

Hero's Journey Outcomes Evaluation Report 2015



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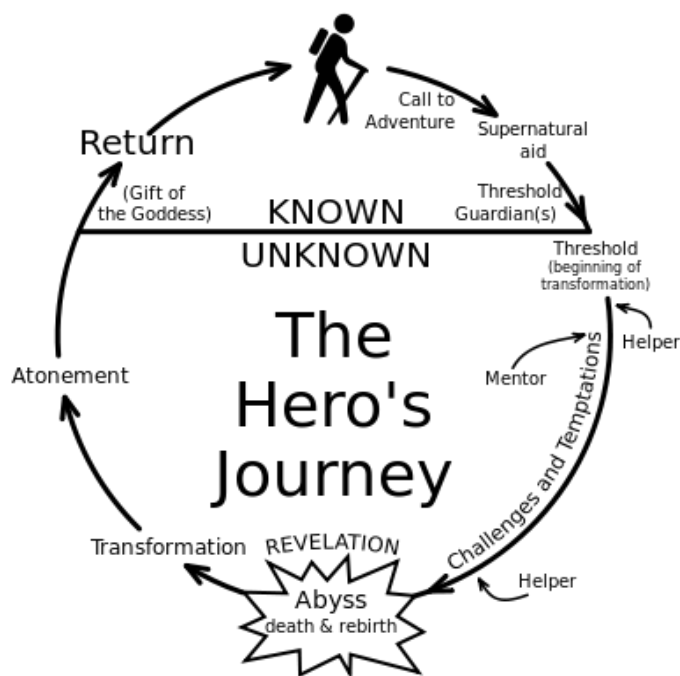
BACKGROUND

The Hero's Journey program is a seven-day, wilderness-based program at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp for young adults whose lives have been impacted by a chronic or life-threatening 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.



In 2015, Hero's Journey served 93 youth aged 16-18 in groups of 13-16 over six sessions of 7 days each. Two nurses, 8 counselors, 2 program administrators, and 2 volunteers supervised each session of Hero's Journey.

Activities in Hero's Journey included a variety and progression of activities designed to support participants' personal growth and teamwork. Examples of activities include the milk crate stack, solo, journaling, maze, tyrolean, nighttime tower climb, fire council, overnight backpacking trip, key and mask ceremonies, and wilderness first aid and search and rescue. The year 2015 marked a transition year with a new staff lead by

Greg Yeager and James Sibelle. The Hero's Journey programming and approach was very similar to that in previous summers.

This summer, we continued evaluating Hole in the Wall's four core values, focusing on two of them: safety and camaraderie, which we also evaluated in 2013. Last summer, we explored the other two values: possibility and appreciation, and we will revisit those in 2016. Another outcome explored in both 2014 and 2015 was "identity awareness," and we explored "program fun" in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

The purpose of the evaluation was to understand the outcomes of "safety," "camaraderie," "identity awareness" and "program fun" from the perspectives of participants and parents/caregivers. The evaluation questions were:

1. To what extent did participants agree with statements about experiencing *safety*? (pp. 5-6)
2. To what extent did participants agree with statements about experiencing *camaraderie*? (p. 7)
3. Did participants report any changes in *identity awareness*? (pp. 8-9)
4. Did participants' parents report changes in their children?
5. How much *fun* were the program activities? (p. 10)
6. Did session predict the above outcomes? (pp. 11-12)
7. Were there any differences in outcomes this year compared to other years? (pp. 13-15)
8. How did parents/caregivers describe Hero's Journey? (p. 16)
9. What were participants' favorite moments at Hero's Journey? (p. 16-17)
10. What recommendations did participants make for Hero's Journey? (p. 17)

SAFETY is described by THITWGC: "The care of children with serious illnesses is both a serious responsibility and a serious privilege. Physical and emotional safety is paramount in all we do." Safety is important to consider because campers living with serious illness deserve a safe space to grow and play, while being unobtrusively medically supported.

CAMARADERIE is described by THITWGC: "We create a community that fosters friendship, inclusivity, a little bit of mischief and a whole lot of laughter." Camaraderie is important because youth living with serious illnesses often have difficulty connecting with others due to hospitalizations and fear. Camp offers a safe place for building relationships and having fun together.

IDENTITY AWARENESS is described as the process of discovering "who I am."

PROGRAM FUN is defined as the amount of fun in day and evening programs. Many other words could be used to describe feelings about programs, but in our experience, when asked what youth like about an activity, they typically reply "It's fun!" Fun is important to youth with serious illness because typically, campers live lives characterized by fear, uncertainty, pain and isolation. To combat these negative experiences, The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp aims to provide youth with programs that are fun and medically-supported.

Methods

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

Ninety of 93 (97%) Hero's Journey participants completed surveys on their last full day of the program and 44 parents/caregivers completed online surveys after the program.

