



# What's Cooking?

# 2016 Hero's Journey Outcomes Evaluation Report

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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.

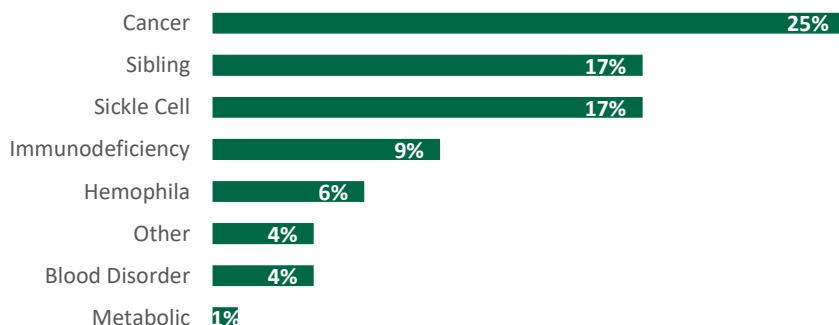
"Some of these youngsters have come to Camp over the course of many years," notes Chief Executive Officer Jimmy Canton. "It is very moving to see them build their confidence level over the course of the week and take on the role of caregivers and helpers – given that they themselves had been the ones 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 2016, Hero's Journey served 83 youth aged 16-18 in groups of 13-18 over six sessions of 7 days each, and 78 completed surveys. Two nurses, 7 counselors, 2 program administrators and 2 volunteers supervised each session of Hero's Journey.

### 2016 Hero's Journey Participants



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, The Maze, Tyrolean, nighttime Tower Climb, Fire Council, overnight backpacking trip, Key and Mask ceremonies, and wilderness first aid and search and rescue.

This summer, we continued evaluating Hole in the Wall's four core values, focusing on two of them: appreciation and possibility, which we also evaluated in 2014. Last summer, we explored the other two values: safety and camaraderie, and we explored "program fun" for the last 4 summers.

In 2016, we partnered with Stephanie Laprise (former Hero's Journey participant, current sibling of a 2016 camper, and a University of Connecticut honors student) and her advisor Dr. Preston Britner (Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Connecticut) to examine "sense of self." For the non-sibling sessions, we included one open-ended question about sense of self, and one open-ended question about how Hero's Journey might influence the ways participants interact with their families when they return. For the sibling session we added a question about how Hero's Journey might influence the ways participants interact with their siblings. A full report of their findings will be available in Spring 2017.

The purpose of the evaluation was to understand the outcomes of "appreciation," "possibility," "sense of self" and "program fun" from the perspectives of participants and parents/caregivers. This evaluation shares the results for:

Participants' sense of appreciation	p. 5
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**APPRECIATION** is defined by THITWGC as "We recognize the generosity and gratitude of others and intend to exemplify that in all our decisions and actions." Appreciation is important to consider because at camp, campers living with serious illness can gain a bigger perspective on their lives and the lives of others.

**POSSIBILITY** is defined as "All aspects of our community are designed to allow every individual inspired by Camp to believe that the impossible can be possible." Possibility is important because a driving philosophy of THITWGC is that at Camp, youth can do that which they have been told they cannot do because of their illnesses.

**SENSE OF SELF** is defined as "realizing things about oneself." Opportunities to develop a sense of self through challenging activities such as those found in Hero's Journey can be rare for youth living with serious illnesses.

**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 they 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.

Seventy-eight of 83 Hero’s Journey participants completed surveys on their last full day of the program and 50 parents/caregivers completed online surveys after the program.

