



2017 Hero's Journey Outcomes Evaluation Report



For more information about this evaluation report, contact:
Ann Gillard, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation, at (860) 429-3444, ext. 116 or
ann.gillard@holeinthewallgang.org

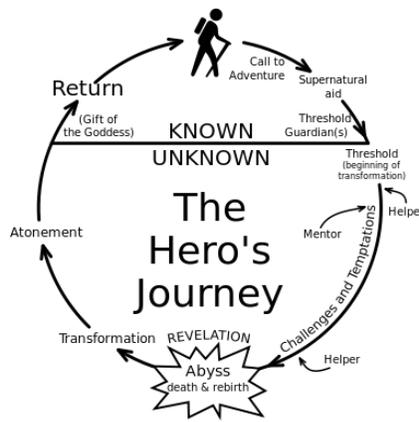
BACKGROUND

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 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.

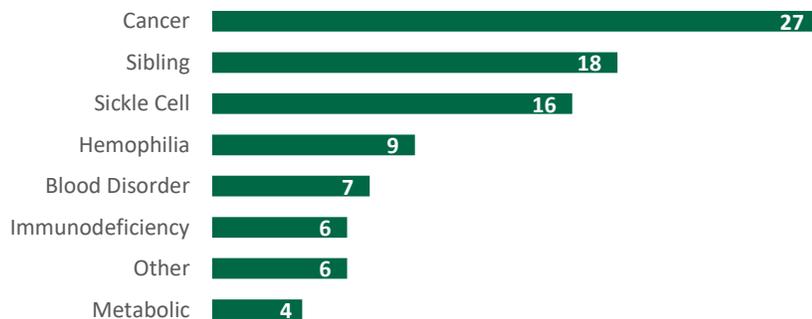
“Some of these youngsters have come to Camp over the course of many years,” notes Chief Executive Officer Jimmy Canton. “It is very moving to see them build their confidence level over the course of the week and take on the role of caregivers and helpers – given that they themselves had been the ones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

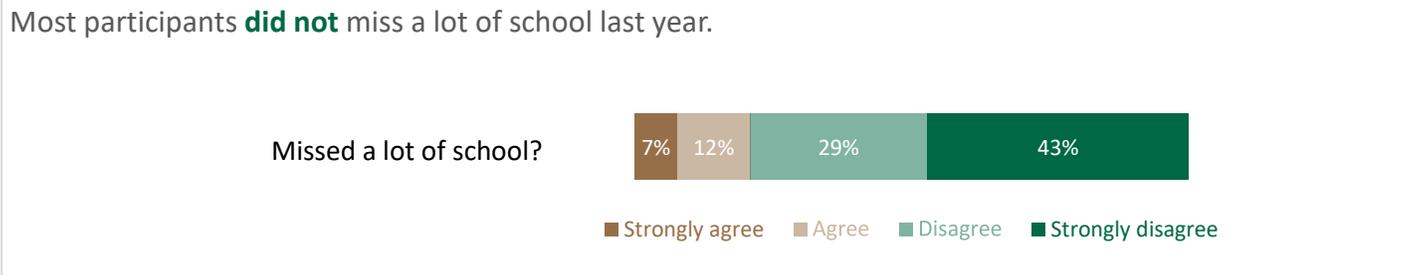
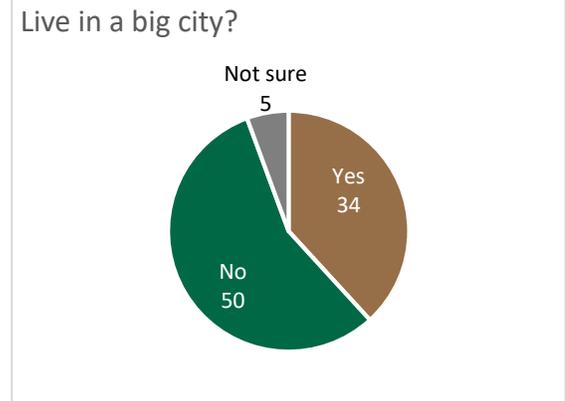
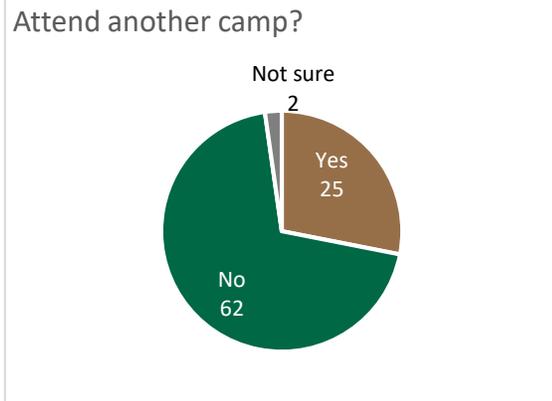
The Hero's Journey program is grounded in Joseph Campbell's 1949 book, “The Hero With A Thousand Faces.” Crafted as a rite of passage to help youth answer “what's next?”, the Hero's Journey program mirrors the journey taken by mythological and real heroes as they heed the call to adventure and move from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