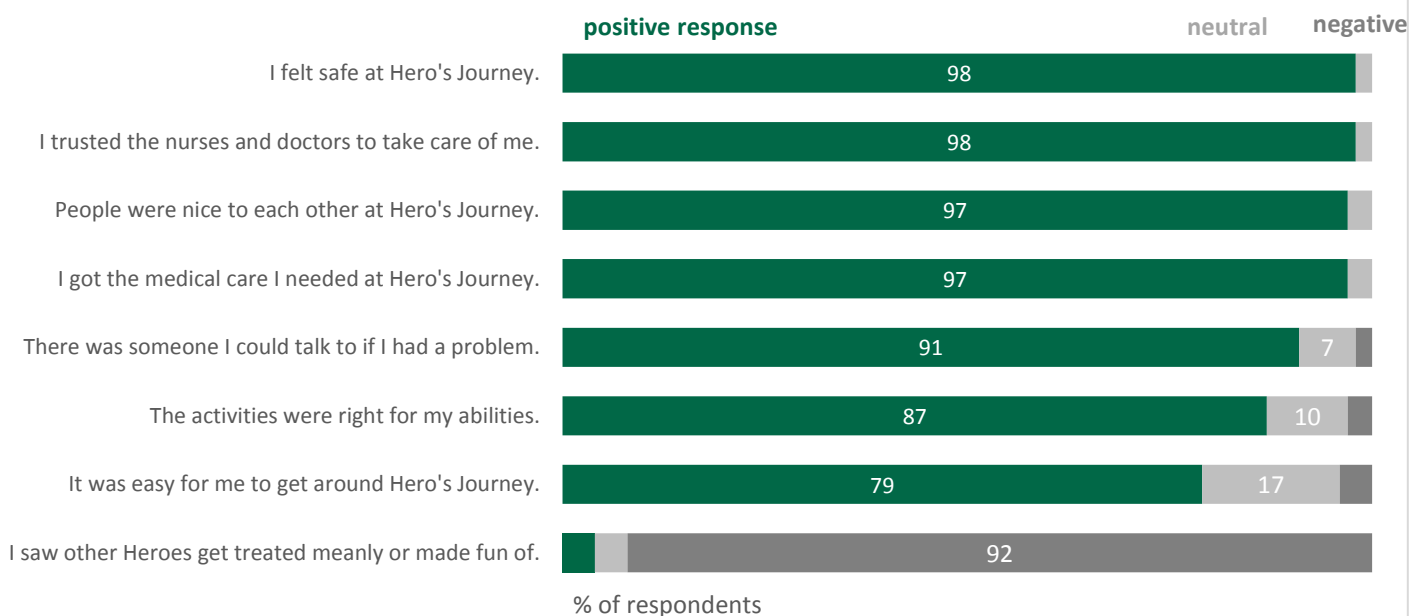
This evaluation covers the 6 sessions of Hero's Journey held during summer 2015.

*Special thanks to **Brandy D'Amboise-Blish** (Research and Evaluation Intern) and **Ashley Boyd** (Newman's Own Fellow) for their incredible help with data collection and analysis for this evaluation.*

RESULTS

Participants felt medically and emotionally **SAFE** at Hero's Journey.

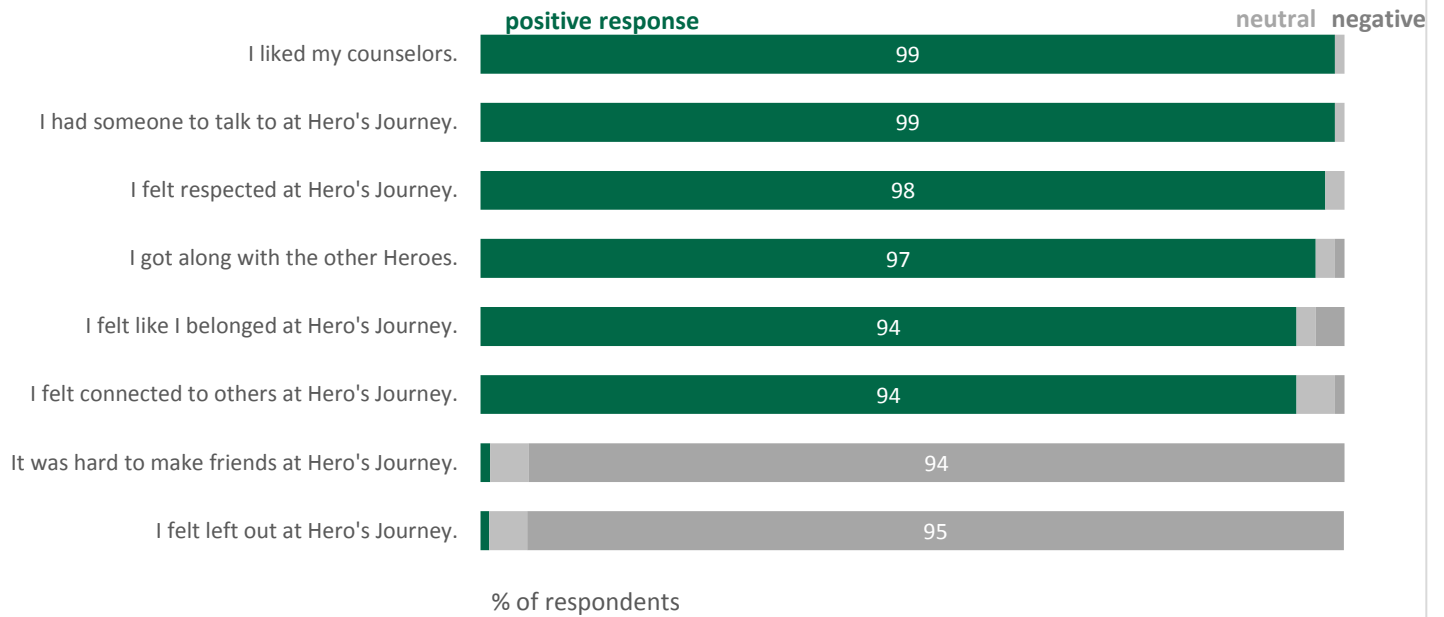
Note the last question is intentionally negatively worded



