Wilderness Therapy: Countering Substance Abuse for Young Adults and CSB/SJU Students

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Abstract

Wilderness therapy is a growing field that offers a unique opportunity for young adults to address their struggle with substance abuse in a healthy way. It is a method that combines clinical counseling and the natural environment in an effort to ensure mental stability and foster personal growth for clients. By analyzing traditional therapy methods to treat substance abuse, it is possible to draw parallels and legitimize wilderness therapy techniques. CSB/SJU college students struggling with substance abuse are often also dealing with forms of depression, anxiety, and/or stress. The CSB/SJU campuses are located in environments that provide natural resources for students to utilize. Wilderness therapy is a viable alternative to traditional therapy for young adults struggling with substance because it incorporates formal therapeutic methods, is empirically supported, and immerses clients in a supportive environment for an extended amount of time.

Therapy Method Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Therapy</th>
<th>Wilderness Therapy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy</td>
<td>Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy</td>
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<td>Motivational Therapy</td>
<td>Motivational Therapy</td>
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<td>12-Step Recovery</td>
<td>Continuous group therapy</td>
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<td>55-min therapy sessions with professional psychologist</td>
<td>Psychologists out in the field with clients</td>
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<td>Client is often given homework to do outside of therapy</td>
<td>Completely new environment, free from daily-life distractions</td>
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<td>Access to resources provided by traditional settings (i.e., Near-by medical facilities)</td>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
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<td>Natural consequences</td>
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<td>Re-evaluation of priorities (Figure 1)</td>
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New Vision Wilderness Therapy

- Location: Grafton, Wisconsin & Bend, Oregon
- Specializations: Youth needing immediate and long-term treatment; Trauma, substance abuse, family conflict
- Mission: To foster healing through intensive, individualized therapy in a safe and challenging wilderness immersive setting.

Second Nature Wilderness Therapy

- Location: Duchesne, Utah
- Specializations: Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, substance abuse/dependence, technology addictions, ADHD, social problems, family conflict, grief, and more
- Mission: Provide a safe and structured environment for struggling adolescents to restore balance and reconnect to healthy family living through a clinically-sophisticated intervention in nature.

Wingate Wilderness Therapy

- Location: Kanab, UT
- Specializations: Adolescents & young adults; addiction, substance abuse, behavioral issues, Asperger Syndrome
- Mission: To help troubled teens and struggling young adults find a new direction and purpose in life through learning independent living skills that lead to a healthy balanced life.

Bringing Wilderness Therapy to CSB/SJU

Health Benefits of Nature

- Reduces Stress
- Increased resiliency and flourishing
- Improved cognition
- Increased physical activity
- Time for self-reflection helps mental / emotional stability

On-Campus Natural and Recreational Resources

College of Saint Benedict

- Common Ground Garden (volunteer opportunities)
- 5 acres Oak Savannah Forest
- 15 acres of restored prairies
- CSB Campus Recreation - a variety of recreational equipment to promote physical fitness and outdoor recreation

Saint John’s University

- 2,700 acres of land, prairie, oak savannah and forest
- 25 kilometers of hiking trails
- 15 kilometers of groomed Nordic ski trails
- Outdoor Leadership Center promotes outdoor recreation by providing equipment and programming

Spring 2018 CSB/SJU Wilderness Therapy Program

The CSB/SJU Counseling Services and the Peer Resource Program will partner on a wilderness therapy program. At the beginning of the semester, a set group of students will commit to the CSB/SJU Wilderness Therapy Program. This group will meet bi-monthly to spend time together outside and practice wilderness therapy techniques (seven times total). At the end of the semester, the program will culminate in a 4-day canoeing trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. This program will be facilitated by Annie Johnson, in collaboration with the CSB/SJU Counseling Services.

References & Acknowledgements


“While at Wingate I struggled a lot but I gained a set of tools to cope with my problems and gained hope that I have never had before. I started to love myself again and build healthy relationships, some of which I still keep today. I also gained an appreciation for the outdoors.”

-Robert A. (Former Wingate Student)

Figure 1: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Life’s Needs and Their Stages: Self-actualization, Esteem, Belongingness and love needs, Safety, and Physiological needs.