together. Another unspoken rule among staff was encouraging parents to avoid making phone calls to camp. Asking a child if they missed home often triggered homesickness that had not been there before. To gently discourage this, some parents were simply told that their child was doing great but could not come to the phone because they were in the middle of a competition.

Visiting the youth camps

For the first few decades of the KONE Global Youth Camp, there was no Visitors Day. The belief was that teenagers would not want their parents at camp, as it was seen as their own space. The tradition was introduced in the 1990s by John Simon, but with a different purpose: it was meant primarily for host families.

"Host families were hard to come by, and we wanted to thank them," John explains. "Many of the campers said their time with the host families was the best part, and they wanted to see them again."

Since campers leave straight for the airport at the end of camp, the reunion with host families was scheduled on the last day.

On Visitors Day, host families would hear a short speech about camp life. Over the years, different activities have been included in the program. Some years, there was a Camp Olympics, where host families formed their own team. Other years featured a cultural fair, where campers gave presentations about their homelands. In some years, campers even prepared meals for each other – many recall a kitchen full of loud Italians making pasta. Unfortunately, due to stricter hygiene regulations, that tradition has since ended.

For campers from abroad, Visitors Day was a special moment to reconnect with their host families and show them a glimpse of camp life. However, for those whose host families did not attend, it could be a disappointing experience. The original concern that teenagers would not want their parents at camp has since faded. Ella Nyström, a former camper, recalls that she never minded her parents visiting and believes that most teens would not either.

"If you enjoyed camp, you'd want to show your parents around and tell them everything you've done and experienced."

Today, Visitors Day is not held at every camp. When Helsinki Day is scheduled mid-week, host families are instead invited to Linnanmäki Amusement Park to spend time with the campers.

Packing up the tents and one last slow dance

On the final day, campers take down their tents. If it has rained, the tents are hung up to dry, and everyone brings their belongings indoors. The evening program offers a summary of the camp experience, reflecting on lessons learned and memories made. Many campers muster the courage to perform in front of the group, sharing songs, skits, or heartfelt words. The highlight of the evening is the secret friend ceremony, where campers finally discover who has been leaving them small gifts or cards throughout the week.

Campers are told on the first day that they have the option to stay up as long as they want on the last night. However, two rooms with mattresses on the floor are set up for those who need rest. The young people are reminded to stay on the campgrounds. Some might be tempted to go on late-night excursions, but for safety reasons, adventures on the boulders, in the woods, or by the lake are off limits.

Most end up wandering between the night disco and the campfire, soaking in the last moments of camp. Some play billiards while others lounge on the couches, chatting until dawn. Sleeping is supposed to happen in the designated rooms, but if campers fall asleep on the couch, they are simply left to rest where they are.

Buses depart

The first bus departs at 3 o'clock in the morning, carrying the first group of international campers to the airport. This farewell moment is often considered the true emotional climax of the camp, when practically everyone gathers to say goodbye.

The moment is so emotional that the staff members have created a special playlist for it: Queen's *Friends Will Be Friends*, Aerosmith's *I Don't Want to Miss a Thing* and N'Sync's *Bye Bye Bye* are played on a portable speaker. The pathos of the songs makes the young people laugh a little: Do you really want us to cry? Why are you doing this to us?

Tears flow, the young people hug each other, and the staff members make sure they have all their bags with them. The teens swear eternal friendship and promise to see each other again soon and stay in touch through social media. The final farewell is

The best memories are staying up through the night with permission, meeting new people, eating good food, and the well-planned program. The evening campfires were the best, and the hypothetical night adventure with a new friend.

CAMPER IN 2014–2016, FINLAND, AGES 14–16

emotional. "It's good to get them to cry so they'll remember," says Magda Kotowska. "I cried so much."

Magda's first camp departure in 2017 was nothing short of an emotional marathon.

"I cried my eyes out the entire time we were saying goodbye. Then I cried on the bus, and my seat partner's shirt got wet. I fell asleep for a moment, but when I woke up, I resumed crying. I cried at the airport and on the plane. It must have been a sight – a fourteen-year-old girl traveling alone, crying the entire time."

By the time she got home, her dad was puzzled. "He asked me if everything was alright. I told him I didn't want to be home. At first, I didn't want to go to camp, but I loved it."

Not everyone experiences a tearful farewell. As the second bus departs around 9 o'clock in the morning, emotions have settled somewhat. By the time the third and fourth buses are ready to depart, the remaining Finnish and international campers have accepted their fate. Camp was wonderful, and they hope to see each other again.

Staff members escort the teens to the airport, making sure their luggage is sorted before leading them to the security checkpoint. At that moment, their responsibility ends.

Daniel Norin, Suvi Muotka, Vignesh Sugumar, Melissa Heikkilä, Freja Hansen and Matias Korte.

Staff members enjoy their own camp day

As the last set of brake lights disappears beyond the evergreens, some staff members break into dance, others grab a swimsuit for a swim, and a few head straight for a nap. After a few hours, they receive the final confirmation – the last of the campers has passed through airport security and is officially homebound. Camp is over!

The staff members then enjoy a day that feels much like a camp day, only without the campers. They take a sauna and swim, eat plenty of food, play games, and lounge around, savoring the sudden stillness.

Sometimes, the staff uses this final day to officially reflect on the camp week, reviewing what went well and what could be improved. At the very least, there are informal discussions about successes and areas for tweaking. However, the day is about more than just debriefing – it is a crucial part of maintaining the camp community.

"It's an organization of volunteers at heart. We need to reward people in non-monetary ways," says Juho Niskanen.

Typically, staff members enjoy an evening get-together before camp. The last day of camp is another opportunity to celebrate with friends. Knowing they have those days to themselves, staff members do not have to try to squeeze in social time during camp itself. The last day is vital for keeping up the camp spirit, says Ella Nyström. She also emphasizes that this time together strengthens the team.