Safety average: 4.62 (SD: .4) out of 5, with 5 meaning "strongly agree."

Participants felt **CAMARDERIE** at Hero's Journey.

Note that the last 2 questions are intentionally negatively-worded.

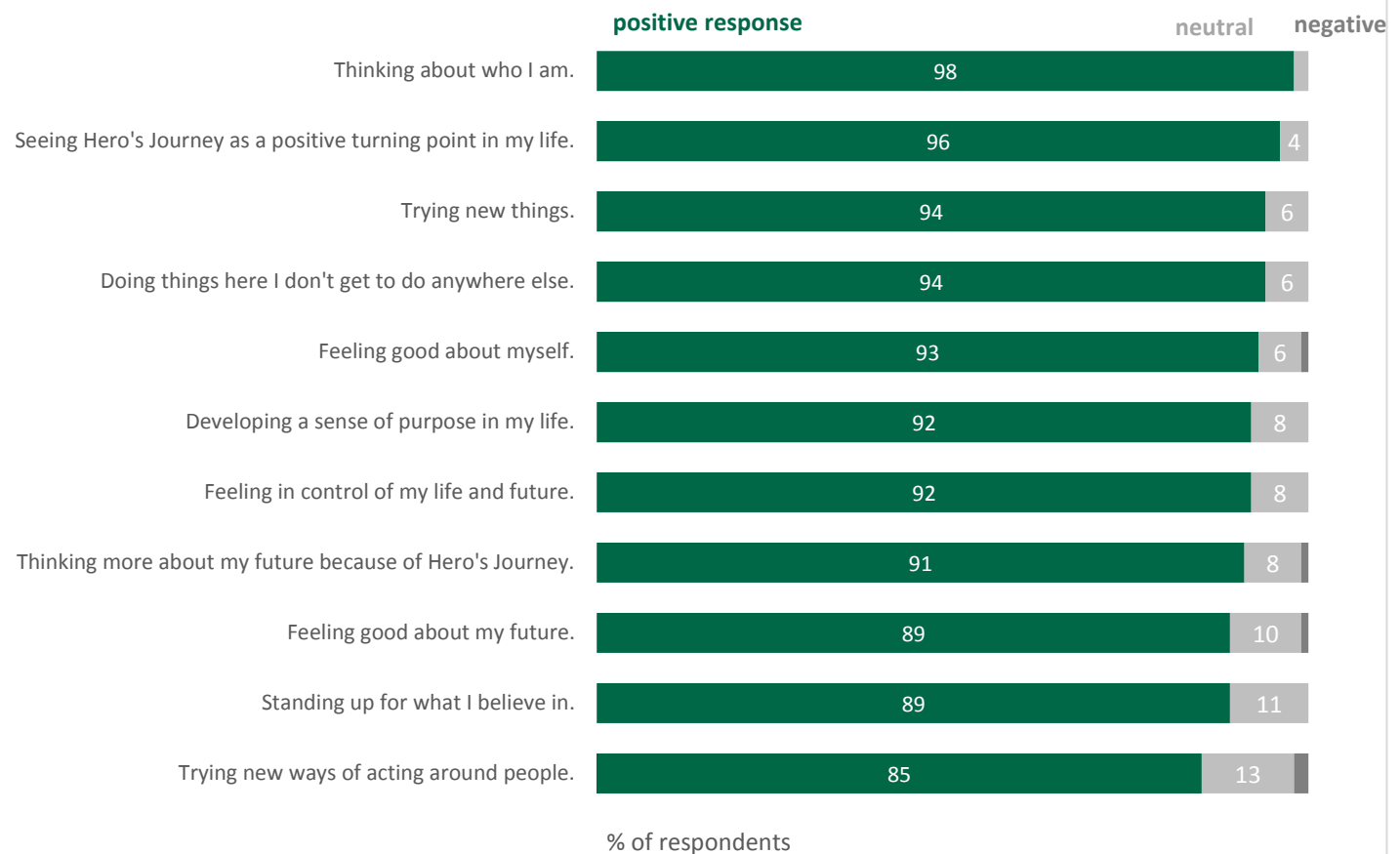


Camaraderie average: 4.73 (SD: .47) out of 5, with 5 meaning “strongly agree.”