In 2017, Hero's Journey served 93 youth aged 16-18 in groups of 13-18 over six sessions of seven days each, and 89 participants completed surveys. Two nurses, seven counselors, two program administrators and two volunteers supervised each session of Hero's Journey.

2017 Hero's Journey Participant Diagnoses





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 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 focused on evaluating the short-term outcomes, as identified in the Hero’s Journey 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 also examined participants’ perceptions of “program fun” in the different activities of Hero’s Journey.

Methods

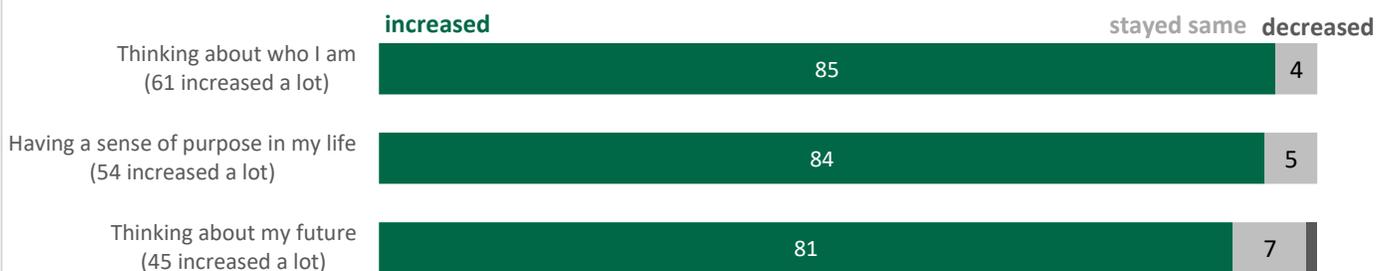
Parents and caregivers gave their children permission to participate in the evaluation. Evaluation participants completed the questionnaires on their last afternoon at Hero’s Journey, using iPads with the iSurvey app. A collaborative approach toward scale creation included conversations and review with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

Eighty-nine of 93 Hero’s Journey participants completed surveys on their last full day of the program, and 43 parents/caregivers completed online surveys after the program.

This evaluation covers the six sessions of Hero’s Journey held during summer 2017.