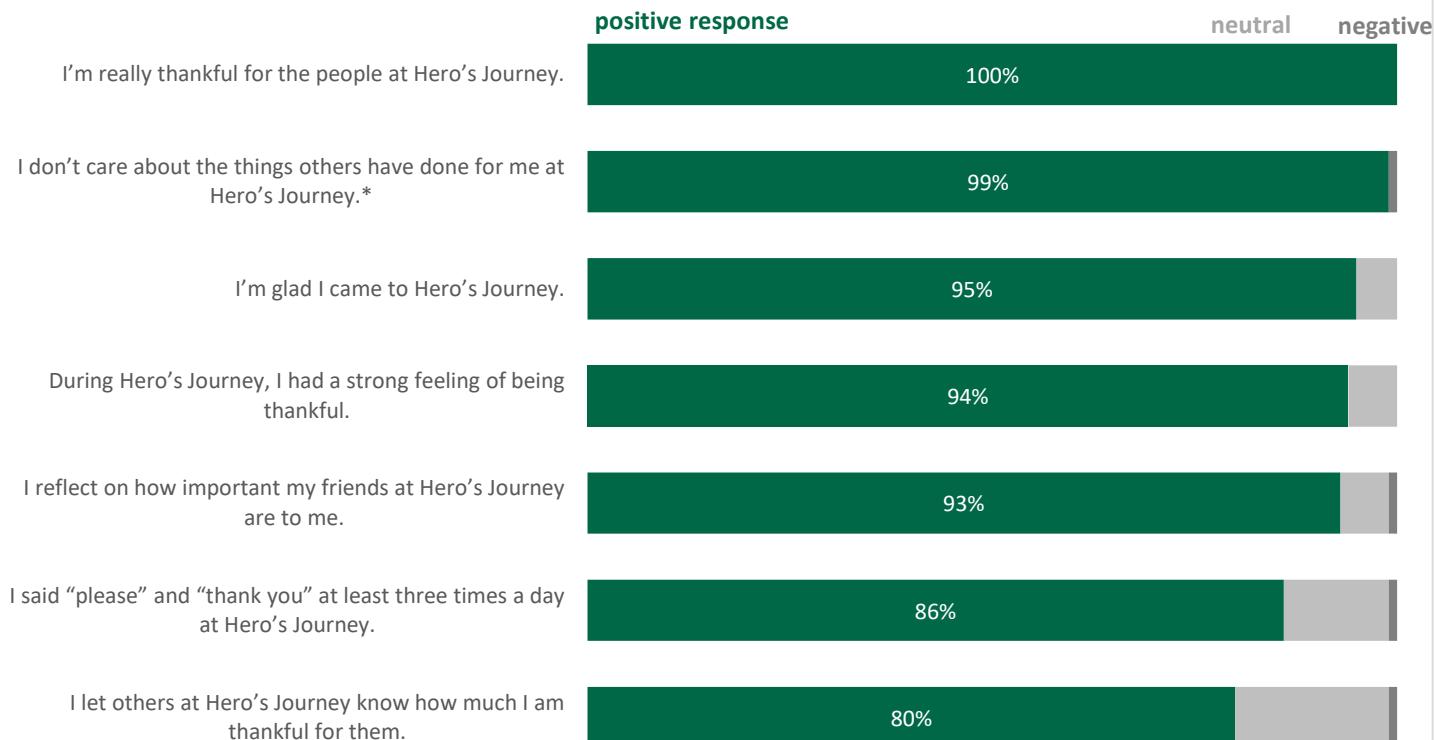
This evaluation covers the 6 sessions of Hero’s Journey held during summer 2016.

*Special thanks to **Anna Boling** (Research and Evaluation Intern) for her incredible help with data collection and analysis for this evaluation.*



## RESULTS

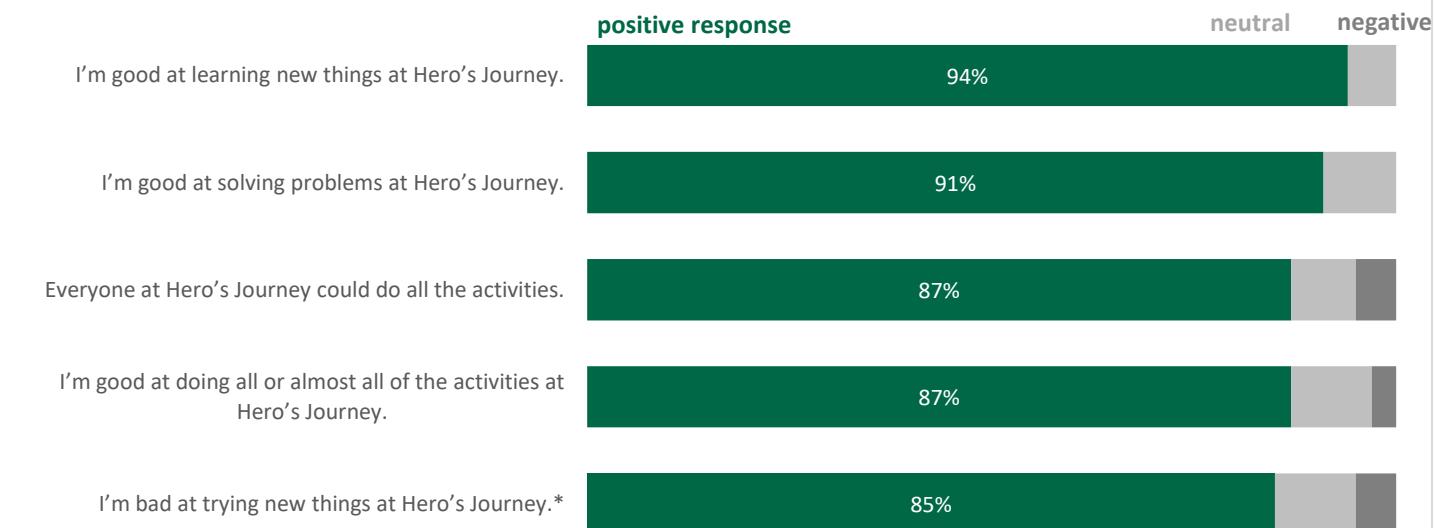
Participants felt **APPRECIATION** at Hero's Journey.