Identity Awareness increased significantly during HJ in all areas.

Top responses involved using HJ for personal exploration.



Identity Awareness average: 2.27 (SD: .66) on a scale of -1: decreased, 0: did not increase or decrease, 1: increased a little, 2: increased some, and 3: increased a lot

While not specific activities, participants reported identity awareness through personal reflection (n = 31) and through communication with other participants and counselors (n = 14). Other activities commonly reported as impacting identity awareness were the night climb and zipline (n = 26), nightly fire council (n = 12), and key ceremony (n = 10). Nine other activities were reported, but were only mentioned by one to four participants.

The night climb up a tower represented physical and emotional challenges faced in participants' daily lives for which there were no clear solutions. Upon reaching the top of the tower, participants ziplined into the dark "abyss," practicing the courage to move forward as the person they want to be and leave 'things' behind that would prevent them in living life as they want to. The fire council encouraged participants to share their answers to a meaningful question and reflect on the day. In the key ceremony, staff described positive attributes of each participant's character and provided a word or phrase that embodied the description. Notably, the three structured activities took place at night in which participants concentrated on what they thought about themselves and their experiences both in life and at Hero's Journey. Additionally, identity awareness was experienced through internal and external processing but not through specific activities.

Certainly, the structured and unstructured activities of Hero's Journey allowed space for these types of processing to occur, but this theme seemed to transcend specific activities. The night climb, fire council, and key ceremony were program activities that appeared to be major drivers of identity awareness. Program staff should continue these activities, consider how these activities contain essential program features that drive participants' identity awareness, and integrate similar features (e.g., emotional and physical safety, reflection) into other program activities. Structured and unstructured opportunities for internal and external processing can potentially magnify or serve as the main conduit for identity awareness.

Activities related to identity awareness.