RESULTS

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



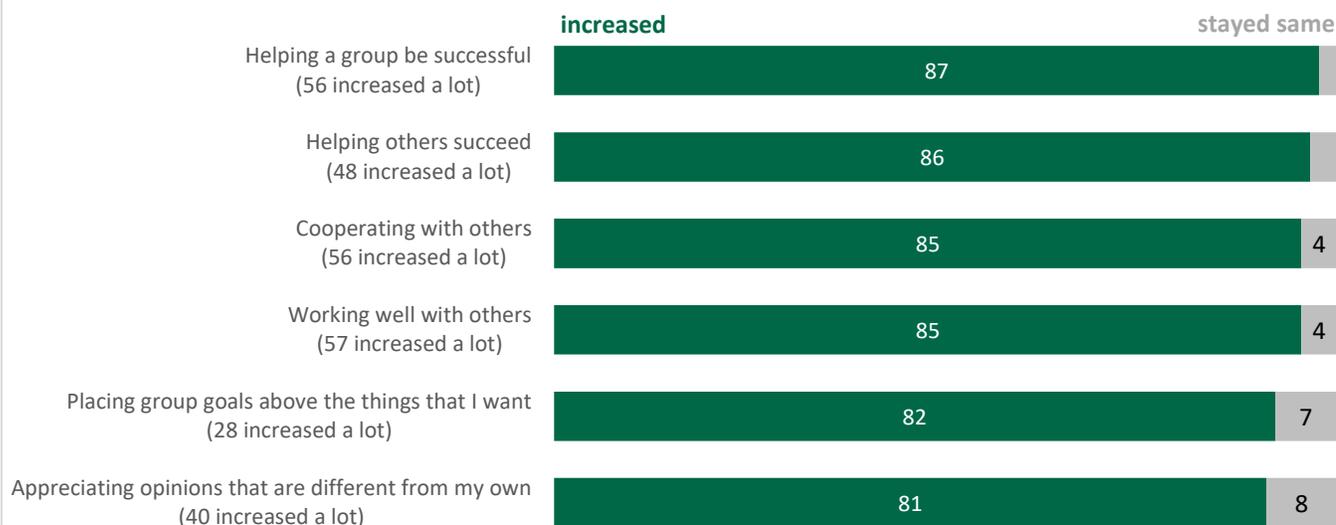
Self-discovery average: 2.4 (SD: .73) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

Participants went outside their **comfort zones** at Hero's Journey.



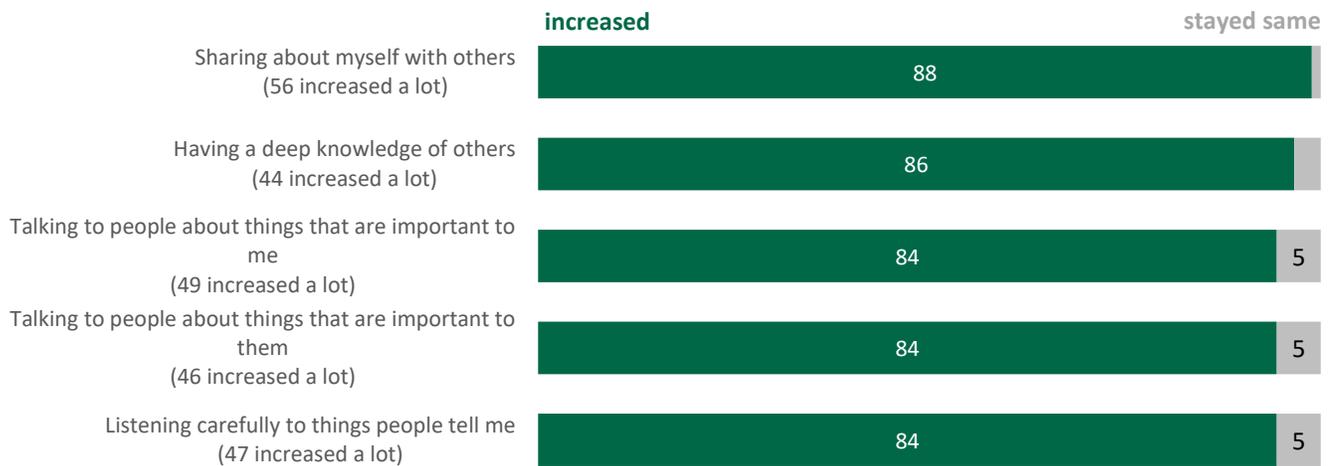
Comfort zone average: 2.3 (SD: .71) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

Participants practiced **teamwork** at Hero's Journey.



