Appreciation Activities

BUS NOTES

Set up: For your materials, gather a stack of cardstock sheets, 8.5x11 or similar, any color. Plain paper can work if cardstock is not available. Have markers and pens or pencils available and one large manilla envelope per person – big enough that the cardstock sheet can be placed inside.

Make materials available on a table. Other tables/desks/flat surfaces will be needed for people to use while writing.

How it works: Have each participant write their name in a noticeable way on one of the pieces of paper. It shouldn't take up too much space, but it should be easy to spot (for example, use a Sharpie for this part). **All team members should participate, including the adults.**

Once everyone is done, people will take turns writing on each other's papers. You have options for how to approach this. You can have people spread their papers throughout the room and people move around the room, marketplace-style, visiting each person's paper and writing on it.

Encourage participants to write messages of appreciation, share memories from the year, or express affection for each person in another way that is right for them.

People do not get to look at their own paper once they've handed it off to the room! They should take them at the end of the session and read them when they're alone. Alternatively, a facilitator can take time at the end of the activity to place each member's sheet inside of a manilla envelope with their name on it and seal it. If participants ask why this is called "Bus Notes", it's because they're meant to be read on the bus on the way home from the last day of school or camp.

With a group with perhaps 15 people or fewer, a variation on the marketplace approach is to have everyone sit in a circle. Each person prepares their sheet with their name on it. Then, they prepare an envelope with their name on it. They hand the envelope to the person to their right, who is responsible for putting their sheet in and sealing it once they have had their turn to write on it. After both the sheet and the envelope have been marked with names, people begin passing sheets to the left and writing on the new ones they receive until everyone has had an opportunity to write on everyone else's sheet. As each person's sheet makes it to the person on their immediate right, that person stops circulation of that sheet, seals it in the envelope, and hands it to the recipient.

When to use it: This is an activity meant to serve as an expression of gratitude and appreciation. It results in a creation of a keepsake of the group's time together. It's a great wrap-up activity after finishing a group project.

GRATITUDE STONES

Set up: You'll need a bucket or basket of mini glass gems (decorative gems/garden stones/vase fillers). Enough to have 3 per participant. Have the group stand in a circle.

How it works: Facilitator passes the basket around the group and invites each participant to select 3 stones from the basket and hold onto them.

Facilitator explains the process the group will follow: each person has the opportunity to give away their stones as tokens of gratitude — one per person. Explain that, at first, the invitation will be for people to share them publicly. One person at a time will share with the full group who they are giving a stone to and why. After sharing, that person approaches the recipient and gives them the stone. Explain that, after a bit, the invitation will change and people will have an opportunity to share stones individually, without the full group as audience.

Facilitator invites people to take a quiet moment or two to consider who they would like to give their stones to, and then opens the floor for people who wish to speak.

After 5-7 minutes, the facilitator can announce that, at this point, we will break the circle formation and anyone can approach anyone else to give them a gratitude stone.

Notes: This activity works best with a larger group (30+ people) that has been in community together for some time. It provide opportunity for group members to share and receive appreciation for individual contributions.

MY CUP IS FULL

Set up: One empty cup of any type is needed. Have the group sit in a circle.

How it works: Facilitator explains the process the group will follow: each person gets a turn holding the cup. The cup is an "anti talking object"; when you are holding it, you must remain silent. While one person is holding the cup, other members of the group can share words of appreciation and celebration. They do not need to raise their hands or go in any order, but rather can jump in as they wish to share. People can choose to speak more than once if they wish. The person holding the cup remains silent and listens to what others wish to share. When the person holding the cup feels that "their cup is full," they can pass it to the next person. It is entirely up to that person how long they wish to hold the cup; they can pass it quickly or hold onto it for several minutes.

The facilitator can go first, or ask for a volunteer. Once the first person is chosen, begin the pass around the group until everyone's cup "has been filled".

Adults might be inclined to bow out of having a turn holding the cup, but **it is important that all group members take a turn** and show that everyone deserves appreciation for their efforts.

When to use it: This activity provides opportunity for group members to share and receive appreciation for individual contributions. This activity works best for a smaller group — perhaps 15 or fewer — of people who have been working together for some time. However, it can work well in larger groups where the intention is to appreciate a subset of the larger group, such as graduating seniors or outgoing elected members. In that case, you would identify ahead of time which specific people will be holding the cup and, ideally, have them sit next to each other in the circle to make it easy to pass the cup along.