

2019 The Hero's Journey® Program Outcomes Evaluation Report



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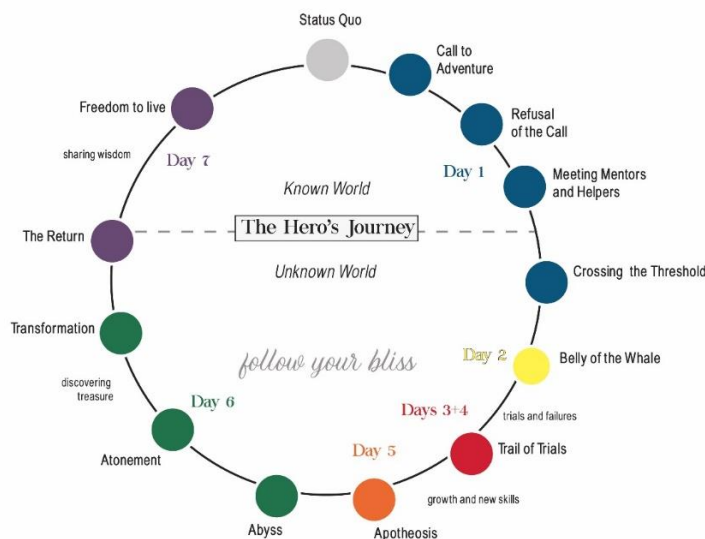
BACKGROUND

The Hero's Journey® program at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp is a seven-day, wilderness-based program for young adults whose lives have been impacted by a chronic or serious illness, especially cancer and blood disorders.

As part of their experience, campers live outdoors for a week. They practice low-impact camping skills, search and rescue, and wilderness first aid. They face an increasing level of challenge throughout the week, both individually and as a group, helping to foster interpersonal communication skills and leadership.

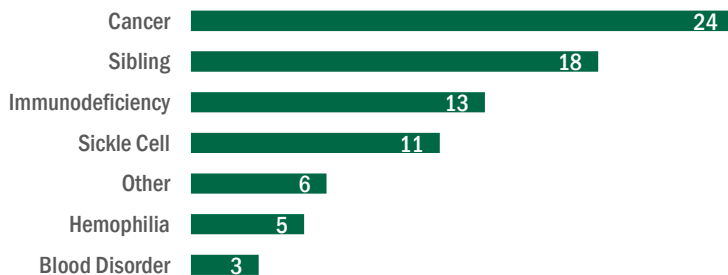
“Some of these youngsters have come to Camp over the course of many years,” notes Chief Executive Officer Jimmy Canton. “It is very moving to see them build their confidence level over the course of the week and take on the role of caregivers and helpers – given that they themselves had been the ones being cared for in the past.”

The Hero's Journey program is grounded in Joseph Campbell's 1949 book, “The Hero With A Thousand Faces.” Crafted as a rite of passage to help youth answer “what's next?” the Hero's Journey program mirrors the journey taken by mythological and real heroes as they heed the call to adventure and move from the known into the unknown (containing challenges, revelations and transformations) and return to the known. The Hero's Journey® mark is used under license from the Joseph Campbell Foundation (www.jcf.org).



In 2019, the Hero's Journey program served 82 youth aged 16-18 in groups of 6-19 over six sessions of seven days each, and 79 participants completed surveys. Two nurses, seven counselors, two program administrators, at least two volunteers, and one volunteer nurse supervised each session of the Hero's Journey program.

2019 Hero's Journey Participant Diagnoses



Activities in the Hero's Journey program included a variety and progression of activities designed to support participants' personal growth and teamwork. Examples of activities include the solo, mindfulness, the maze, tyrolean, nighttime tower climb, fire council, overnight backpacking trip, key and mask ceremonies, wilderness first aid, and search and rescue.

This summer, we focused on evaluating the short-term outcomes, as identified in the Hero's Journey program theory of change (see Appendix). The purpose of the evaluation was to understand potential changes in "comfort zones," self-discovery, teamwork, social skills, and appreciation of nature and simple living from the perspectives of participants and parents/caregivers. We added a set of questions asking participants to identify which short-term outcome was most influenced by each program activity.

Methods

Parents and caregivers gave their children permission to participate in the evaluation. Evaluation participants completed the questionnaires on their last afternoon at the Hero's Journey program, using iPads with the iSurvey app. A collaborative approach toward scale creation included conversations and review with key program staff.

Seventy-nine of 82 Hero's Journey program participants completed surveys on their last full day of the program, and 47 parents/caregivers completed online surveys after the program. Participants used the survey as an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and did not report completing the survey to be a burden.

This evaluation covers the six sessions of the Hero's Journey program held during summer 2019.

RESULTS

Overview

Participants reported increasing in self-discovery, stepping outside their comfort zones, teamwork, appreciation of nature and simple living, and social skills.

Self-discovery was most influenced by fire council, mindfulness, key ceremony, mask ceremony, maze, night climb and "my Hero's Journey."