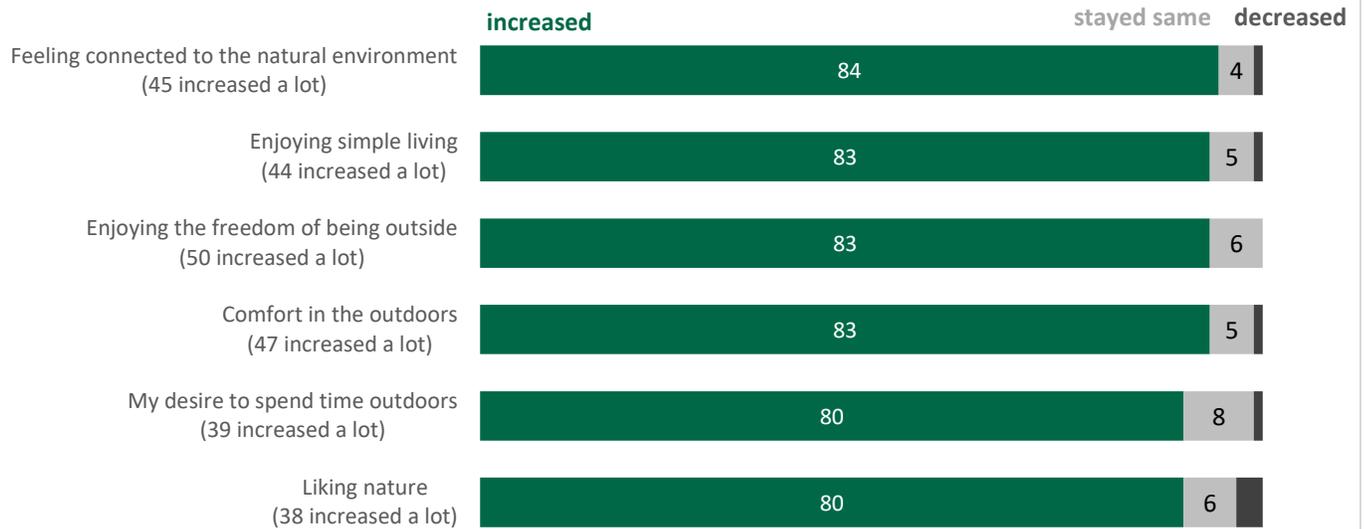
Teamwork average: 2.3 (SD: .70) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

Participants learned **social skills** at Hero's Journey.



Social skills average: 2.3 (SD: .70) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

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



Appreciation average: 2.2 (SD: .84) on a scale of -1 (decreased) to 3 (increased a lot).

What did participants like best about Hero's Journey?

Four main themes emerged: *Bonding and connecting with new friends, outdoor and simple living, self-discovery* and *specific program activities*. Some participants chose more than one thing they liked best.

Bonding and connecting with new friends (n = 45)

The best thing about it was that we got to bond with each other and change with each other.

Having time to bond with the other participants and learn new things from each other

The connections that you form with the people around you and the trust that is developed within the group.

How much I grew close to the group and how much I enjoyed being with them even though we started off as strangers.

Actually opening up to people and reaching a new level of understanding and love that I was not aware of previously.

Outdoor and simple living (n = 13)

The simplicity of life really made me stronger.

Getting away from the chaotic nature of normal society

Spending time without electronics

Self-discovery (n = 11)

You really find who you are and can start to see the impact you have

Personal growth and the ability to feel confident sharing personal stories with others.

Falling completely in love with every part of life and finding my bliss. I no longer fear my future and I'm excited for what is next to come.