\* Question reverse-coded

Appreciation average: 4.61 (SD: .39) out of 5, with 5 meaning "strongly agree."

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



\* Question reverse-coded

Possibility average: 4.32 (SD: .48) out of 5, with 5 meaning "strongly agree."

## Parents and Caregivers of Hero's Journey participants agreed:

94% of parents/caregivers reported their children's sense of appreciation increased.



96% of parents/caregivers reported their children's sense of possibility increased.



## Sense of Self

**What is the most important thing you have realized about yourself over the course of the Hero's Journey program this week?**

4 main themes emerged: *Discovery of personal qualities, Confidence, Asking for help, and Helping others.*

### *Discovery of personal qualities (n = 31)*

- I realized how important it was to be myself. My friends at Hero's Journey that I made made me act like I truly am, and not someone else that I wanted to be.
- The most important thing I learned about myself at Hero's Journey is that I'm quiet but I still bring a peaceful and positive energy to camp and I'm always happy and don't complain a lot.
- I need to not be so independent/self-reliant, and bottled up.
- I have realized that vulnerability and openness are the key to self-discovery. Sharing with others empowers you in a way that is revealing like no other.
- I realized that I need to be more open and vulnerable in everyday life in order to be more like my true self.
- I am kinder than I think I am and should be easier on myself.

### *Confidence (n = 29)*

- Over the course of this week I have learned so much about myself and I've learned that I am more capable of doing things I never thought I could do.
- I learned that I can be a leader in very stressful and tough situations. I never knew I could lead in such a good way; it was powerful to learn that about myself.
- I am not afraid to spread my wings and show people who I am.
- I am strong, able and worthy.
- That I can persist through problems and persevere despite my weaknesses.

### **Helping others (n = 11)**

- I am someone who can help.
- That I have the power to really help people in many different ways.
- I thought I was someone who was positive and could lighten the mood when needed. I realized that I am that, but I am also a really good helper who people will come to for advice.
- I realized that I love others as well as myself.

### **Asking for help (n = 7)**

- I realized how independent I can be, but it is always okay to ask for help.
- What I realized in in hero's journey was that it ok to ask for help when you can't handle a problem.
- That I can get help from others and not need to feel below anyone for asking.

## **How (if at all) might the Hero's Journey experience influence the ways you interact with your family when you get back home?**

4 main themes emerged: *Be a better person*, *Be a better communicator*, *Be more helpful, kind and patient*, and *Teach family*.

### **Be a better person (n = 28)**

- Camp helps me focus and pay attention more and camp shows that who I am is somebody really appreciated in this world and that its ok to take this blessing and spread it across the world😊😊.
- I'm more truthful around people.
- Be more open minded and appreciate what I have.
- I will be so much more grateful and appreciate who's in my life.
- Hero's Journey will definitely impact the way I interact with my family at home because I have learned to be more thankful for the family and friends that I have. I have learned to be more grateful for the things my parents especially my mom does for me.
- Appreciate the loving environment that I call me home will help to bring my family closer.
- I will continue to strive to be a leader.
- I think I'm gonna be more aware of being a better person in general, and it's gonna impact me in all areas when I get back home.
- It taught me respect and how to make new friendships in the span of minutes.