"During camp, there's only time for quick conversations over lunch or a sauna break while the campers are sleeping – but the campers are the priority. It's important to have a moment where we can truly focus on each other and reflect on the experience together."

Some staff members still have enough energy to gather around the campfire one last time, but most are ready for bed after a sauna and a hearty dinner. At camp, lights-out has been at 11 o'clock, and by the end of their own "camp day," most staff members are asleep already by then. Nobody makes it until sunrise.

Camp made a big impact on me, because I remember a lot of it. I don't remember much else about things forty years ago. I've never regretted it, and I'd go again, if I were fifteen.

MATTS FALCK, CAMPER IN 1986, SWEDEN

Post-camp blues: coming down from the high

When the campers arrive home, they are exhausted, their shoes and belongings possibly damp, their heads still spinning from the experience. Most sleep in late, and some may even sleep through the first 24 hours. Yet, once the initial fatigue wears off, an unexpected emptiness sets in for both campers and staff members alike.

"I feel like I have a dark hole inside me," says staff member Jiry Boute. "What am I supposed to do now?"

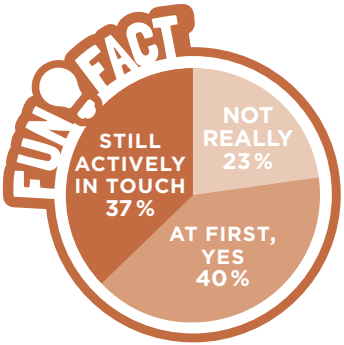
Back home, nobody wants to hear endless camp stories, and former campers find themselves constantly hungry and perpetually tired. Life suddenly lacks sparkle, and they long for camp, fully aware that it will never be quite the same again. This feeling – often called "camp homesickness" or simply "camp blues" – is all too real.

"For the first five years, I stayed awake for every single bus departure, crying my eyes out. I was so sad to know I'd never see most of those people again," says Mirka Jokiniemi. The sadness, longing, and sense of loss could last for weeks, slowly fading as daily life resumes.

Juho Niskanen, who has witnessed more than a hundred camps, says that camp blues are inevitable. The intensity of camp life – the constant togetherness, the deep connections, the inside jokes – creates a bubble that outsiders simply cannot comprehend.

One of Juho's colleagues even books a hotel for a night before returning home, taking the opportunity to decompress before facing reality. "It may seem unreasonable to the spouse waiting at home, but if you can, it's good to give yourself a little time to recharge."

Juho emphasizes that easing back into everyday life is key: "It's best not to do anything too demanding for the first few days after camp, regardless of your role. It may take a moment, but eventually, normal life will return."



Have you kept in touch?

Typically, the most active contact has been with campers from the same country, host families, and one or two close friends.

SOURCE: SURVEY OF CAMPERS IN THE 2000S

Easier to keep in touch these days

Back in the days of the children's camps, many campers saw the same friends summer after summer. For many, it was important to attend camp with familiar faces even though they rarely saw their camp friends outside of camp. Unlike class reunions, formal camp reunions never really took off, possibly due to the large age differences among campers.

For international young people attending the KONE Global Youth Camp, sending letters was the primary way to stay in touch for many years. Some even reunited while traveling abroad, meeting up with old camp friends in different countries. Even today, some campers and staff members plan vacations together, enjoying the benefit of local guides and friendly places to stay when visiting foreign cities.

My tent friends still text each other from time to time. My friend from Spain who also speaks Spanish texts me every day and we are super close. My Taiwanese friend texted me a lot some days after the camp, but we couldn't keep it on that long.

CAMPER IN 2024, MEXICO, AGE 17

Thanks to the internet, keeping in touch is easier than ever. Campers often create chat groups during camp, some lasting only a few months, while smaller friend groups may stay connected for years, especially those who have attended multiple camps together.

For a lucky few, camp friendships last a lifetime. Some have served as best man or maid of honor at each other's weddings, while others have become godparents to each other's children. A few have even dated through their teen years and into adulthood.

However, as time passes, life moves on for most campers. Connections gradually fade, and while they may not talk often, many continue to follow each other on social media, exchange birthday greetings, and occasionally meet up when visiting each other's countries.

WISHES FOR FUTURE CAMPS

We asked campers, staff members, and past participants what they would like to see in future KONE Global Youth Camps. Here is what they had to say:

It would be nice to get more host families. I also wish we staff members could be ready to try new things at camp, to stay relevant. We can always go back if the new thing doesn't work out, but we shouldn't get stuck thinking that certain patterns from the past will work in the future. Of course, maybe we've come up with the best possible way to organize a youth camp, but we can't be sure until we've tried other ways!

JERE SANTALA,
CAMP MANAGER

There's nothing to improve. It's the best camp. Besides, what good are my words? I'm only sixteen. They've been doing this since before I was born, so these people have much more experience than I do.

CAMPER IN 2024,
INDIA, AGE 16

I hope camp doesn't grow from here. Having 120 campers is manageable, and we can get to know them. With 200 campers, it wouldn't be feasible to create such a friendly atmosphere that feels like family.