Specific program activities (n = 35)

Tower night climb and zip line - 15

Ceremonies (key, mask, etc.) - 8

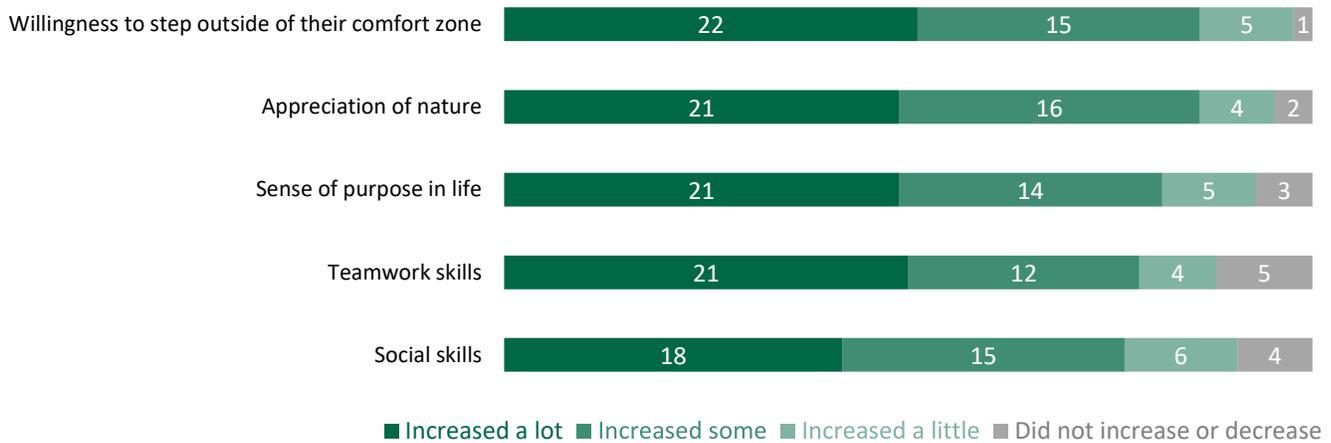
Wilderness first aid, search and rescue - 4

Remotes - 3

Others: free time, downtime games, fire council, and the maze

Parents and Caregivers of Hero's Journey participants agreed.

Parents/caregivers reported their children increased in many psychosocial areas.



Other areas of changed noticed by parents/caregivers included:

Confidence

My child came back with more confidence in his abilities, and specifically, leadership capabilities. He was proud that he was able to take a leadership role and help other teammates.

He seems much more willing to jump in and help out and even take charge when needed. He doesn't seem as fearful of new situation and he seems more willing to push outside his comfort zone. He is excited to share the games he learned and wants to do more than in the past. He loved Hero's Journey!

Self-reliance

Just relying on herself during the week at Camp, I noticed my camper has been more of a self-starter at home since getting back from Hero's Journey.

He has increased appreciation and love for life. This is evident in our conversations as well as his day to day activities (e.g., does his own laundry). I am forever grateful that camp has impacted the lives of both my children in such a positive, effective, meaningful way.

Other positive outcomes

He has redeveloped a love for camping, backpacking and the outdoors that had fallen to the wayside when our family had to put medical needs first.

