

Rowing club plays host to deaf kids

BY BOB BRENT
STAFF REPORTER

When it comes to rowing, losing produces winners. That may sound like somewhat twisted logic, but Dominic Kahn stands by his statement.

This summer, he's giving more than 20 deaf children — who are already winners — the chance to win some more.

Kahn runs the Bayside Rowing Club. For a week in July and August, the club will play host for the first time to youngsters from the Sign Language Summer Program run by Silent Voice Canada Inc.

The rowing club, which operates in the shipping channel amid Toronto's port lands, has invited the kids to learn to row for free.

Asked what lessons the children can learn from a week-long challenge of rowing, Kahn answers: "It's funny — but losing. No matter who you are, when you start rowing, you lose."

With time, however, teams of eight learn to co-ordinate their efforts and work as a unit to propel their craft. "It's the ultimate team sport," he says. "You've got eight people and, if you don't work together, you don't go. You're constantly striving and using the losses to strive to a higher goal."

Of course, children who can't hear will face the added challenge of co-ordinating their actions without verbal directions from the boat's coxswain.

They'll rely instead on sign language, both from an adjacent

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coach's boat and from siblings in the rowing shell who can hear and who are attending the Silent Voice camp.

Silent Voice has a mandate to promote communication in the home, explains program co-ordinator Maureen Haan. To that end, the summer camp isn't just for deaf children, but also their brothers and sisters.

"They're able to be involved in the deaf child's world for a while," Haan says. Normally, it's the other way around, with the deaf child immersed among hearing children.

While the program is designed to teach sign language to children aged 6 to 14, the emphasis is on having fun, she says. Lessons are learned in an informal manner, such as by encouraging children to talk in sign language about the different colors they see on the subway en route to a field trip.

Or, for that matter, in a rowing shell.

The Silent Voice camp is just one of 85 that will receive funding this summer from Star readers through the Fresh Air Fund.

In all, more than 20,000 children will go to camp thanks to support from the fund. Send your donation to: The Star Fresh Air Fund, One Yonge St., Toronto M5E 1E6.

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