Teamwork was most influenced by meal task groups, multi-swing, search and rescue, and wilderness first aid.

Stepping outside of comfort zones was most influenced by the expedition to remote sites.

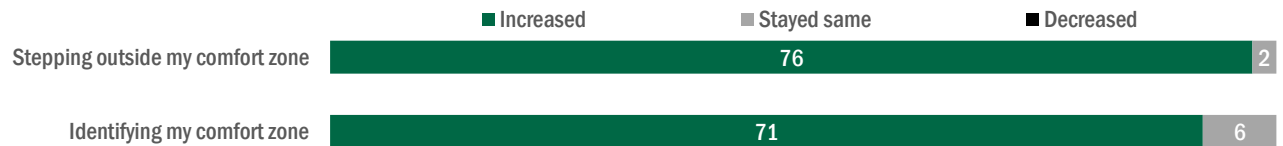
Parents and caregivers reported high satisfaction with the Hero's Journey program and remarked on many positive changes they saw in their children after the program.

Participants engaged in self-discovery at the Hero's Journey program.



Self-discovery average: 2.6 (SD: .70) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

Participants stepped outside their comfort zones at the Hero's Journey program.



Comfort zone average: 2.75 (SD: .75) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

Participants practiced teamwork at the Hero's Journey program.



Teamwork average: 2.65 (SD: .72) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

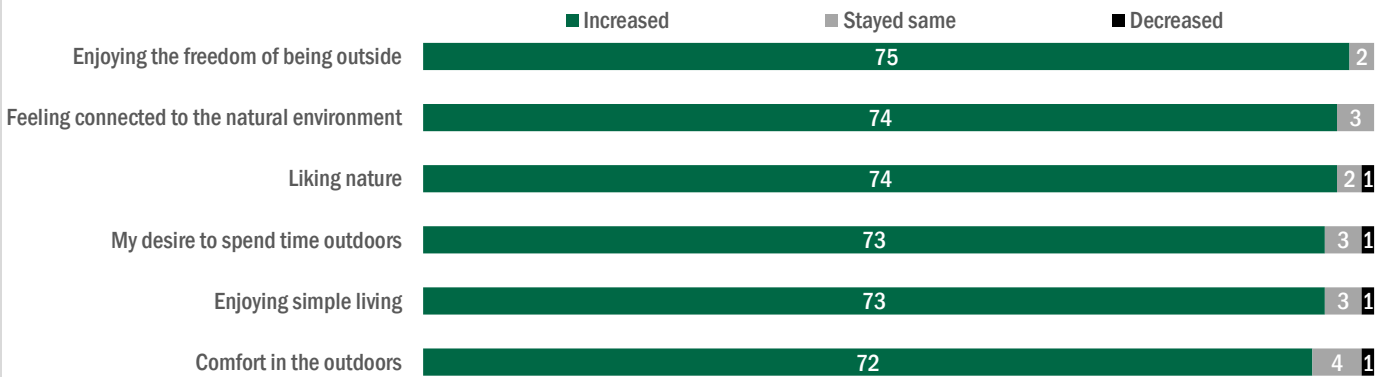


Participants learned social skills at the Hero's Journey program.



Social skills average: 2.61 (SD: .67) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

Participants appreciated nature and simple living at the Hero's Journey program.



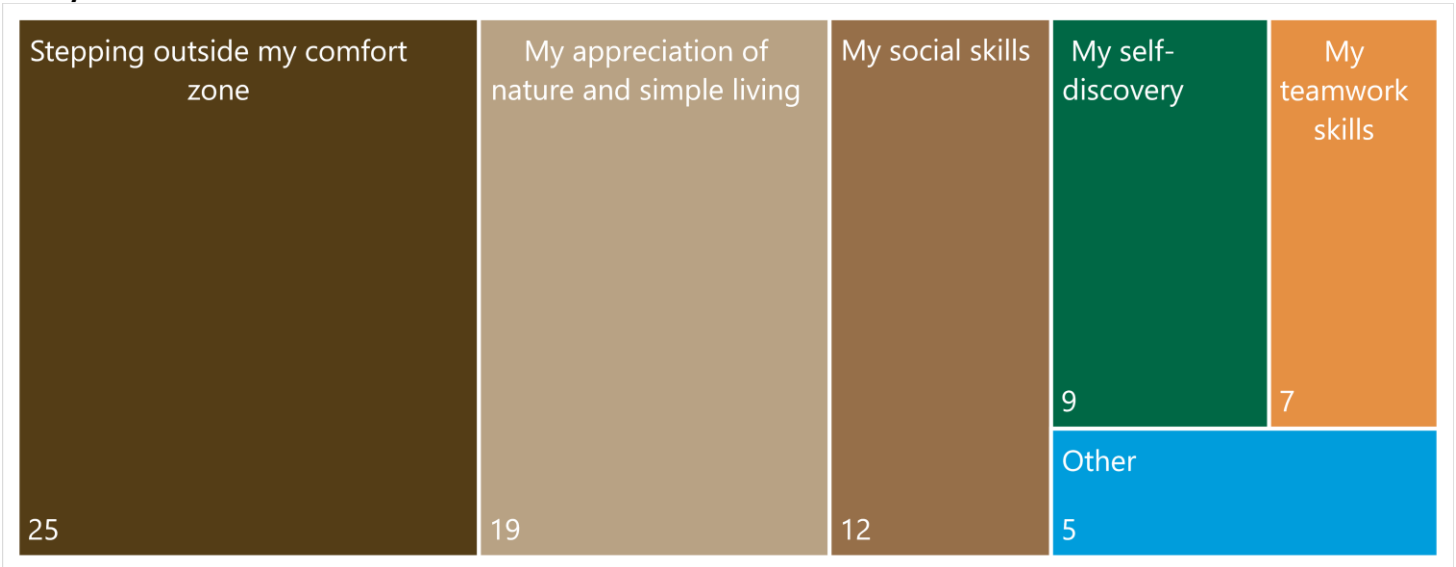
Appreciation average: 2.62 (SD: .74) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).