### **Be a better communicator (n = 23)**

- I can be more confident at home and interact and communicate with my family better.
- It's taught me to make a closer bond, and start communicating
- I will communicate more with my family in a more respectful manner and encourage them to try new experiences together and grow as a group.
- The hero's journey will influence me when I get home and interact with my family by using communication because I now know that it will only help me when I'm facing challenges in life and need help.
- I feel like I will be able to interact with my mom better and use my "soft skills"
- I will tell them that I love them more and I will communicate better with them knowing my strengths
- It will help me be more open to people in my life

### **Be more helpful, kind, and patient (n = 15)**

- I think I will definitely be a more caring and mature person around my family.
- Everyone at Hero's Journey treats each other with so much respect and love and even if I became upset with a camper (which I never had) it was easy for me to let go of anger and this experience will influence me to be more kind to my friends and family.
- It might change how I interact with my family because it teaches me to be patience with them like with everyone here
- I believe that I will be kinder, more helpful, and more sensitive towards others and myself

### **Teach family (n = 11)**

- I can help more and share my new knowledge.
- I would want to go on more hikes with my dad and dog, and I would also try new recipes with my mom.
- I can teach them what to do in the woods for emergency
- I will bring the energy and the early wake ups (to the dismay or my parents). I also want to bring the skills I learned at Hero's Journey to my life at home.

### **How (if at all) might the Hero's Journey experience influence the ways you think about or deal with your sibling's medical issues?**

For the 12 participants in the siblings session of Hero's Journey, 3 themes emerged:

1. *Be a better helper*: "I will try to help more with his struggles."
2. *Have better understanding*: "I feel as if I'll be more open to her and her because in that I have a greater understanding of her and her life as well as mine."
3. *Connect with others*: "Feeling less alone and like there are other people going through the same thing."

96% of parents/caregivers reported their children's sense of self increased.



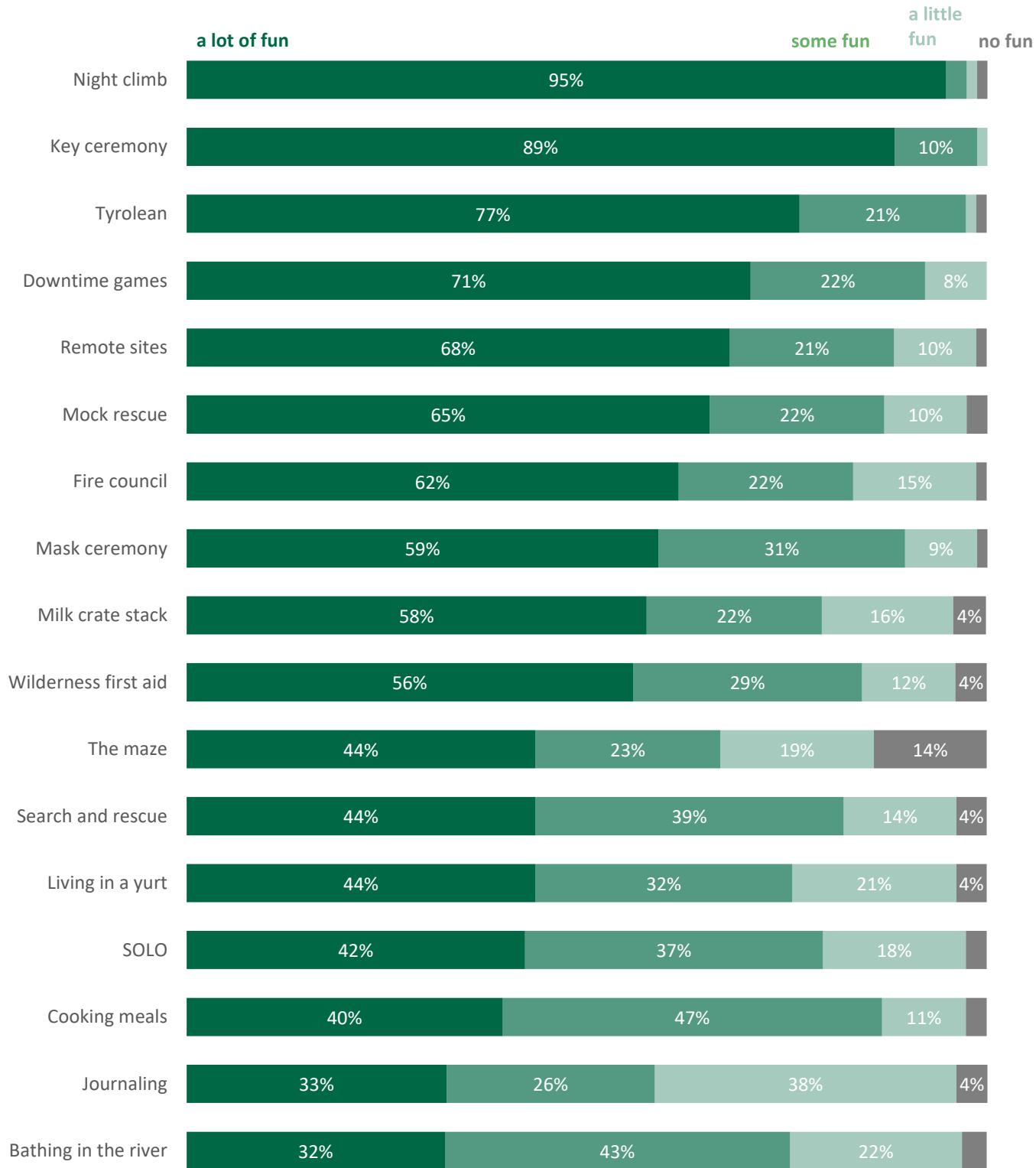
**From the perspectives of parents/caregivers, what effects did Hero's Journey have on participants?**