FREJA HANSEN,
STAFF MEMBER


Camp is too short.
CAMPER IN 2024, CHINA, AGE 17
In a way, I wish camp would take on a more structured direction with the same kinds of rules as workplaces have. On the other hand, I absolutely wouldn't want that for camp because the atmosphere there is so special. I wish we could keep up with the times and understand what young people are interested in and touched by. At the same time, we should be able to keep traditions, hold onto what's important, and let go of what we no longer need.
OONA TCHITCHERIN, STAFF MEMBER
I'd like to redo the entire camp concept. Why do we bring youth here? When we know the answer to that, we need to figure out how to bring it about. Do we have to have all the same elements? These times call for caution, but I'd like to see more courage. We could blow it all up and design a new camp from scratch.
JUHO NISKANEN, LONG-TIME STAFF MEMBER
I hope the structure stays the same, traditional: host family, Lake Day, Helsinki Day, followed by camp. But we must mold the activities and program to fit the growing generations.
VIGNESH SUGUMAR, STAFF MEMBER
I sincerely recommend that KONE revive the children's camps.
ILONA AUTTI-RÄMÖ, CAMPER IN THE 1960S AND STAFF MEMBER IN THE 1970S

Behind the scenes: year-round preparations

while the camp director's responsibilities ramp up in the spring and during camp, the camp manager works year-round, handling both preparations and logistics. For the past ten years, Jere Santala has served as camp manager, balancing a seasonal workload. Spring and summer bring a flood of tasks, followed by a quieter post-camp period, at least after the most urgent paperwork is completed. Jere typically takes a real vacation after camp, using the time to recharge before diving into planning the next one. The first priority is coordinating camp dates with the camp location's administration. Once the dates are secured, Jere starts confirming staff availability and, if necessary, begins recruiting new staff members.

> I have full confidence that the people in charge know what they're doing.
>
> JOHN SIMON, CAMP DIRECTOR, 1994–2008

Much of the work is behind the scenes, involving a surprising amount of paperwork and communication. The application process starts with contacting KONE offices worldwide to ensure every country knows about the camp. Once applications arrive, Jere oversees selection, emailing both accepted and rejected families.

The search for host families is ongoing, requiring constant communication with both families sending children and those receiving them. Flight schedules, allergies, host family plans, transportation, T-shirt sizes, photography permissions, visas, and insurance all need to be sorted and confirmed. Coordinating logistics for staff members is equally demanding. Staff members require flights, hotel rooms, meeting places, phone plans, bus tickets, and employment contracts. Host family visits and camp itself involve organizing buses, signups, seat reservations, and meals. In total, hundreds – if not thousands – of emails are sent and received to keep everything running smoothly. But no amount of preparation can prevent unexpected challenges.

"We also get about a million curveballs and a hundred unexpected situations when people don't read the clear instructions or otherwise act in unexpected ways," Jere says with a somewhat strained smile.


We usually get great feedback from campers, parents, and host families after camp, which is rewarding and gets us pumped up for next summer.
JERE SANTALA, CAMP MANAGER

Springtime preparations for the camp program

The camp program is usually set in motion at the beginning of the year, when the unofficial camp management meets to draft a preliminary plan for the upcoming summer. Later, a planning weekend in Siikaniemi serves as the key moment when everything starts taking shape. Although the meeting is available online, most staff members prefer to attend in person, even traveling from abroad if possible.

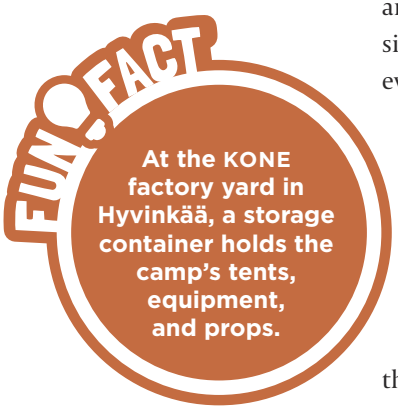
Over the course of the weekend, the upcoming camp begins to form. Small groups are assigned, and leaders are chosen for various tasks. One person takes charge of Helsinki Day, while another plans morning themes. Others organize afternoon activities, evening programs, and special events.

The camp administration has an extensive archive of past programs and activity stations, ensuring a balance between tradition and fresh experiences. The same program is never repeated right away, but one from four or five years ago can be reused with updates and tweaks. Jukka Wiljanen, who has worked as a staff member for almost the entire 2000s, has seen the planning process become much more professional over time.

"Lots of things are now done ahead of time," Jukka says. "It used to come down to the wire before everything was done. The last few weeks were super busy."

During the planning weekend, the main ideas are finalized, and each team focuses on its responsibilities to ensure everything is prepared in time. The camp manager and camp director oversee the process, making sure tasks are completed on schedule, avoiding overlaps, and securing all necessary supplies for the program.

Once the final preparations have been completed, the stage is set. Flights land, campers meet their host families, and the ten-day adventure begins – an experience that many will later call the best of their lives.



Life IMPACTS

KONE camps foster a global and open outlook, shaping the way young people see the world. Many former campers say the experience has had an impact on their lives – from applying for exchange programs and studying abroad to pursuing international careers and even building multicultural families.

KONE camp had a huge impact on my language skills and view of the world. I'm extremely happy with the outcome. I have a better understanding of foreign cultures, and I've continued international activities in student organizations.

CAMPER IN 2020,
FINLAND, AGE 18

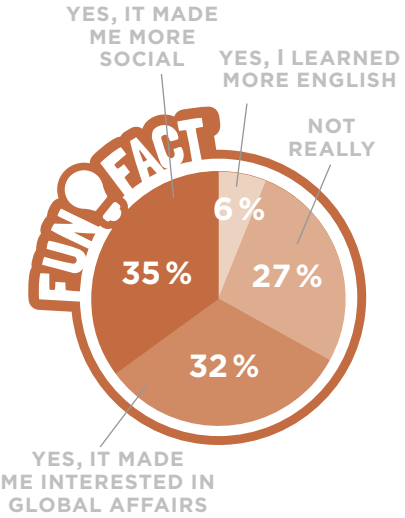
THE INFLUENCE OF CAMP IS DIFFICULT TO MEASURE IN HINDSIGHT. Former campers often struggle to pinpoint exactly which aspects of their experience shaped their lives. However, most agree that their time at a global youth camp made them more open, courageous, and internationally minded.