What activities affected what participant outcomes?

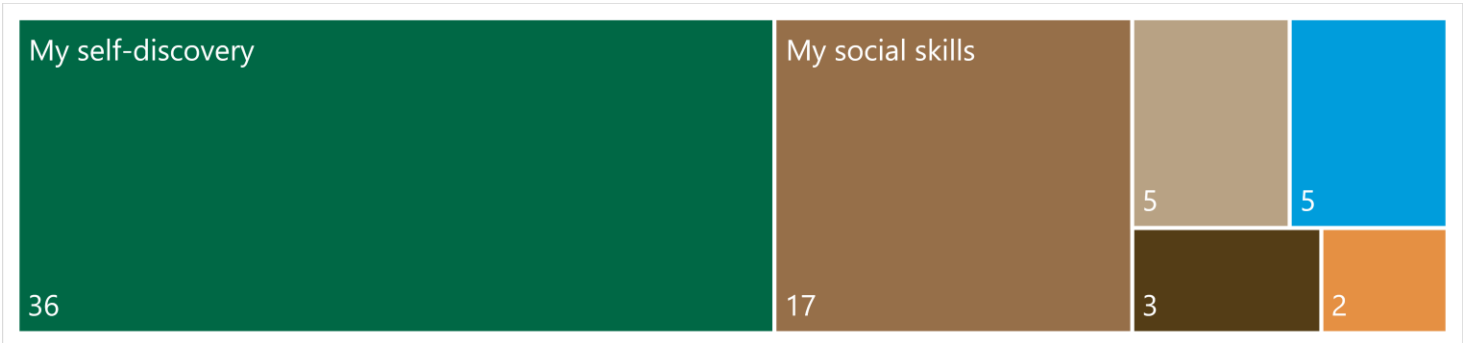
Stepping outside my comfort zone Appreciation of nature and simple living	Teamwork skills Other	Social skills	Self-discovery
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The Expedition to Remote Sites most affected...



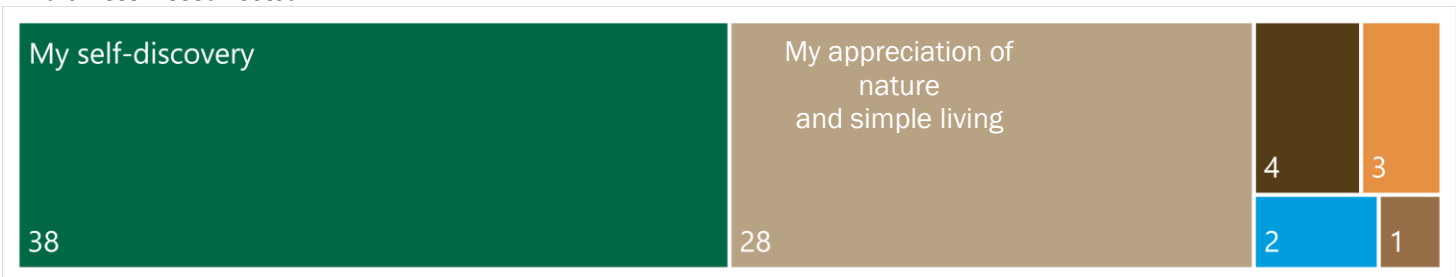
Other (blue): connecting with others; it helped to me overcome challenges and keep moving no matter what in particular the maze; just enjoying people as a whole and identifying what makes me me; my comfort outside my teaching skills.

The Fire Council most affected...



Other (blue): learning to express myself; New ideas from other members on ways to do/look at things; none of the above; social skills and comfort zone; understanding other participants lives and experiences.

Mindfulness most affected...



Other (blue): My ability to just think and breathe; understanding my Mind space and focusing on who I am.

Stepping outside my comfort zone
Appreciation of nature and simple living

Teamwork skills
Other

Social skills

Self-discovery

The Key Ceremony most affected...