-  My husband and I have been amazed at our son's improved sense of self, possibility and appreciation after just a week of Hero's Journey. He always returns from his camp experiences reinvigorated, but this year we think it is even more apparent.
  -  He came back filled with powerful appreciation of who he is and where he has been, he was extremely emotional during and after Hero's Journey, in a good way though, he felt a sense of worth and the ability to help others, himself and be a team player, with positive input.
  -  My daughter definitely seemed as she had reached inside herself and released some feelings that had been buried and needed to be uncovered. I am so grateful to camp for helping her do this as I do not think this could have happened without you.
  -  I believe that he definitely experienced positive changes because of Hero's Journey. I think he has returned home more confident and with a better sense of who he is and what direction he might want to go in the future.
  -  I noticed a peace about him and can see him thinking through things a bit more before reacting to certain situations after camp.
  -  My child seems more aware of his ability to make decisions and effect outcomes. He seems stronger in his opinions and more readily expresses his desires.
  -  She learned that vegetables won't kill you! She can start a fire. She knew she was physically strong but having other people acknowledge this really has empowered her to want to try new things, rock climbing for one...She learned you can wear clothes more than once. She actually thanked me for doing her laundry and has been more aware of other's needs.
  -  Activities at Hero's Journey have empowered my child to realize that he can participate in all activities even with a disability. This will help him in the future.
  -  He seems more sure of himself, was very comfortable talking to kids his own age.
  -  A good sense of self. They know when they go to camp that it's no judgement from anyone.

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



The **Night Climb** continues to be the most fun activity.



The overall average for Program Fun was 2.38 (SD: .42) on a scale of 0: no fun, 1: a little fun, 2: some fun, and 3: a lot of fun.

## Participants' favorite moments at Hero's Journey:

Activity	Quote
<b>Night Climb: 32</b> Especially the walk to the Tower	My favorite moment had to be the Night Climb...no matter how far we may think we are from something, it is closer than we could ever possibly imagine. Climbing the wall that held so much meaning for me at night and soaring through the dark was a leap of faith like no other and it truly felt like I was flying into a new phase of life.
<b>Connections: 15</b>	I loved being around all these great people, and being able to open up about anything and everything.
<b>Key Ceremony: 10</b>	My favorite moment was the key ceremony. We were with people that we truly cared for. We got a chance to tell them why we loved them, and it was interesting to hear what people think of us.
<b>Mock Rescue: 8</b> Especially the walk into the Dining Hall	My favorite moment was without a doubt the final Wilderness First Aid scenario. Everything from running to get to the patients to watching the helicopter land was amazing.