The international aspect of the camp has been considered particularly important, especially in earlier decades. Minna Karhunen, who attended camp in the 1980s, recalls that KONE camp was a unique international experience for a teen from Hyvinkää. The experience sparked her interest in languages, travel, and foreign cultures, which later led to her becoming a Member of Parliament and CEO of a major municipal lobbying organization.

It is very typical for former campers to study abroad as high school exchange students or through university programs. Some say camp influenced their decision, while others had exchange student dreams in mind even before the camp – and perhaps they went to the camp because they were already interested in internationalism.

Some campers take it even further, sharing years later that they have moved abroad, in some cases, even to Finland.

"I learned how fantastic it was to be abroad and learn languages and cultures," says a former camper from Japan, who attended in 2008. "I later moved to the United States and now have two children. I really want them to have similar experiences to mine in Finland."



Did camp have an impact on your life?

SOURCE: SURVEY OF FORMER CAMPERS

Breaking out of the shell

Many former campers say that camp made them more open and social people. One such example is Steve Davies, who was a shy kid from a small village in the north of England when he started his first camp.

"My hometown was a tiny bubble with a few thousand people," he recalls. "I came to Finland, and my eyes were opened: There was so much more to the world – and there was more within me than I had thought."

Steve attended camp for as long as he could, and when he aged out, he relentlessly applied to become a staff member.

"My thought was to help at least one teen break out of his or her shell, the way camp had helped me do."

Now, as a staff member, he enjoys watching timid young people open up and gain confidence by the end of camp. Steve jokes that he has become a fairly confident shy person. He ended up working in sales, a career he says he never could have pursued without the confidence and social skills he gained at KONE camps.

> Please take me, Finland! I have so much to offer. I want to live in a truly developed country. Will you accept Americans? I promise I won't try to strike up a conversation with anyone while on public transportation.
>
> CAMPER IN 2012, USA, AGE 14

> When my 15-year-old daughter recently had the opportunity to go to Japan, I was all for giving her the experience. I guess my positive experience with travel at that age meant that I knew she could be brave and handle it and that it would be great for her.
>
> JENNI OSBORN, 15-YEAR-OLD CAMPER FROM AUSTRALIA, 1993

Career choices and work skills

Camp has influenced the career paths of many staff members in particular, often in ways beyond leading them to employment by KONE. The experience of working with children and youth, managing activities, and handling unexpected challenges have shaped their professional and personal growth. Liisa Kannisto, daughter of Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa, went on to work in child welfare and says that her years at camp influenced her. A later example is Danish instructor Freja Hansen, whose studies and camp career are still in progress.

"I began my studies to become a teacher, but I recently changed my mind. I wanted to apply to university instead," Freja says. She credits KONE, at least partly, for the decision.

CAMP PREPARES YOU FOR LIFE

The children's camps left a deep impact on those who attended, and many former campers still remember them vividly.

"KONE did a great job; we became so social," says Ilona Autti-Rämö.

"And so nice," adds Kirsi Väljä.

The sisters chuckle, but their words hold weight. They spent their summers at children's camps in the 1960s and later worked as staff members in the 1970s. Camp taught them social skills and how to work with different kinds of people.

"I've done darn well with the gifts I was given," Kirsi laughs. For Ilona, camp provided stability in an uncertain childhood. Her family moved often, and as the youngest sibling and small for her age, she sometimes felt out of place. But at camp, she always felt accepted and valued.

"Camp was such an empowering experience."

Osmo and Sirkka Vesikansa's children spent entire summers at Konekari, and this had a great influence on them. All the Vesikansa siblings remember learning on the island – both at camps and otherwise – that everyone, regardless of social class, can be friends. A special needs child participated in games and competitions alongside everyone else. In an era when society was still divided – where gentlemen's clubs and people's houses for workers kept social classes apart –Konekari was different. There, working men and company managers spent their summers together in harmony.

From camp to career

Throughout the camp's history, many former campers have gone on to apprenticeships or careers at KONE, both in Finland and abroad. Their experiences at camp have shaped their idea of a good employer, but the company's role as a large global employer also plays a part. It is not unusual for the children to end up in the same workplace as one of their parents.

At times, friendships at camp or Konekari have affected everyday work life. For example, Esko Vesikansa later worked at KONE as a payroll clerk. He once miscalculated the pay of a communist with a reputation for being extremely severe. The pay was calculated with a "weird calculator", and occasional mistakes were inevitable.

Instead of exploding in anger, the man calmly approached Esko to correct the issue. Later, Esko's colleagues were surprised by his uncharacteristically mild reaction.

"We're friends from Konekari," Esko simply explained.

Freja found planning and implementing camp programs so rewarding that she wanted to pursue something similar as a career. She was especially drawn to the idea of bringing people together across cultures. In 2023, she began studying multicultural communications, focusing on relationships between cultures, genders, and social groups.

"I can use everything I've learned at camp for my studies –and I can use what I've learned at university to help me at camp," she says. "I can also use the social skills I've learned at camp in all my future jobs and life in general."

Long-time staff member Jukka Wiljanen says that camp taught him how to react quickly to unexpected situations – whether that means thinking up an engaging activity for a group on short notice or helping someone find lost belongings or a missing friend.

"Those types of situations don't take me by surprise after all my time at camp."

Former camper and staff member Rolf Relander, who attended camp in the 1980s and worked there in the early 1990s, says that being a camper helped him mature and become more independent, while working as a staff member taught him responsibility and work skills. The discipline that some campers once complained about, he believes, had lasting benefits.