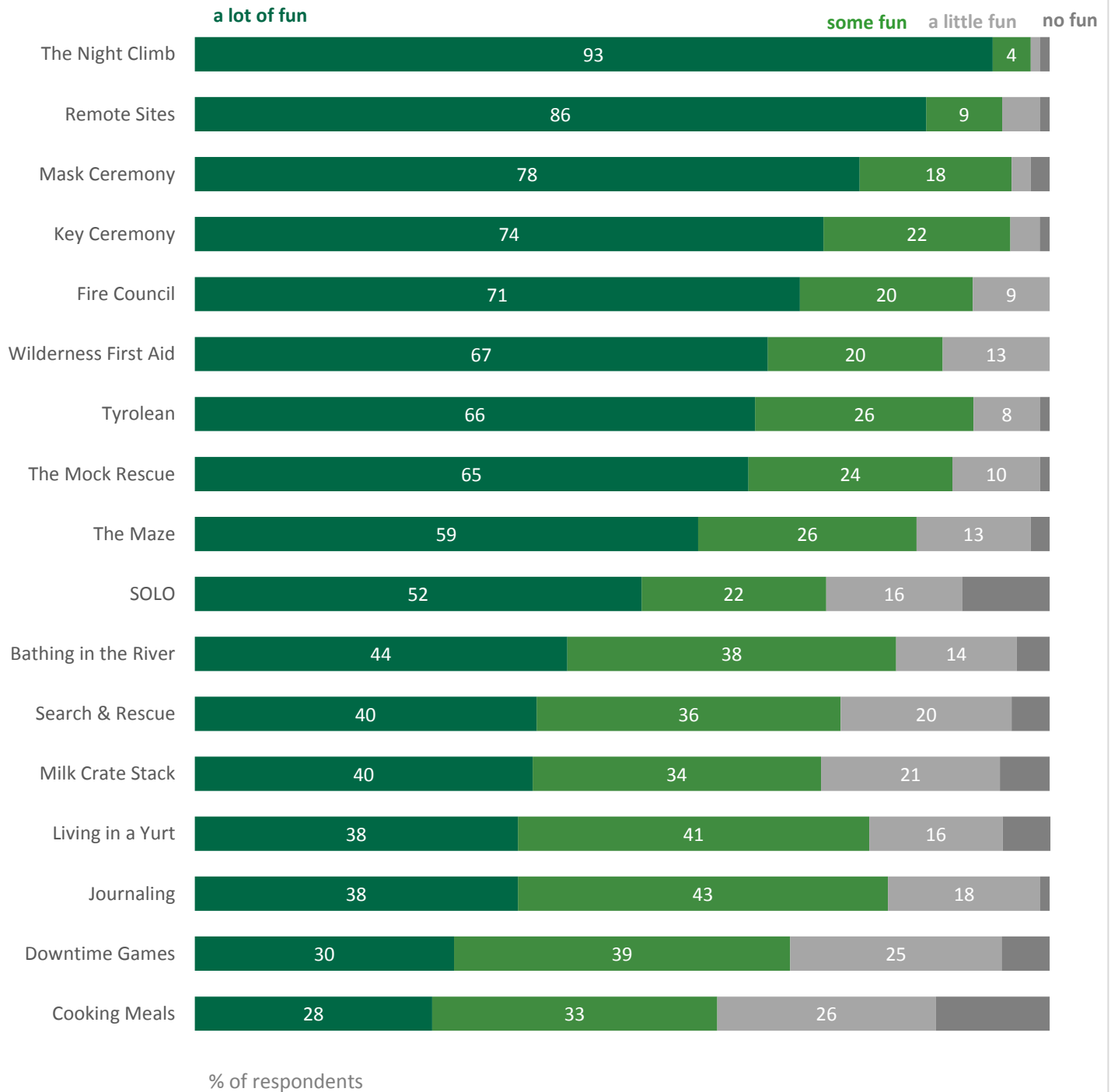
Activity	Quotes
Personal Reflection	During this week I experienced a lot of new and amazing things. I can't quite name the exact moment when I discovered who I am, but now that the week has passed, I feel so self aware and so freed. The week as a whole has been a life changing experience.
	I recently had been making changes in my life about who I am, and I sort of used HJ to observe my newfound attitude and see if it is truly healthy for me and makes me happy. Though there may be a thing or two I can still work on, overall HJ has helped me to "discover" that the new me I created before HJ is the good me.
Communication with Counselors and Participants	This experience has made me realize where I belong. The counselors recognized my potential as a guide and it was brought out in me and now I realize I prefer to be out here in the wild and I will be back to help people have a similar experience to the one I have had.
	When I was in the patrol group is when I discovered who I was the most when I became closer to my friends and had conversations with them I haven't had with anyone else and I was able to be open with them and talk about personal things and have their positive feedback to help me through what I was going through and to have me know it's okay to be who you want to be no matter who that is
Tower/Zip Line	I discovered who I was after reflecting on the week as a whole after the night tower climb and zip line to the "unknown". I realized for the first time I truly believed in my future and am hopeful of my potential. I know now that I have the potential to not only help others, but help myself and be my own hero. My priorities and perspective was shifted greatly. I have been reminded of the lovely simplicities of life. I know now that my priorities are to merely follow my bliss and learn to be selfish along with selfless. I am a caregiver, courageous, determined, and stubborn. Most of all, I have the potential to be not only a hero to others, but a hero to myself....eventually.
	A time at hero's when I discovered who I was was when I climbed the tower and zipped off. Crossing that abyss was very scary for me so at the top along the zip line and at the end I completely broke down. Which was something I used to have a lot of trouble doing . 7 years since I was diagnosed and all the feelings held in came rushing out . I knew who I was. I knew my feelings. My roots and what experiences made me and broke me...The truth that I was a cancer survivor and it made me into the person I know I am. Which was hard because I wanted to be an average teen. But I'm so much more than that. Hero's journey showed me how to embrace myself instead of hating myself.

Key Ceremony	I discovered who I am when I participated in the key ceremony and found out that I make a change without trying and I'm someone to look up to which is something I never knew.
	The time I discovered who I was at hero's journey was the key ceremony. I never knew I had a "guardian" in me. I truly believe that I care for the people I'm surrounded by.
Fire Council	At the fire in the remote campsites I found out that I have a deep, strong leader inside of me that didn't really come out. I also found out that I am a really hard working, determined individual that really has changed over the number of days and I really have accepted that person that I am. I feel after hero's journey that I will bring that person into the outside world and benefit from it by using around friends, family, and strangers so that I can really become a better person.
	When we was sitting by fire I discovered I wasn't just anyone I mattered to people



Participants mostly had fun in their **Program Activities**.

The top 2 activities were both physically and emotionally engaging.



The overall average for Program Fun was 2.37 (SD: .46) on a scale of 0: no fun, 1: a little fun, 2: some fun, and 3: a lot of fun.

Favorite moments at Hero's Journey.