Other (blue): everything - very very moving; I'm usually really uncomfortable when people compliment me so it gave me a way to learn and be humble; it helped me believe in myself and trust my skills; My ability to connect with others by sharing how they have impacted my life for the better; my appreciation toward others; my will to live.

The Mask Ceremony most affected...



Other (blue): everything. that and the key ceremony were very very moving; realizing my problems.

Meal Task Groups most affected...



Other (blue): it showed me hard work because I don't really experience doing chores - it's really humbling.

Stepping outside my comfort zone Appreciation of nature and simple living	Teamwork skills Other	Social skills	Self-discovery
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The *Maze* most affected...



Other (blue): ability to work "limited"; Asking for help; Did not participate because was sick; I learned that I can ask for help anytime; I was in the maze for about 2 seconds so I didn't get the full experience; It affected my ego and my attitude towards asking for help; it made me rely on my other senses and made me pay attention to the resources around me; It not only taught me about trusting others but it taught me a lot about myself; It taught me to ask for help from peers; It was tougher to take anything away from this activity because I had already done it before being at camp; it's okay to ask for help; Learning to deal with difficult things and get through harder parts of life; My ability to accept help from others; My knowledge of knowing that asking for help is ok; Pissing me off.

The *Mock Rescue* most affected...



Other (blue): All of the above; It gave me the power to save people and made me put people before myself; It taught me a lot about knowing my limits while still being able to work together with a team to do something new and challenging; My teaching skills; Team work and stepping outside of comfort zone.

The *Multi-Swing* most affected...



Other (blue): Didn't do it; Getting to know others; Made me understand the abilities that make up my personality; None of the above.

Stepping outside my comfort zone
Appreciation of nature and simple living

Teamwork skills
Other

Social skills

Self-discovery

The *Night Climb* most affected...



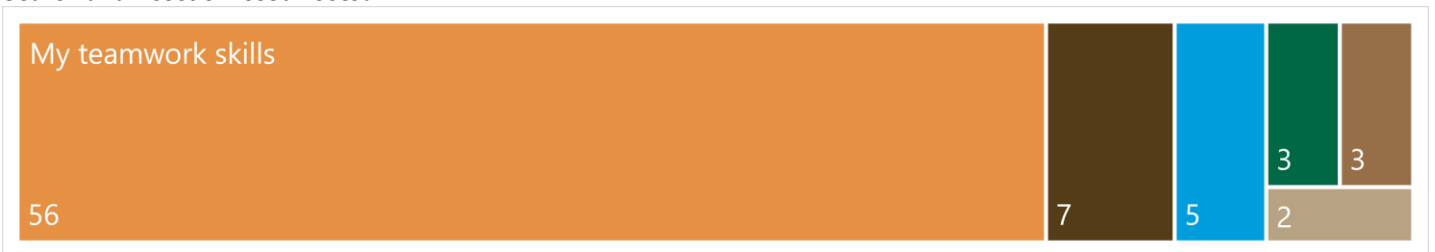
Other (blue): I felt more content and was impressed by the growth of the other participants; It helped know where my home was; It made me change on how I looked at my life to never fret on the past experiences and to know the future is always bright and it's what I make it; My appreciation of camp and the important things in life and my understanding of Hero's Journey and how it comes full circle; This was the most moving event ever in my life - never change this please.

The *My Hero's Journey* most affected...



Other (blue): Added a bit to my story telling skill; All of the above; I feel like it affected all of the following a lot; My ability to reflect on my life and events that shaped who I am today; My social skills along with my self discovery and being able to come to terms with my feelings and emotions.

***Search and Rescue* most affected...**



Other (blue): All of the above; Improving my leadership skills; It made me be a life line to other people that needed me; Teaching skill; World skills I can use.

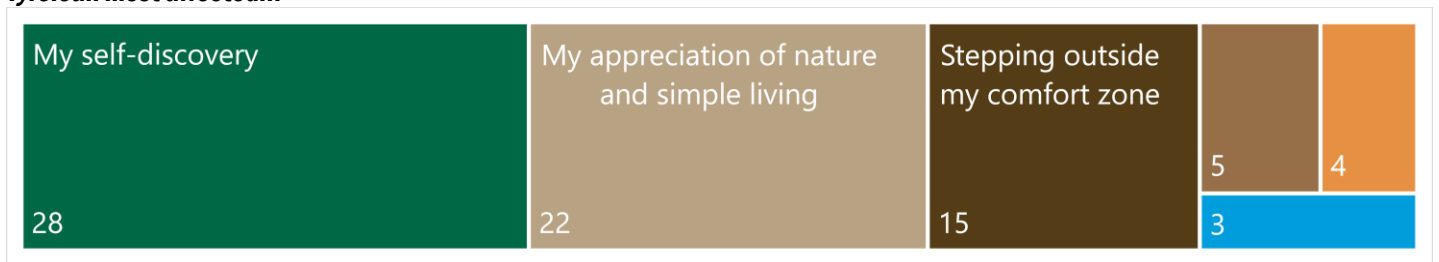
Stepping outside my comfort zone	Teamwork skills	Social skills	Self-discovery
Appreciation of nature and simple living	Other		

Solo most affected...