"It's good to gradually learn to follow rules because they'll hit you in the face a lot harder if you don't," Rolf says. In his professional life, Rolf has observed that many young adults struggle with basic workplace expectations, such as following schedules or being considerate of others.

"You can learn them at camp or on a sports team, but you need to learn them."

> **I've worked internationally for forty years, and I love it. I didn't choose my career because of camp, but camp did have an impact on me as I learned English and about different cultures.**
>
> MATTS FALCK, CAMPER IN 1986, SWEDEN

Depth and meaning in work life

The longer participants spend at camp, the greater the impact on their lives. Juho Niskanen, for example, has worked as a staff member at KONE Global Youth Camps throughout his working life. He studied and later taught youth social work, and he credits camp for giving him valuable professional experience. He also acknowledges former camp director John Simon as a key influence.

I learned how to work with wood, and I love it. I do a lot of 3D printing, but in the future, I could start carving wood. Both use sandpaper.

CAMPER IN 2024, ITALY, AGE 17

"When I think about the people who have impacted my life the most, I can name four. John is one of them."

John Simon, who was camp director from 1994 to 2008, worked in KONE's Corporate Communications Department.

"If someone had wanted to pay me to do it, I would've liked to have been camp director year round. I much preferred it to office work." Originally from the United States, John had planned to work with youth in Finland, but since he did not yet speak Finnish, it was not possible. His job in communications, however, also allowed him to engage with young people through camp. "It was another way to be in contact with the young people. I've always enjoyed it, and camp gave me a lot."

In a way, current camp manager Jere Santala has lived John's dream. Jere has now worked full-time at camp for a decade. Originally, Jere planned to become a teacher, but as a young man, he wanted a higher salary, so he applied to the Helsinki School

of Economics. He pursued a career in the private sector, managing development projects, but quickly realized that a job that only felt rewarding on payday was not enough. Now, camp is a central part of his life, and he loves the idea that camp is changing the world, one small step and one teen at a time. It also helps that he works in a well-resourced environment where he is fairly compensated for his efforts.

"Camp has given my life a lot of meaning," Jere says.

Jere's role at camp is intensive in the spring and summer, but the part-time nature of his job allows him to recharge his batteries, play sports, spend time with his family, and contribute to his local school PTA. Occasionally, a friend from his student days will appear as a CEO on the cover of a finance magazine, but Jere has come to realize that success is not just measured in money.

"The worth of a person is measured with so much more than the thickness of his wallet or the length of his titles."

Using your head

Sometimes camp lessons can help you land a job. When Mike Durbin from England was a camper, his group encountered a rather unusual activity station. Camp director Jussi Herlin was dressed up as pollution and singing love songs to fossil fuels, running through the woods, and throwing trash everywhere.

Mike's group thought that Jussi should be helped because he seemed to be asking for it, so they started throwing trash around. Then, suddenly, it dawned on them: this could not be right. Why on earth were they polluting the woods? Realizing their mistake, they turned against Jussi and started cleaning up instead.

"I think I was 14," Mike recalls. Years later, Mike used this very story in a job interview to illustrate a crucial lesson: Just because someone in a position of authority tells you to do something – even someone you trust – does not mean it's always right. You have to think for yourself. His interviewers loved the lesson, and the story helped him secure the job.

Pedagogical takeaways

Many who work in education confirm that the pedagogical lessons of the camp have influenced their later careers. For example, Ronja Verkasalo is now a professional dancer and dance teacher in the United States. Ronja sees connections between the camp experiences and how they teach young people at university.

> I know it made me more worldly, more well-rounded. I can't specifically say what choices it affected in my life, but I know for sure that I'm a much better person for the experience.
>
> CAMPER IN 2017, AUSTRALIA, AGE 16

At camp, Ronja learned how to combine a position of authority with building trust. They also understood the importance of creating spaces where young people can find answers and new questions for themselves. At KONE camps, Ronja had the freedom to play and experiment with different ways of conveying information.

"All those experiences have helped me figure out the kinds of learning spaces I'm still building," Ronja says. "It also affects the way I look at pedagogical methods. I'm still not at all interested in hierarchic models."

Even if someone has more knowledge about something, it does not have to be shared from top to bottom; instead, spaces can be created where students are made responsible for seeking information themselves. "That's how the camps have opened up my line of thinking," Ronja says.

Community is a gift

Juho Niskanen believes that in many ways he would not be the same person without KONE camps. The camp and the network surrounding it have become a second family and a very meaningful community for him.

Many staff members echo this sentiment, saying that the close-knit nature of the camp staff is one of its greatest gifts. The friendships and support system developed at camp continue to shape their lives, year after year.

"The community is a large family. It's a unique family whose members meet once a year, but a family nonetheless," says Jukka Wiljanen.

At the end of camp, everyone cheered each other on and enjoyed one another's talents. It's not hard to connect with people who seem different. It's a big difference compared to the first group tasks that felt uncomfortable, when we were all shy and hadn't come out of our shells yet. Now everyone is super close, and I know people from millions of countries. I believe it'll make me more open in the future.

CAMPER IN 2024,
USA, AGE 16

For some, camp has become a permanent fixture in their yearly schedule. Many staff members' families and employers understand that for one week every summer, they will be in Finland for camp. Beyond tradition, the global community that camp builds holds intrinsic value.

Families established through camp

For some, camp has also led to the establishment of more traditional families. Kirsi and Tapani Väljä have been together for 50 years. Their relationship did not begin at camp, but they knew each other as staff members. When Kirsi arrived a little late for a graduation dinner, Tapani, already seated, motioned for her to join him. They have been together ever since.

Kirsi's sister, Ilona, is convinced that camp played a role in their romance.

"When you're responsible for a hundred children for two weeks, you get to know each other's good and bad points."

Some of today's staff members have also had relationships, some long-lasting, others short-lived.

