

# RESEARCH ROUNDUP



May 2014

Issue 2

Howdy! Welcome to the second issue of Research Roundup for The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp!

The purpose of this newsletter is to share with you recent research about camps, children, youth, and families living with serious and life-threatening illnesses, and similar research that can help increase your knowledge and skills in your work.

Twice a year, we will recap research topics along themes such as diagnosis groups, staff training, etc. The good part? The research is summarized, so your brain doesn't hurt! The best part? You can use this information to help children and their families!

This issue focuses on research studies of **summer camp staff** from the last 11 years. As we get ready for summer, we hope this information helps you support summer Camp staff!

Five studies are summarized, and a list of additional studies is provided at the end.

Happy reading! Let's lasso some knowledge!

For more information, contact Ann Gillard at 860.429.3444, ext. 116 or [Ann.Gillard@holeinthewallgang.org](mailto:Ann.Gillard@holeinthewallgang.org)



## **The impact of camp employment on the workforce development of emerging adults (2014)**

*Authors:* Mat D. Duerden, Peter Witt, Barry Garst, Deb Bialeschki, Tori Schwarzlose, and Kara Norton  
*Journal:* Journal of Park & Recreation Administration, 32(1), 26-44.

*Introduction:* Camps can provide the types of experiences and benefits that would position them as an effective context for workforce-development. The researchers explored the impact of camp employment on the development of workforce-related skills and identified the elements and processes of camp employment that facilitated or impeded this development. This study is important because we should identify contexts and experiences that can promote workforce readiness among emerging adults.

*Methods:* Focus groups were held with 21 former camp staff (average age 22.6 and predominantly white and female). Questions included the topics of (1) what factors influenced the decision to work at camp, (2) what was unique about working at camp, and (3) how the camp counselor experience impacted participants.

*Results:* Workforce-related skills gained at camp included

1. interpersonal skills (conflict management and empathy),
2. communication skills (listening, sharing personal thoughts and feelings, and public speaking),
3. problem-solving skills, and
4. leadership skills (mentoring and responsibility).

These skills were applied and meaningful in counselors' home contexts. Camp aspects that facilitated these skills were: intrinsic motivations, working with kids, making a difference, feeling forced out of the comfort zone, camp community, and receiving positive feedback. Camp aspects that hindered these skills were: losing focus, desire to play, crushes, exhaustion, poor camp management, poor communication, and over-scheduling.

*Recommendations for Practice:*

1. Consider camp employment as a stepping stone in emerging adults' workforce development paths.
2. Structure camp cultures and processes to facilitate (not hinder) skills.
3. Communicate the workforce development-related benefits of camp employment to potential employees and future employers.



**The relationship between seasonal employee retention and sense of community: The case of summer camp employment (2012)**

*Authors:* Dan McCole, Jeffrey Jacobs, Betsy Lindley, and Leo McAvoy

*Journal:* Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 30(2), 85-104.

*Introduction:* The average return rate of American camp staff is 56 percent. The researchers examined whether a camp employee's sense of community toward the organization related to his or her decision to return to work there. This topic of retaining quality camp staff is a critical issue because retention provides cost and time savings in recruitment, training, and programming, and high turnover can send negative messages.

*Methods:* 916 camp employees from the previous season ("returnees" and "non-returnees") completed an online survey one month before staff training about their demographic information, camp experience, and sense of community. Sense of community was defined as "a feeling that members have a belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together."

*Results:* Returnees had an exceptionally higher sense of community than non-returnees. Sense of community was higher for those who wanted to return but couldn't compared to those who did not want to return. Sense of community was higher for those who returned



compared to those who wanted to return but couldn't. Camps with higher return rates had higher sense of community scores. Larger camps had lower return rates (26.3%) than smaller (48.8%) and medium sized camps (45.5%).

*Recommendations for Practice:*

1. Invoke sense of belonging through membership and identification and understanding of common symbols.
2. Connect and continue to support relationships of new employees with experienced employees.
3. Develop pipelines of future employees from current campers, such as Counselor-in-Training programs.
4. Give employees additional roles and responsibilities to foster influence in the camp community.
5. Intentionally plan for community building in trainings, facilities, and policies that affect employee interaction.



**Emerging adults' identity exploration: Illustrations from inside the "camp bubble". (2011)**

*Authors:* Sara K. Johnson, Jane A. Goldman, Anita I. Garey, Preston A. Britner, and Shannon E. Weaver  
*Journal:* Journal of Adolescent Research, 26(2), 258-295.  
 doi: 10.1177/0743558410376832

*Introduction:* The researchers examined how emerging adults experienced the camp environments where they worked as counselors and the impact of working at camp on their personal development. This study is important because residential summer camps provide a developmental context for the emerging adults who work there, but little is known about how those who have worked as counselors perceive the camp environment or how they experience the impact of this employment on their own social and emotional development.