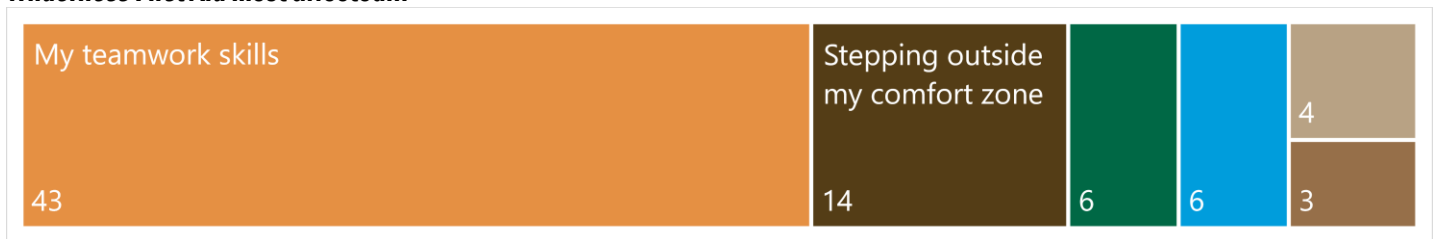
Other (blue): 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊; How I value myself; Sleep.

Tyrolean most affected...



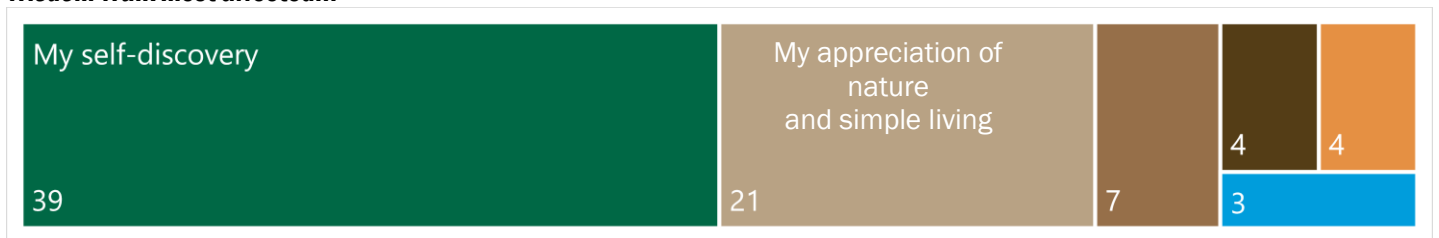
Other (blue): It made me embrace my fear; Me reminding myself "adapt and overcome"; My understanding of the hero's journey.

Wilderness First Aid most affected...



Other (blue): All of the above; It made me want to help people more and made me be the answer for help; Knowledge of first aid; Knowledge of safety precautions; My confidence in accomplishing tasks and approaching situations; teaching skill.

Wisdom Walk most affected...



Other (blue): Living in the moment; Mindfulness; None of the above.

What were participants' favorite moments?

Six main themes emerged: Tower/Night Climb, Connections, Key ceremony, Personal Growth, Cooking, Mask Ceremony, and Others. Some participants chose more than one thing they liked best.

Tower/Night Climb (n = 32)

The night climb because I had a lot of time to focus and think about my journey and how much farther I'm gonna take it and improve myself on this journey.

Seeing the tower as I go from the wisdom walk and understanding that by following the light and make it back to the place that always supports me and the place I call home which is camp.

Jumping off the tower into the darkness was one of the happiest and most satisfying moments of my life. I felt truly free and that I would take everything I had learned this week and bring it out into the real world. I felt confident and not scared at all. Flying through the air I felt pure joy. I'll never forget it!

Connections (n = 22)

I really enjoyed all the simple moments where we get to just hike with each other and tell riddles and play games, those moments, brought us all closer together.

Every time we went to do something with the group I really was excited to be with my friends whether they were campers or counselors and that feeling only got stronger as the week went on. I'm really gonna miss the people I met here and the place itself.

I really liked getting to know the other participants and the times that we would learn more about each other and our experiences.

Key Ceremony (n = 7)

Confirmed the things I thought I could be in the words of others, and destroyed the doubt I had in the importance of myself and my purpose.

The key ceremony. I walked into hero's in a low low place, with no self worth or sense of self. Hearing others opinions and words about me made me feel on top of the world and in control and able to continue in this life.

Personal Growth (n = 5)

My favorite moments at Hero's Journey would have to be all the times when I stepped outside my comfort zone and really challenged myself to do things I didn't think I could, like improving my social skills and trying new things, which are really hard for me. This week was really special and I learned a lot about myself and can really identify my weaknesses and strengths.