Activity	Quote
Night Climb: 40	My favorite moment at Hero's Journey was when I reached the top of the tower and had a very in-depth conversation with the program coordinator, which opened my eyes to the reality of what position I'm currently in within my life. To see the path behind me (the past) already lit, where I was currently (the top of the tower), and the path ahead of me (the future), was a very powerful moment in which I felt totally in control of what was happening in my life. I felt that my eyes and heart were opened to the truth of what was occurring in my life.
Friends: 26	My favorite moment at Hero's Journey was the second night of our remote camping site trips. It was probably the best night of my life and I know that's a long shot. The way my group opened up to each other discussing our masks was in all honesty challenging but not even moments after fire council was over we were singing and dancing and gathering around the fire. Those moments are moments I live for and that mean the most to me. A family in my perspective is everything and that night made me realize how easily provided a wonderful family can be.
Personal Growth: 22	Confronting my own abyss. The moment I leaped from the tower I spread my arms wide trying to grasp at every piece of my surroundings that I could. The further and further away I got from the camp the less I could see of what was once my only safe haven. But when I laid on the grass on the other side of my abyss, arms interlocked with my new family, I realized that this is a safe haven I will always take with me. I will always be under the same sky as camp Hole In The Wall, or the Hero's campsite. It will always be with me. It transcends.
Remotes: 14	My favorite moment was the remote site camps because even though I left some of my good friends behind, I was able to make really deep connections with the people in my group those two days.
Everything: 9	It is difficult to think of one single moment and chose it as a favorite. I loved every minute of being here with my fellow hero's and my outstanding counselors. I could not ask for a better week so I believe the best part was the journey and the worst part is closing on this chapter in my life but I have made a promise to myself and some of the counselors I will be back.
Activities: 8	I loved playing Mr. Commissioner Sir at remotes. We laughed so hard and bonded so much. I felt so carefree and with myself and connected to the people I was with.
Mask Ceremony: 5	The mask ceremony really helped me understand that so many other people no matter what age or gender are going through problems even though they are super kind and genuine. It's helped me to find strength in my struggle.
Key Ceremony: 4	My favorite moment at Hero's was the Key Ceremony. I loved hearing what the counsellors thought my good qualities are and hearing them describe me. It really lifted my spirits and raised my self confidence. It was also nice to hear someone describe me without being judged by myself because of my diagnosis and what I am unable to do because of it.
Wilderness First Aid/ Search and Rescue: 5	The final scenario was also very real but very fun. It was cool to see the whole group come together and locate and care for our patients.
Tyroleon (2); Maze (1); Yurt (2); Fire Council (2)	Sitting at the top to the Tyroleon with a counselor and listening to what he had to say about being a "sunflower" and hearing about how much he believed in me because I feel like people don't always believe in me and it means a lot to me to know that someone does.

What were the 100 most common words parents/caregivers used to describe Hero's Journey?



From the perspectives of parents/caregivers, what effects did Hero's Journey have on participants?

About one-third of comments reflected that their children had already been strong in positive qualities, but Hero's Journey seemed to magnify those qualities.

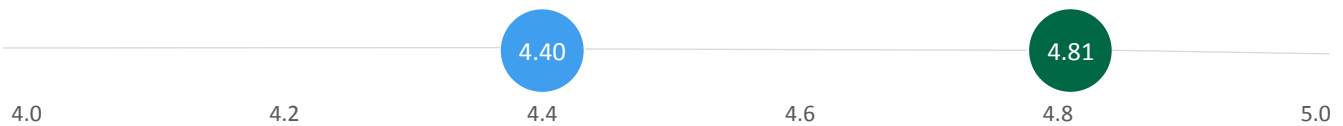
Topic	Quotes
Connecting with others (9)	The connections she made at camp were astounding. Leaving that day was the hardest it has ever been. They all wanted to stay together which was amazing and heart breaking to see. She has done been in contact daily with many of her camp friends. They truly made connections like no other. Thank you.
Empathy (7)	My child has always been a good friend to others, listens, cares, helps - she is a very inclusive person and gives everyone a chance. I think camp reinforced these skills and reinforced the importance of these skills
Confidence (4)	Both children opened up, which is difficult...and have noticed this at home also.

Digging Deeper

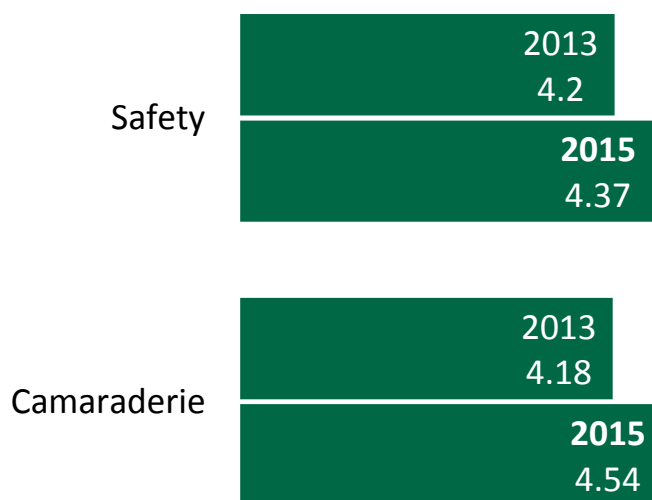
Were there any differences in outcomes by session?