*Methods:* 20 emerging adults from eight camps participated in interviews. Interviews involved questions about the aspects of their camp experiences that were the most meaningful to them.

*Results:* Participants described their camp experiences as being in the "camp bubble." Five characteristics of the camp bubble were:

1. the physical and psychological separation of camp,
2. its organizational structure,
3. camp traditions,
4. camp activities, and
5. the establishment of a camp culture built around acceptance.

Counselors experienced and explored a variety of roles and responsibilities: caregiver, disciplinarian, entertainer, facilitator, friend, role model, and mentor. Working at camp influenced many areas of participants' identities, especially identity exploration, the sense of being "in-between" childhood and adulthood, and "self-focus" – all associated with emerging adulthood.

*Recommendations for Practice:*

1. Understand that emerging adult camp staff face developmental tasks.
2. Provide opportunities for deliberate identity exploration.
3. Increase opportunities to explore adult-like roles and responsibilities.



**Long-term impacts of working at an organized camp for seasonal staff (2003)**

*Authors:* Don DeGraaf and Jessie Glover

*Journal:* Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 21(1), 1-20.

*Introduction:* The purpose of this study was to gain a richer understanding of how the camp experience impacts seasonal staff, especially camp counselors, after five, 10, 15 or more years following the camp experience. This study is important because camp administrators need deeper understanding of the benefits to staff of camp for recruitment and retention, enhancing job satisfaction, and intentional programming for long-term benefits.

*Methods:* 29 former staff aged 24-70 from a Christian camp in Western Michigan participated in interviews about their experiences before, during, and after their camp experiences.

*Results:* Themes identified in this study included: personal impacts of the camp experience (e.g., self-confidence, responsibility, spiritual growth, environmental awareness, role models, relationships), professional impacts of the camp experience (e.g. the development of specific work-related skills, vocation), and reflections on camp (e.g. community building, benefits of organized camp for campers and staff, diversity, camp traditions). As respondents distanced themselves from working at camp they continued to remember the experience in a positive light and recognized the positive impact that their camp experience had in both their personal and professional lives.

*Recommendations for Practice:*

1. Develop a philosophy of camping and a theory about how your camp works, realizing that camping is a unique, positive educational experience that makes an important contribution to individuals and to society.
2. Document the stories and traditions of your camp.
3. Document benefits of the camp experience for both

campers and staff.

4. Understand what staff are looking for in the camp experience.
5. Administrators should recognize that they serve as role models to staff.
6. Help staff make the transition to and from camp.
7. Reach out to former campers for staff and cultivate former staff to stay connected to the camp.



**Burnout among summer camp staff supporting people with intellectual disability and aggression (2012)**

*Authors:* Clara Ko, Yona Lunsky, Jennifer Hensel, and Carolyn S. Dewa

*Journal:* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 50(6), 479-485.

*Introduction:* This study examined the relationship between aggression and burnout in staff members working at summer camps in Ontario, Canada. This study is important because there is an association between exposure to people with intellectual disability who are aggressive and burnout in the staff who support them, but little is known about the experience of summer camp staff who work with this population.

*Methods:* 169 staff members completed questionnaires about demographic information, exposure to aggression (frequency and severity), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory—Human Services Survey.



*Results:* Although summer camp staff were exposed to frequent and relatively severe aggression, most coped relatively well, with very few staff missing work, low levels of depersonalization, and few problems with personal accomplishment. However, over half of staff reported to be struggling with emotional difficulties related to aggression, and 41 percent of staff scored above the high cutoff on the emotional exhaustion, leading to possible burn out. Depersonalization particularly affected younger staff, and emotional exhaustion particularly affected female staff.

*Recommendations for practice:*

1. Summer camp staff need training to manage aggression and reduce its likelihood, and to manage their own emotional responses to the accompanying stress.
2. Staff need support for handling aggression and their emotional responses when aggression occurs.

***Here are some more articles about camp staff:***

1. Cousineau, L., & Roth, J. (2012). Pervasive patriarchal leadership ideology in seasonal residential summer camp staff. *Leadership, 8*(4), 421-440.
2. Lyons, K. D. (2003). Exploring the meanings of community among summer camp staff. *World Leisure Journal, 45*(4), 55-61.
3. Taniguchi, S., Widmer, M., Duerden, M., & Draper, C. (2009). The attributes of effective field staff in wilderness programs: Changing youths' perspectives of being "cool". *Therapeutic recreation journal, 43*(1), 11-26.



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