I'm just glad to have the experience because most kids I know remain ignorant and don't really open their perception to the unknown.

Cooking (n = 5)

Cooking meals. I really enjoyed the silly moments that went along with cooking because most didn't know how to cook and it was so fun to teach people but also make those silly mistakes.

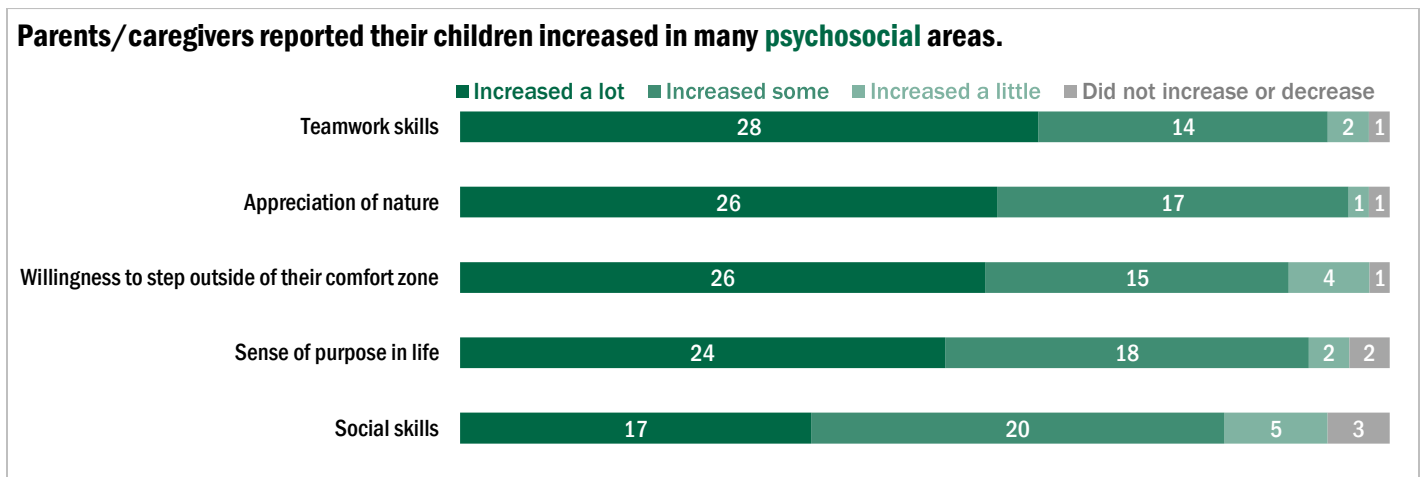
We were making dinner and I laughed so hard I had to take a walk.

Mask Ceremony (n = 5)

My favorite part was finding yourself in the mask ceremony and the wisdom to face our past.

Others: fire council, remotes, telling your story, and the maze.

Parents and Caregivers of Hero’s Journey participants agreed.



Numbers above reflect the number of responses for each question, not percentages.

Other areas of changed noticed by parents/caregivers included confidence, inspiration and empathy and connections with others, and other changes. However, some parents/caregivers had concerns that the effects of the Hero’s Journey program would end and some were unable to assess changes yet.

Confidence

More confident, relaxed, positive, excited for the future.

He has been helping out more and I saw him have more confidence to take a leadership role when he was a counselor at another camp.

She is very positive, confident and ready to step out of her comfort zone. THANK YOU!!!

This week gave him so much more confidence and strength to try new things and step out of his box.

More confident.

More confidence, less anxious, greater willingness to take risks.

I think my son is still taking it all in. He has conversations about what he learned and how he wants to try new things.

Inspiration

When I picked her up, she cried (good tears) for the whole 2 hour ride home about what an extraordinary experience it was! She was so inspired.

She came home very motivated and has some very clear aspirations and goals for the future. Exciting!

Inspired.

Life changing experience for my son!

Empathy and Connections with Others

Gratitude and loving kindness displayed immediately.

Small but discernible increase in empathy

Helps out more. More mindful of others. Thinks and process before acting.

He’s showing more interest in his brother’s stuff which makes his little brother very happy and enthusiastic.

Concerns About Fading Effects of the Hero's Journey Program

It seems as if she is going to try and face things with a more positive attitude but I am not sure how long it will last.

Lots of positivity when initially came home, just hard trying to keep it going once the initial buzz from camp dies down and they are back in their regular routines. Would be great if there was a group chat, or other social media type place that the heroes journey "alumni" could get together and chat, bounce ideas off one another and just keep that great vibe going. Overall - it seemed to be a very positive and uplifting experience for my son.

Such a remarkable experience- having some adjustment to sleeping inside and missing this program.

Unable to Assess at This Time

She is the happiest of my three daughters, her love of life and how much she appreciates everything is one of the most genuine characteristics about her. She is always a social loving person for me to say these feelings have changed her is hard to answer at this time.

Still trying to understand the full effect of the journey. Pick up was only yesterday and she is still resting and returning to reality. "Not sure yet" should be an answer choice, due to this! It takes a while to let them have their space to explain how it went and all they took away.