No, except for feelings of “Safety.” Session 2 participants ($m = 4.4$, $SD: .34$) reported less overall Safety than Session 6 participants ($m = 4.81$, $SD: .21$, $p < .05$, $d = 1.45$) and this difference was very large and meaningful. There were no differences between other sessions.

Compared to participants in **session 2**, participants in **session 6** reported significantly higher levels of **Safety**.



How do previous years compare to 2015?



There was a large difference in Safety between 2013 and 2015, ($p < .001$, $t = 6.02$, $df = 147$, Cohen's $d = 1.0$). There was a very large difference in Camaraderie between 2013 and 2015, ($p < .001$, $t = 7.52$, $df = 147$, Cohen's $d = 1.29$).

Additional questions were added for each of these outcomes in 2015, so caution should be used when interpreting these results because the question sets were different in each year. However, the sets of questions had very good reliability for both 2013 and 2015.

Program Fun	2013 2.49
	2014 2.4
	2015 2.37

The differences between the three years were not statistically significant, meaning that fluctuations in the averages occurred by chance. The questions asked in all three years were the same, and the set of questions was statistically reliable.

Similar to past years, the amount of fun a camper had moderately predicted their feelings of safety, camaraderie and identity awareness. See Appendix for specific information.



Hero's Journey participants practicing a "mock rescue."

Participant Recommendations

Topic	Quotes
Nothing (39)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have no recommendations. I haven't been this happy and felt more like myself in a while. • I recommend that people should really come because, they will receive a life-altering process the really expounds their character out for them even if they can't find that. It also makes you soak in the experiences that you can take from this place and it makes you really discover yourself so you can really find yourself in the outside world. I can really change your aspect of life in any way, for example it really change my life by showing me what I can really be and it really made me a better person and really find myself and really reflect on my life more and it really cleared everything for me. • Do whatever it takes to make sure the mysterious-ness of the Hero's Journey stays unknown to the outside world, for all the surprises made it all the better to enhance the experience. This was truly an amazing experience, please keep up the great work!! • There are many things I didn't like about the program. However, I don't feel that there was anything inherently wrong with the program. It may just not have been the best fit for me. As someone else in the program said, the fact that I didn't enjoy it doesn't mean that I don't appreciate its impact on others.
Food (19)	<p>I would also recommend that the kitchen has a little more of a variety in foods since camp is actually so close. I'm not saying that we should be eating like we are at the dining hall but have the same sandwich for lunch every day is boring and maybe one breakfast could be eggs cooked over the fire. Also if we got the supplies to make some homemade cookies over the fire that would be sweet as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desserts (6) • Better pack-a-meals (2) • Juice/ flavored water (2) • Coffee (2) • Different and more snacks (especially fruit roll ups) (2) • More meal choices • Hot lunches • Mango Tango
Communication with participants (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to the participants why splitting them up is necessary • I felt at first we were treated a bit like children at first when I got here • I think that entries from the memory book should be read to the participants earlier in the week to hear some advice on how to approach hero's journey because it can be pretty intimidating and I feel that the entries encourage people to try new things and to open up earlier in the week. • The only advice, or request if you will, I have for this camp is that we are told to pack in a hiking backpack. That way we don't have to switch bags when arriving and departing. • I would suggest that on the list that says what people should bring, y'all should really say to bring two pairs of sneakers. I think you should also let people know that they will be doing a lot of hiking and that their whole suitcase won't go with them.

More rest and socializing time (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hour of downtime (2) • Less downtime games • More time with self • The recommendations that I have is to extend the time spent at remotes so that there is a greater connection made with in the participants in the two groups. (2) • I would recommend their being a little bit more time to socialize with the other campers because while on remotes you miss being with the campers in the other group.
Hero's Journey dog (7)	For Hero's Journey I recommend a hero's dog. It was really fun and fascinating when Officer Christy and Axel came to camp and explained search and rescue to us. I think a dog on site would be a really cool experience and make it even more fun
Camper t-shirts (5)	My biggest recommendation is to make an online camp store. After I leave tomorrow I have no idea when I will ever get a chance to be back at camp. Therefore I need a way to show some camp pride even when I'm across the world. So I would love to buy some camp merchandise. Especially some Hero's journey merchandise. I would love to buy some nice shirts like the staff shirts that the counsellors wore on the opening day... But please do all you can to get an online camp store running or just some way that I can order some camp merchandise because I'm growing and all my old camp stuff is starting to not fit.
Personal (4)	Be yourself and try your best. Those are the two things I found that made this adventure worth taking. Because if I hadn't done either of those, I wouldn't be who I am today.
Yurts (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just improvements on the building we sleep at base camp so not so many Mosquitos get in. I'd recommend a screen on the opening on the dome (2) • Yurts were hot(2) • Sleep in a hammock
Make it longer (3)	
Individual suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some recommendations I have for Hero's include doing some more creative activities like possibly drawing or some other art related activity. I think it might also be beneficial to have a slight variety of journaling activities like making an acrostic poem using the word of the day! • Bring it to every Serious Fun camp in the world. Also, put the lessons and the quotes online so people who either can't do this program or people who have done it and want to reflect are able to find a positive outlet of expressing themselves. • Allow participants to use MP3 players of a sort. I understand that this is an experience to "step out" of one's comfort zone, but this week I was allowed to have a simple iPod Shuffle for music and podcasts, as it is one of my coping methods. It was an amazing motivation, and I think that MP3 players - not phones - should be allowed. • The milk crates I think should have a little padding on them, just in case anyone does some "wrecking ball" action and crashes into a bunch of crates. • Cleaner port-a-potties