"I remember after the 2004 camp, Carina and I started talking about dating," says Jussi Herlin. "The 2005 camp was a bit awkward because we came to camp for the first time as an official couple."

Their children have since been part of camp life in one role or another.

Jussi says that the lessons learned at the camp have become a part of his life in other ways. He emphasizes camp empathy exercises, where participants step into someone else's shoes to better understand different perspectives.

"I cultivate that way of thinking elsewhere in my life, too."

Even KONE's corporate culture has absorbed some camp traditions. Jussi recalls a time when the KONE strategic team ended a team day by playing camp games.

> When we were at camp, there was a group discussion. I remember one of the questions was, "What do you think you lack". My answer at that time was "courage". I thought I wasn't brave enough. I don't like to try many things, and I dislike competition because I am afraid of failure. I always have great worries about the unknown, and I habitually feel that the outcome will be bad. However, at camp, I began to try to express myself because of the cultural differences between the East and the West. This effort also affected my later life. In high school I always spoke on behalf of my group, and I also tried to participate in class performances.
>
> CAMPER IN 2018, CHINA, AGE 16

AN ENDURING LOVE OF FINLAND

Torsten Seidel attended KONE Global Youth Camps in 1988 and 1989. From the very beginning, he was impressed by how well organized everything was. Before camp, he received detailed information about Finland, the camp, and even the median temperatures.

"Finns like to do things well, but they don't toot their own horn about it," Torsten says. "It was really nice."

He was picked up from the airport by a KONE employee who spoke little English. "We didn't say a word on the drive to Hyvinkää. It was the first time I came across the typical Finnish art of silence. I realized it didn't bother me one bit."

Torsten quickly learned that social awkwardness was completely acceptable in Finland, and as a naturally timid person, he felt at home. One detail that stood out to him was how his host family left their front door unlocked even when nobody was home – what a safe country Finland was! At camp, Torsten enjoyed the sports and international feeling.

"It creates its own atmosphere," he says. "Especially when communication happens in a language that isn't anyone's own, and everyone does her or his best."

Erasmus and the dissertation

The positive international experiences later encouraged Torsten to apply for the Erasmus exchange program. He studied at Berlin Technical University, which had an exchange agreement with Tampere University of Technology. It turned out that no one before him had wanted to go on an exchange from Berlin to Tampere.

"I was asked if I was absolutely sure and whether I knew where I was applying," Torsten chuckles.

He told them he had already been to Finland twice and was confident that studying there would be fun, even though it had been a decade since the camps.

"It truly is thanks to KONE," he says.

In 1998, Torsten began an unforgettable year as an exchange student. It strengthened his belief that being in an international environment, surrounded by different languages and cultures, was exciting and rewarding. He also took the opportunity to visit his former host family.

After spending a year as an exchange student, the thought of someday living in Finland

for an extended period kept haunting him. He completed his degree and found a job, but then he decided to pursue a dissertation. He reached out to a professor in Tampere from his exchange days, who recommended another professor's research program. Torsten eventually became a researcher at Tampere University.

"I thought living in Finland might be completely different from attending camp or being an exchange student. And it sure was."

Ordinary Finns

Whether you visit Finland through KONE camp or as an exchange student, people around you help create a safe and structured experience, according to Torsten. There is no need to worry about lodging, classes, or finding things to do – everything is organized.

"A doctoral thesis researcher is more of a lone wolf," Torsten says. "And with age, your interests change."

The bubble that exists in camp or exchange programs eventually bursts, and suddenly, you find yourself in genuine Finland, among real

Finns. Torsten never encountered hostility toward foreigners, but for the first time, he was surrounded by Finns who had not actively sought international contacts. The difference was noticeable.

"It's easy to make contact with internationally minded Finns, but the rest mostly keep to themselves," he says.

To interact with so-called ordinary Finns, he needed a practical reason, something that required attention. Casual socializing was not as common. When he visited the doctor, for example, the nurse might bluntly tell him to come back in two weeks. "It wouldn't happen in Germany. When you go to the doctor, the doctor talks to you."

Considerate Finland

Torsten observed his surroundings and began to understand more about Finnish ways.

"I grew out of my shyness because of the Finns," he says. He realized that many Finns were like him: shy, quiet, and observant. "They're actually being thoughtful when they leave you alone. They don't bother people unless someone does something totally crazy."

He appreciated the way social contact was left to individual discretion and personal space was respected. When he watched the Independence Day speech at Tampere City Hall, he noticed how people stood in the freezing cold, leaving enough space between them for others to walk through without disturbing anyone. He found that very considerate.

Torsten also learned to love the silent communication of Finns.

"The best example is the bus," he says. If two strangers sit side by side on the bus, and the one by the window needs to get off, they usually do not say anything. Instead, the person by the window simply turns to look at their seat partner, who, being observant, also turns to look. They nod, and the one in the aisle seat stands up to let the other out.

"Another option is for the one by the window to grab their bag, which signals the other to look. They nod, and the one in the aisle seat stands up. No words needed. It's incredibly considerate. I really like it."

Torsten eventually stayed to work at the university and spent a total of ten years in Finland. Though it has been years since he left, he still keeps in touch with some people. On a recent vacation in Finland, he looked up old friends, and everyone was eager to see him, making time in their schedules.

"That is another positive side about Finns: loyalty and trustworthiness."

I think my interest and openness towards the world and its cultures comes from camp. Camp also played a big part in my motivation to learn languages. I've since lived abroad, and I don't think Finland is the only possible place to live in the future.