Other

My child has been using her first aid skills since she left camp.

He also has a new appreciation of nature.

Our children seem to be more willing to talk about more mature things with us (parents), especially things involving our oldest child whom we lost.

He is doing things for himself without been told.

She really embraced camp, became more involved, and learned more about her "inner Buddha."

Positive changes and increased optimism.

She is pretty self-assured and comfortable in groups. She did well and enjoyed camp.

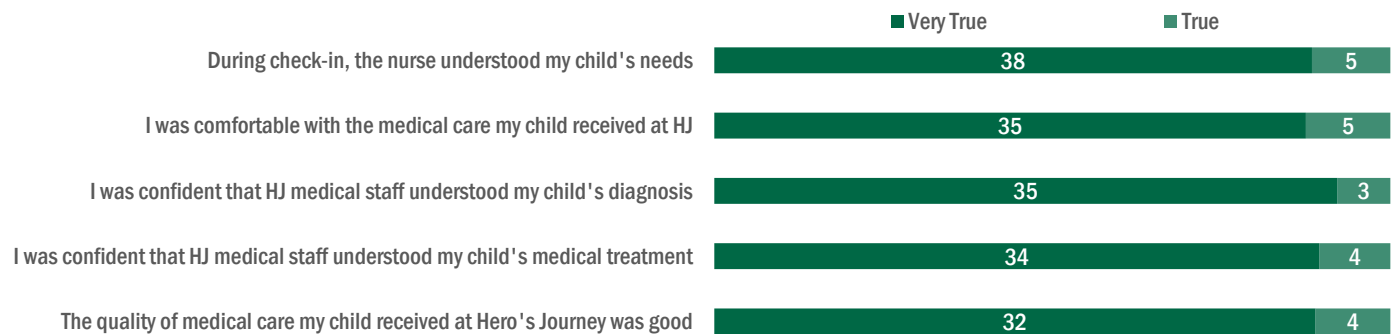
She appreciates every little thing and it looks like she understood life. Thank you.

Just never stopped talking about his experiences. He never talks that much.

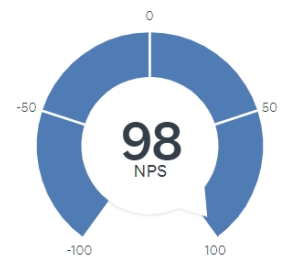
The nature part of this was rough-39 mosquito bites, a bunch with pretty bad itch/inflammation.



Parents/caregivers had great confidence in the **medical care of their children.**



The Net Promoter Score (NPS) from parents/caregivers was 98. The NPS is an index ranging from -100 to 100 that measures the willingness of customers (in this case, the parents and caregivers of the Hero's Journey program participants) to recommend an organization's services to others. It is used as a proxy for gauging the customer's overall satisfaction with an organization's service and the customer's loyalty to the brand. Anything over 70 is considered "world class."



Although there were a few suggestions for better communication before and during the program, most parents/caregivers also expressed gratitude for the positive experiences their children had during the Hero's Journey program.

Most amazing week of my son's life!

The program helped him to become more aware of himself and what he has been through. It also helped him to grow up. It was transformative! Thank you!

The "Hero's Journey" program has played an important role in the growing of 3 of our children. All staff members have been 200% wonderful in all accounts. Thank you for this program!

Absolutely wonderful experience. Focusing on siblings is such an awesome thing to do! Thank you.

It was very reassuring that when I spoke with the nurse informing him that she "may" be emotional because her grandfather had just passed away two weeks ago; he was very compassionate and asked if the information should be shared. I informed him that this would be her decision to share it with folks and not mine. He understood and just kept it to the nursing team.

This was an incredible and transformative experience for her. I cannot say enough about the quality of counselors, program, activities, logistics. Just blown away!

The Hero's Journey was a positive, life changing event for my child. She learned so much about herself and will bring it forward with her in life.

Thank you for all that you do. She loved Hero's Journey, it helped her immensely especially with her upcoming surgery. In her own words "camp was the therapy I needed before my surgery." Both our children have attended and been touched by camp sessions and Hero's Journey in positive ways.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both participants and their parents/caregivers expressed high levels of enthusiasm for the Hero's Journey program. The Hero's Journey program provides participants with strong opportunities to increase in self-discovery, going outside their comfort zones, teamwork, social skills, and appreciation of nature and simple living. Further, this evaluation showed which program activities most related to these positive outcomes.

"Self-discovery" is the outcome most often influenced by the activities of the Hero's Journey program.

The night climb is a particularly important activity within the Hero's Journey program.

The Hero's Journey program theory of change is supported by the positive outcomes expressed by participants and their parents/caregivers.

The primary outcomes associated with each activity varied greatly from 2018, indicating that there might be differing intentions in the way each activity is facilitated. Consider reviewing the goals of each activity for participants.