Notable differences in responses from last year include:

- Fewer complaints about the backpacker meals, down time, communicating about equipment, and feeling uncomfortable sharing
- No complaints about bathing in the river or journaling
- Greater comfort in living outdoors
- More participants recommending nothing should change
- Less focus on wilderness first aid and search and rescue

What recommendations did parents/caregivers have for Hero's Journey?

Nothing (17)

Desire to keep in touch (5)

To offer Hero's Journey to other populations (4) such as parents/caregivers, and youth who are bereaved or have mental health issues



Hero's Journey participant practices caring for another participant "victim" during a mock wilderness first aid scenario.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hero's Journey provides participants with strong opportunities to experience safety and camaraderie, to develop identity awareness and to have fun.
- The night climb is a particularly important activity within Hero's Journey to the achievement of these participant outcomes.
- Personal reflection, communication with other participants and counselors, and the activities of the night climb, key ceremony and fire council strongly influenced increases in participants' identity awareness.
- Participants were very satisfied with their Hero's Journey experience.
- The amount of fun participants have at Hero's Journey makes a strong positive difference to their feelings of safety, camaraderie and identity awareness.
- 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 Hero's Journey was worthwhile.

Actionable Insights

High Priorities

1. Continue the activities in Hero's Journey, especially the night climb.
2. Continue creating a space for participants to experience safety, camaraderie and opportunities for identity awareness.
3. Continue supporting the engagement and inclusion of participants with disabilities and illnesses in an outdoor setting.

Medium Priorities

1. Consider revising the menu and food options
2. Consider providing more down and rest times.
3. Consider providing clear ways for participants to stay in touch.
4. Communicate in different ways with participants about equipment needs and programming decisions.

Low Priorities

1. Consider increasing the potential impact of the SOLO activity, given that few or no comments were made about this activity.
2. Consider providing t-shirts to participants.

APPENDIX

Participant Scale Performance and Items

Scale	Item	Mean
Safety (range: 1-5) M = 4.62; SD = .40 $\alpha = .745$ Inter-item range .255 to .695 rFun = .51 ($p < .001$)	It was easy for me to get around Hero's Journey.	4.16
	The activities were right for my abilities.	4.36
	I got the medical care I needed at Hero's Journey.	4.84
	I trusted the nurses and doctors to take care of me.	4.87
	I felt safe at Hero's Journey.	4.82
	I saw other Heroes get treated meanly or get made fun of.*	1.41
	There was someone I could talk to if I had a problem.	4.62
	People were nice to each other at Hero's Journey.	4.69
Camaraderie (range: 1-5) M = 4.73; SD = .47 $\alpha = .918$ Inter-item range .423 to .756 rfun = .54 ($p < .001$)	I felt left out at Hero's Journey.*	1.32
	It was hard to make friends at Hero's Journey.*	1.4
	I got along with the other Hero's Journeymen in my cabin.	4.7
	I felt respected at Hero's Journey.	4.74
	I had someone to talk to at Hero's Journey.	4.83
	I felt connected to others at Hero's Journey.	4.71
	I felt like I belonged at Hero's Journey.	4.67
	I liked my counselors.	4.89
Identity Awareness (range: -1 – 2) M = 2.27; SD = .66 $\alpha = .896$ Inter-item range .222 to .707 rfun = .67 ($p < .001$)	Developing a sense of purpose in my life.	2.07
	Feeling good about myself.	2.4
	Feeling good about my future.	2.34
	Feeling in control of my life and future.	2.34
	Trying new things.	2.28
	Trying new ways of acting around people.	1.72
	Doing things here I don't get to do anywhere else.	2.51
	Thinking more about my future because of Hero's Journey.	2.21
	Thinking about who I am.	2.5
Fun (range: 0-3) M = 2.37; SD = .46	Seeing Hero's Journey as a positive turning point in my life.	2.5
	17 day and evening programs (e.g., tyrolean, wilderness first aid, key ceremony)	

* Item reverse-scored

Regression Analyses

Only statistically significant results are reported.

Predictor	Outcome	Relationship	R ²
Program Fun	Safety	$b = .51$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 88) = 30.74$.26
	Camaraderie	$b = .54$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 88) = 35.99$.29
	Identity Awareness	$b = .67$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 88) = 72.88$.45