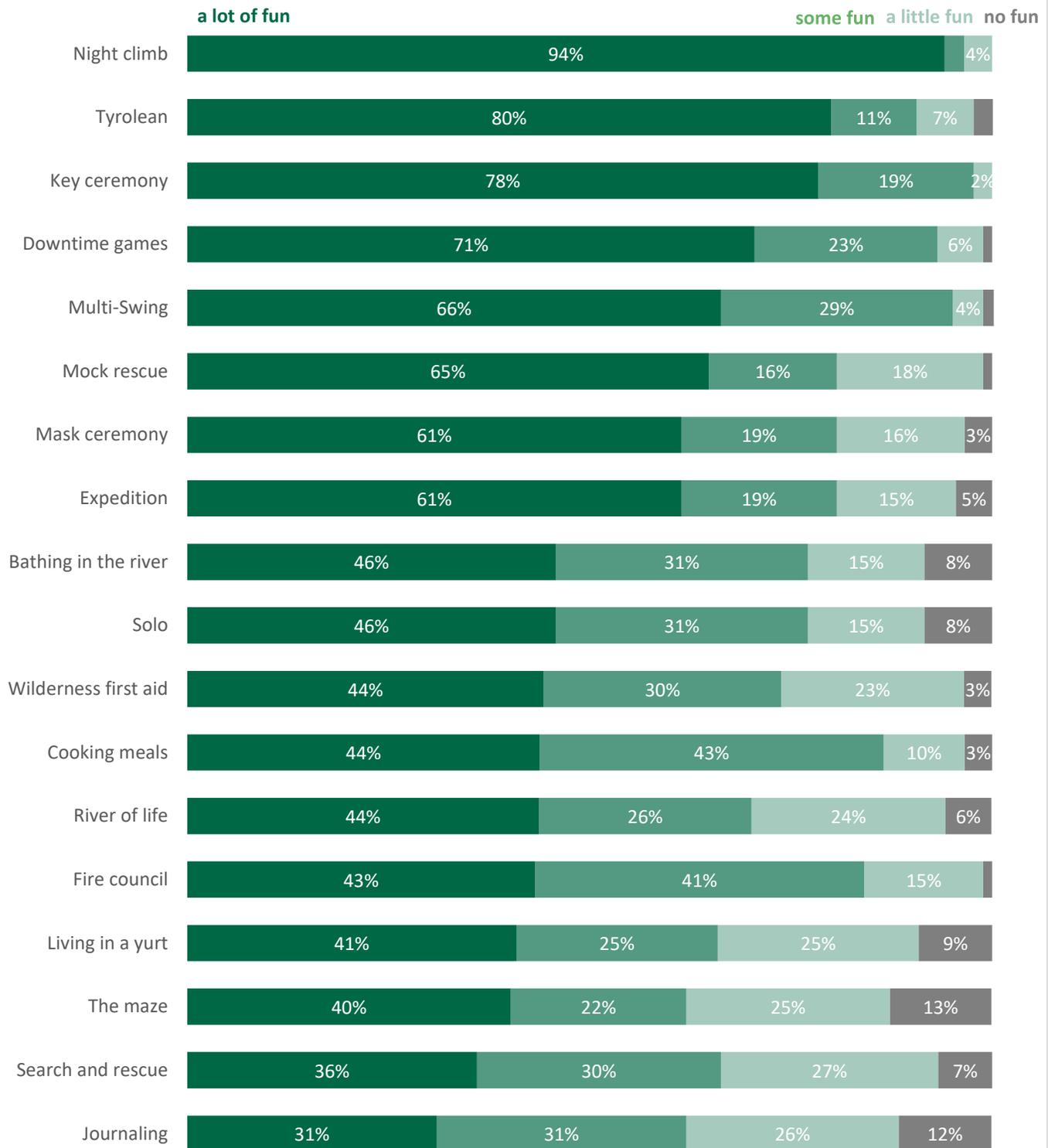
We had quite a talk on the way home in the car. He was very emotional in a great way. Had recognized a lot about himself and wanted to share all with me

Positive, excited, hopeful, proud

He loved his experience there and appreciates life so much the bonds he has made are incredible and the skills he has learned are invaluable

More open to talk about things that she experienced. Very useful as we were having a hard time communicating

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



The overall average for Program Fun was 2.3 (SD: .55) on a scale of 0: no fun, 1: a little fun, 2: some fun, and 3: a lot of fun.

Digging Deeper

Were there any differences in outcomes by session?

No, except for the outcome of “comfort zone.” Session 2 participants reported more increases in expanding their comfort zones compared to Session 1 participants.

How do previous years compare to 2017?

Program Fun	2013 2.49
	2014 2.4
	2015 2.37
	2016 2.38
	2017 2.25

Program fun in 2017 was slightly less than the previous four years. The questions asked in all four years were mostly the same (some name changes and one activity replaced), and the set of questions was statistically reliable each year. This finding could have many different reasons, including changes in summer staff, evolution of activities, growing intolerance of youth in general for outdoor living and being away from technology, or other reasons.