CAMPER IN 2013–2015, FINLAND, AGES 15–17

Camp nurtures a sense of hope

Youth is our future, as the saying goes. According to studies, however, young people's faith in the future is weakening. In 2021, *The Lancet Planetary Health* journal published a poll from ten countries, revealing that 45% of youth were worried about climate change and 75% feared for the future. The trend is echoed in other studies too. According to the International Youth Barometer published by Credit Suisse, young people's optimism has been declining year after year.

In 2022, the Finnish Children and Youth Foundation, in collaboration with software company Tietoevry, published a study on young people's faith in the future. It

found that less than half of Finnish young people believe humanity has the desire or ability to solve the biggest global problems. While concerns about the environmental crisis remain, the fear of war has become the biggest source of anxiety. Yet, despite these worries, all the studies show that young people still have faith in their personal futures, even when society at large does little to encourage them.

The findings sound familiar to KONE Global Youth Camp staff members. Over the years, discussions about society and the environment have deepened, and sometimes the worry is tangible. But even so, camp still brings plenty of hope.

Ronja Verkasalo, who worked as a staff member from 1995 to 2007, says that camp gave them incredible hope for what can happen when people work together. Ronja saw how people's thinking could change in a short time, when the circumstances were right, and when people were open.

"We have a chance to create a structure that helps us see each other as human beings and dispel the illusion of differences," Ronja says.

Campers often reflect on this illusion of differences in their feedback. They say that camp helps them understand that people are fundamentally the same everywhere and that teamwork is possible with anyone. In facing an uncertain future, hope is essential, and teamwork at camp builds trust, which helps combat insecurity.

"If four of us are carrying a table, and I see the other three lifting their corner, trusting that I'll lift mine, the responsibility becomes easier to uphold," Ronja says.

The deterioration of the natural environment, growing selfishness, and global tensions make trust and hope more important than ever. Many staff members say their experiences at camp have left them with a lasting warmth toward global youth in general. When, in just a few days, we can get a hundred young people to rethink things, work together, and genuinely like each other, it is hard to remain cynical.

KONE camps cannot save the entire world, but they are doing their part – one camp and one teen at a time.


KONE

CHECKLIST: *How to Create a Good Camp*

Staff members from 2024 share their best tips for creating a successful international youth camp.

Preparations

- Begin planning well in advance. A strong foundation built in winter and spring ensures smooth logistics and a safe, well-organized camp.
- Delegate responsibilities among staff members and their groups during the preparation phase.
- Use preliminary questionnaires to gather important information on campers' health and needs.
- Communicate with campers and their parents before camp to build excitement and trust. Video chats for questions and introductions can help ease concerns.
- Prepare all necessary equipment ahead of time. No one wants to be searching for supplies in the middle of the night.

Start of camp

- Make the campers feel welcome from the moment they arrive. Ensure both campers and staff understand what to expect in the coming days.
- Overcome language and cultural barriers early. Encourage campers to interact, ensure that staff engages with campers immediately to build trust. Staff members are not teachers or parents, but campers must still trust them on important matters.
- Give campers a sense of responsibility for their own wellbeing. Fewer, clearer rules are easier to follow.

Selection and attitude of staff members

- Staff members should be motivated by a genuine desire to create an amazing experience for the campers, not just by the paycheck.
- A positive atmosphere among staff members is crucial, as it directly affects the campers. Stress among staff members can easily transfer to the group, so staff should also take time to relax, play, and enjoy camp life.
- A diverse team with different cultural backgrounds and personalities helps campers find someone they can relate to. Charisma comes in many forms!
- Staff members should be willing to risk embarrassing themselves, as doing so can help campers feel at ease and overcome their own self-consciousness.
- Staff presence is key. They must be approachable, engaged, and ready to interact with campers.
- Assign staff members tasks that suit their strengths. Not everyone is great at sports or crafts. Balancing responsibilities ensures everyone can contribute effectively.

A well-balanced program

- Include a sense of adventure, but within safe limits. Stepping out of one's comfort zone with group support promotes personal growth.
- Balance physical activities with intellectual ones. Every camper has different strengths, so variety is essential.
- Mix structured group activities, guided voluntary options, and free time. Not everything needs to be pre-planned. Sometimes, boredom sparks creativity!
- Use scheduled activities to mix groups and encourage friendships across language and cultural barriers. Thoughtful grouping ensures no one is left out.

Camp location and food

- Choose a site with enough shaded areas, rain shelters, open spaces for games, and access to natural surroundings.
- Ensure the facilities have adequate sleeping arrangements, restrooms, showers, and well-planned security measures.
- The camp space should be large enough for activities but not so vast that campers isolate themselves.
- Provide plenty of nutritious food. Hungry campers and staff members can become irritable. Consider allergies, dietary restrictions, and cultural preferences when planning meals. Special diet options should be just as nutritious and appealing as the main menu.
- While sleeping in tents adds excitement, always have indoor accommodation available in case of storms or other emergencies.

Post-camp

- After camp, clean, organize, and properly store all equipment for the following year.
- Wash and save lost clothing or items as extras for future campers.
- Take time to reflect individually or in groups on what went well and what could be improved.
- Gather and document feedback to refine next year's camp experience.
- Chances are, you will want to start planning even earlier next time!

SUMMARY

Summary in Simple English: KONE CAMP

KONE IS A FINNISH COMPANY THAT MAKES ELEVATORS AND escalators. In 1947, it started organizing summer camps for the children of employees. These camps became very popular, with over a hundred children attending each year.

In 1979, KONE held its first global youth camp for teenagers aged 14–17. It was open to the children of employees from all the countries where KONE operated.

By the 1990s, interest in the children's camps had faded, and the last one took place in 1993. However, the global youth camp still takes place every summer and remains a cherished tradition. Each year, over a hundred young people from some thirty countries take part. To give as many teens as possible the chance to attend, those coming from overseas can only attend once.