Certainly, some limitations exist for this evaluation. First, participants reported about themselves, which can sometimes be unreliable and inaccurate. Second, because participants did the surveys at the end of their sessions, they might have been experiencing an elation that inflated their answers. Third, parents/caregivers might have inflated their answers because they wanted to believe that their investment of time and effort to get their children to the Hero's Journey program was worthwhile.

Actionable Insights



#1 Continue the activities in the Hero's Journey program, especially the night climb.



#2 Continue creating multiple spaces for participants to experience self-discovery, go outside their comfort zones, practice teamwork, increase social skills, and appreciate nature and simple living.



#3 Continue supporting the engagement and inclusion of participants with disabilities and illnesses in an outdoor setting.



APPENDIX

Participant Scale Performance and Items

Scale	Item	Mean	SD
Self-Discovery (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.6; SD = .70 $\alpha = .737$ Inter-item range .481-.521	Thinking about my future	2.8	.920
	Thinking about who I am	2.41	.696
	Having a sense of purpose in my life	2.77	.972
Comfort Zone (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.75; SD = .75 $\alpha = .730$ Inter-item range .588	Identifying my comfort zone	2.96	.938
	Stepping outside my comfort zone	2.54	.751
Teamwork (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.65 SD = .72 $\alpha = .927$ Inter-item range .511-.831	Placing group goals above the things that I want	2.83	.855
	Working well with others	2.61	.814
	Helping others succeed	2.60	.799
	Cooperating with others	2.58	.833
	Helping a group be successful	2.61	.830
	Appreciating opinions that are different from my own	2.68	.895
Social skills (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.61; SD = .67 $\alpha = .841$ Inter-item range .433-.669	Having a deep knowledge of others	2.53	.718
	Sharing about myself with others	2.64	.872
	Listening carefully to things people tell me	2.61	.834
	Talking to people about things that are important to them	2.63	.844
	Talking to people about things that are important to me	2.61	.966
Appreciation of nature and simple living (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.62; SD = .74 $\alpha = .906$ Inter-item range .416-.674	Liking nature	2.62	.874
	My desire to spend time outdoors	2.77	.944
	Comfort in the outdoors	2.66	.954
	Enjoying the freedom of being outside	2.53	.804
	Feeling connected to the natural environment	2.58	.879
	Enjoying simple living	2.57	.924

The Hero's Journey Program: Theory of Change

Situation: A serious illness for 16-18 year-old adolescents impacts their natural social, emotional and physical autonomous transition into adulthood through experiencing isolation, fewer opportunities to discover their personal identities, and a decreased feeling of personal responsibility.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
<p>Staff 2 full-time dedicated program staff</p> <p>Vetted, qualified and trained seasonal staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 counselors • 2 adventure specialists • 2 expedition leaders • 1 nurse • 1 volunteer nurse • Volunteer counselors (2/ session) <p>Other Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilderness environment • Water • Food supplies • Transportation • Yurts and tents • Program and wilderness first aid supplies • Facilities and equipment • Staff knowledge of the outdoors • Medical supplies • Funding 	<p>Ceremonies/Rites of passages</p> <p>Skills training (wilderness first aid, search and rescue), Mock rescue</p> <p>Fire Council</p> <p>Expedition</p> <p>Remote campsite and yurt living (e.g., outdoor cooking, bathing in a river)</p> <p>Adventure activities (high and low ropes)</p> <p>Reflective/Introspective activities</p> <p>Story telling</p> <p>Downtime games</p> <p>Pre-program conversations with participants</p>	<p>~96 participants each summer (16 each session)</p> <p>Participants with cancer, sickle cell disease, HIV/AIDS, metabolic/mitochondrial diseases, hemophilia, other blood diseases, and their siblings.</p> <p>Participants aged 16-18 mostly from the Northeast U.S.</p> <p>6 week-long sessions, including one sibling-only session</p>	<p>Step outside of comfort zones</p> <p>Self-discovery</p> <p>Camaraderie: Improve teamwork and social skills; Deepen knowledge of others</p> <p>Appreciation: Appreciation of nature and simple living</p>	<p>Confidence and tenacity Positive risk taking</p> <p>Personal reflection and trying new things</p> <p>Camaraderie: Connections with others Feelings of community Desire to help others</p> <p>Appreciation: Increased mindfulness and gratitude</p>	<p>Identity Exploration</p> <p>Community engagement</p> <p>Responsibility in life choices</p>
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued parents/caregivers' trust • Active interest and participation of participants • Strong medical care and program safety • Qualified, trained staff with an understanding of adolescence development and the outdoors • Staff and volunteers have positive attitudes and actions • Strong support from Board • Well maintained grounds • Continued use of state land • Maintained relationship with Life Star, local EMS, CT State Police • Abundant financial resources 			<p>External Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather affecting programming • Emotional and medical crises • Continued financial support directly affected by the economy • Equipment breaking • Natural disaster • Intruders 		

Evaluate: Process – Satisfaction – Outcomes