Similar to past years, the amount of fun a camper had positively predicted all outcomes of self-discovery, teamwork, social skills, comfort zones, and appreciation of nature and simple living. See Appendix for specific information. **This means that if participants had more fun, they had better outcomes.**

Were there any differences in outcomes by participant demographics?

For participants, mostly no. Demographic factors of city living, attendance at other camps and missing a lot of school did not make a difference to outcomes. One exception is for program fun ($p < .01$). Participants who

Disagreed they missed a lot of school averaged 2.4 (SD = .42; $n = 54$) for fun

Agreed they missed a lot of school averaged 2.1 (SD = .56; $n = 26$) for fun

This finding indicates that participants who attended school last year had moderately ($d = .61$) more fun than those who missed a lot of school.

For the parent/caregiver results, there were no meaningful differences in their perceptions of their children's outcomes based on any demographic factors.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hero's Journey 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, participants had fun while increasing in these areas.
- The night climb is a particularly important activity within Hero's Journey to the achievement of these participant outcomes.
- The Hero's Journey theory of change is supported by the positive outcomes expressed by participants and their parents/caregivers.
- The amount of fun participants had at Hero's Journey made a strong positive difference to their increases in positive psychosocial outcomes.
- 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 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.



#4 Consider how to make the maze, search and rescue, and Journaling activities more fun.



APPENDIX

Participant Scale Performance and Items

Scale	Item	Mean	SD
Self-Discovery (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.39; SD = .73 $\alpha = .759$ Inter-item range .449-.599 rFun = .354 ($p < .001$)	Thinking about my future	2.24	.977
	Thinking about who I am	2.53	.813
	Having a sense of purpose in my life	2.39	.887
Comfort Zone (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.26; SD = .71 $\alpha = .629$ Inter-item range .459 rFun = .381 ($p < .001$)	Identifying my comfort zone	2.15	.847
	Stepping outside my comfort zone	2.38	.819
Teamwork (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.32; SD = .70 $\alpha = .902$ Inter-item range .355-.856 rFun = .413 ($p < .001$)	Placing group goals above the things that I want	2.02	.879
	Working well with others	2.43	.878
	Helping others succeed	2.36	.815
	Cooperating with others	2.44	.852
	Helping a group be successful	2.51	.740
	Appreciating opinions that are different from my own	2.12	.975
Social skills (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.35; SD = .71 $\alpha = .902$ Inter-item range .447-.796 rFun = .398 ($p < .001$)	Having a deep knowledge of others	2.29	.829
	Sharing about myself with others	2.49	.740
	Listening carefully to things people tell me	2.33	.863
	Talking to people about things that are important to them	2.29	.882
	Talking to people about things that are important to me	2.34	.878
Appreciation of nature and simple living (range: -1 - 3) M = 2.17; SD = .84 $\alpha = .921$ Inter-item range .545-.779 rFun = .438 ($p < .001$)	Liking nature	1.97	1.11
	My desire to spend time outdoors	2.09	1.02
	Comfort in the outdoors	2.19	1.01
	Enjoying the freedom of being outside	2.36	.882
	Feeling connected to the natural environment	2.2	.967
	Enjoying simple living	2.2	.967
Fun (range: 0-3) M = 2.25; SD = .55 $\alpha = .895$ Inter-item range .004 to .614	18 day and evening programs (e.g., tyrolean, wilderness first aid, key ceremony)		

Regression Analyses

Only statistically significant results are reported.

Predictor	Outcome	Relationship	R ²
Program Fun	Appreciation of nature and simple living	$b = .44$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 87) = 20.6$.19
	Teamwork	$b = .41$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 87) = 17.85$.17
	Social skills	$b = .40$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 87) = 16.35$.16
	Comfort zone	$b = .38$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 87) = 14.76$.15
	Self-discovery	$b = .35$ ($p < .001$), $F(1, 87) = 12.47$.13

Hero's Journey: 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