First stop: host families

Young people coming to Finland from abroad first stay with host families for a few days. They experience everyday life with these families, going grocery shopping or taking nature walks. KONE also organizes activities where campers can meet each other and camp staff.

There is a shortage of host families, so some families host multiple campers. Many host families are not connected to KONE, and their children do not always attend camp.

What happens at camp

Camp starts with various tasks that the young people carry out in groups to help them quickly get to know each other and the staff members. The common language at camp is English, and every group includes campers from different countries.

Campers follow an organized program. Mornings are spent at activity stations, where they work together to solve problems and develop teamwork skills. Afternoons and evenings include free time for games, crafts, swimming, sauna, and socializing. There are also activities like climbing, SUP boarding, and kayaking.

Campers sleep in tents, usually four to a tent. They bring their own sleeping bags and choose their tent buddies. Many find sleeping in a tent an exciting experience.

Safety at camp

The safety and wellbeing of the campers are top priorities. Two nurses are onsite, and a health clinic and hospital are nearby if needed.

In recent years, camp has also focused on psychological safety. Staff members step in if there is any bullying and work to create a positive team spirit. Camp provides a safe and welcoming space for everyone, including teens from sexual and gender minorities.

Camp has only a few rules, and the young people are trusted to behave responsibly.


GAP

Rufus Davidson ja Caroline Cameron.

Staff members

There are over 30 staff members, most of whom are former campers. Some have been part of camp for more than 25 years, while younger staff members attended camp just a few years ago. Some also work for KONE.

Staff members aim to create a safe, fun camp experience and are a close-knit group. Many of the teens want to become staff members after camp. They usually have to wait a couple of years before applying. While some are accepted, not everyone gets the chance, as there are many applicants.

Life impacts

By the end of camp, the atmosphere is warm, and friendships have formed across many national boundaries. Some campers keep in touch long after camp ends.

Many campers say camp has helped them become more open and confident. It often sparks an interest in learning about different cultures and traveling. Many former campers have later become exchange students or spent time living abroad.

The global skills gained at camp have also proven valuable in many careers.

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KONE Uutiset

KONE Camp – Summer Camps since 1947

Cover and Layout: Maria Mitrunen
Photographs by Daniel Norin. Additional photography by Charley Hart p. 3, 28, 58, 99y, 106, 150a, 247a;
Jussi Herlin p. 4; Helsinki City Museum p. 7; Emma Herlin p. 8, 57, 97, 103, 119, 150av, 161, 179, 190; Kirsi Siltanen p. 19;
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Jyrki Vesikansa's archives p. 45, 71, 130, 133a, 135, 145, 146, 194, 197, 223; Matti Tapola / Lehtikuva p. 46, 109, 120; Magda
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Liisa Kannisto's archives p. 109b; Antti Herlin's archive p. 136; Tiina Kuisma's archives p. 85, 170; Lehtikuva p. 126;
Manon Leseur p. 183; Silja Mäki's archives p. 231; Torsten Seidel's archives p. 232; Giulia Alessi p. 250
Cover Image by Daniel Norin. Pictured: Enora, Emma, Lou-Ann, and Aysha from the 2023 camp.

Printed by Jelgavas tipogrāfija, Latvia

1978 — A record 278 children attend the camps.

1979 — The first global youth camp is held at Tourun Torpat.

1980 — Youth camp attendance numbers decline from a hundred to approximately fifty.

1986 — The youth camp begins to grow; 84 campers attend.

1992 — Silja Mäki (now Niemi) becomes camp director.

1993 — The children's camp is held for the last time.

1993–1995 — KONE decides to focus on elevators and escalators. The crane business is sold and becomes Konecranes.

1994–2001 — KONE continues purchasing companies and expands in Asia.

1994 — John Simon becomes camp director. He wants to make significant changes in the camp.

1995 — The camp is held at a scout center in Kiljava.

1996 — The camp is held at Haukilampi in Kiljava.

1997 — The camp moves to Rantalahti in Janakkala.

1999 — The first official themed camp. The new ca program includes a lot teamwork and communica among campers.

20 — KONE purch conglomer whose tot approximat of KO

K

Pekka Herlin dies, and Antti Herlin becomes KONE chairman of the board. In 2005, Partek is reorganized as Cargotec Inc.

amp of ation

Jussi Herlin becomes camp director.

KONE pledges to have carbon neutral operations by the year 2030, the first in its field to do so.

Only a small-scale weekend camp is organized for those who live in Finland.

The camp is held in Kotka during the renovation of the Siikaniemi event center.

The camp returns to Siikaniemi. Carina Herlin is appointed camp director. Approximately a hundred teens from thirty countries attend.

Publication of the KONE Camp book.

02 2003 2004–2016 2009 2017 2020–2021 2021 2023 2024 2025

2020 2023 2024

ases Finnish rate Partek, al sales are tely the size ONE's.

KONE purchases several businesses in Asia, Europe, and North America.

The camp moves to Siikaniemi in Hollola. The program is simplified.

Summer camp canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

KONE's production units become carbon neutral.

KONE's elevators and escalators move two billion people daily. The headquarters are in Helsinki, Finland, but the company operates in more than sixty countries, with over 60,000 employees.

KONE *Camp*

I feel that camp helped me become interested and open towards the world and other cultures.

It was easy to see at camp that people from faraway countries aren't all that different.

My eyes get misty when I remember camp. It was the best experience of my life.

SUMMER CAMPS FOR THE CHILDREN OF KONE EMPLOYEES

Each year, KONE hosts a summer youth camp for the children of its employees. Approximately one hundred young people embark on adventures and learn teamwork at the camp. This book explores the history of KONE summer camps, which began for younger children in 1947 and expanded into global youth camps in 1979.

This book is written for KONE employees, former and future campers, and host families.