Other favorite moments included Various/Everything (6), Remotes (5), Nature (4), Mask ceremony (3), Tyroleon (1), SOLO (1), Fire council (1), and River of life (1).



## Digging Deeper

### Were there any differences in outcomes by session?

No, except for feelings of “Appreciation.” Session 3 participants ( $m = 4.3$ ,  $SD: .41$ ) reported less overall Appreciation than people in the other sessions ( $m = 4.5-4.8$ ).

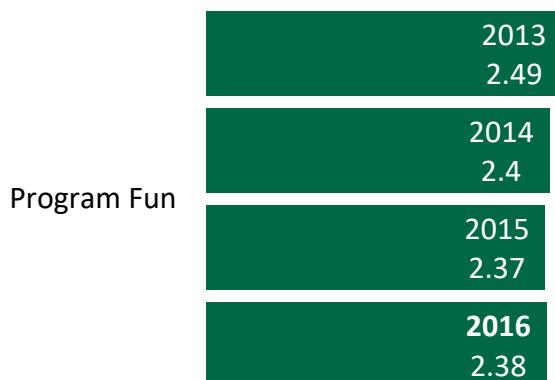
### Were there any differences based on previous experience at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp?

No. Number of summers at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp did not make a difference to any outcome.

### How do previous years compare to 2016?



There were no meaningful differences between the outcomes of possibility and appreciation in 2014 and 2016.



The differences between the four years were not statistically significant, meaning that fluctuations in the averages occurred by chance. The questions asked in all four 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 appreciation and possibility. See Appendix for specific information.

For the parent/caregiver results, there were no differences in their perceptions of their children’s changes in appreciation, possibility, or sense of self based on how many years’ experience their children had at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in the Wall Gang Camp, nor on which session their children attended.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hero's Journey provides participants with strong opportunities to experience appreciation and possibility, to develop a sense of self, and to have fun.
- The night climb is a particularly important activity within Hero's Journey to the achievement of these participant outcomes.
- Participants were very satisfied with their Hero's Journey experience.
- The amount of fun participants had at Hero's Journey made a strong positive difference to their feelings of appreciation and possibility.
- 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



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



#2 Continue creating a space for participants to experience appreciation and possibility, and opportunities to develop a sense of self.



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



#4 Consider offering more opportunities and advice about transferring the lessons learned in Hero's Journey to after the program.



#5 Provide more opportunities for participants to show appreciation for other participants during Hero's Journey.



#6 Promote the idea that everyone can do everything at Hero's Journey.



#7 Improve the journaling and river bathing activities.

## APPENDIX

### Participant Scale Performance and Items

Scale	Item	Mean
Appreciation (range: 1-5) M = 4.61; SD = .39 $\alpha = .739$ Inter-item range .053 to .579 rFun = .64 ( $p < .001$ )	During Hero's Journey, I had a strong feeling of being thankful. I'm really thankful for the people at Hero's Journey. I said "please" and "thank you" at least three times a day at Hero's Journey. I don't care about the things others have done for me at Hero's Journey.* I let others at Hero's Journey know how much I am thankful for them. I reflect on how important my friends at Hero's Journey are to me. I'm glad I came to Hero's Journey.	4.59 4.83 4.48 4.87 4.23 4.54 4.73
Possibility (range: 1-5) M = 4.32; SD = .48 $\alpha = .633$ Inter-item range -.053 to .544 rfun = .62 ( $p < .001$ )	I'm good at doing all or almost all of the activities at Hero's Journey. I'm good at learning new things at Hero's Journey. I'm good at solving problems at Hero's Journey. I'm bad at trying new things at Hero's Journey.* Everyone at Hero's Journey could do all the activities. <i>DELETED ITEM (poor reliability) I always (or almost always) believe there is nothing I cannot do at Hero's Journey.</i>	4.27 4.49 4.4 4.24 4.21 3.48
Fun (range: 0-3) M = 2.38; SD = .42 $\alpha = .877$ Inter-item range -.041 to .644	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 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Program Fun</b>	Appreciation	$b = .64$ ( $p < .001$ ), $F(1, 77) = 52.63$	.41
	Possibility	$b = .62$ ( $p < .001$ ), $F(1, 77) = 46.5$	.38