



← **"Out of Office":**
Impact of Adventure-Based
Counseling on
Therapist Well-Being

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Barnes Center at The Arch, Counseling



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge the land on which the University at Buffalo operates, which is the territory of the Seneca Nation, a member of the Haudenosaunee/Six Nations Confederacy. This territory is covered by The Dish with One Spoon Treaty of Peace and Friendship, a pledge to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. It is also covered by the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, between the United States Government and the Six Nations Confederacy, which further affirmed Haudenosaunee land rights and sovereignty in the State of New York. Today, this region is still the home to the Haudenosaunee people, and we are grateful for the opportunity to live, work, and share ideas in this territory.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

THE PRESENTERS
HAVE NO ACTUAL
OR POTENTIAL
CONFLICTS OF
INTEREST IN
RELATION TO THIS
PROGRAM.

Presenter Introductions

Aaron Klein *(he/him/his)*

- Staff Therapist
- MS Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Syracuse University; BA Psychology, SUNY Cortland; AAS Substance Abuse Counseling, Tompkins Cortland Community College; advanced clinical training in Somatic Experiencing®
- With SU Counseling since January 2019
- Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team, Chancellor's Task Force on SRV, Options (Alcohol and Other Drug) Team
- Integrating body-oriented approaches to psychotherapy, substance use disorders, trauma, disenfranchised grief, anxiety, depression, cultural/identity development, and the formation and maintenance of healthy relationships
- I enjoy an active lifestyle, loved ones and being a dad; I train in Muay Thai for both leisure and competition and am an instructor for adults and children

Cara Capparelli *(she/her/hers)*

- Clinical Case Manager/Staff Therapist
- MS Clinical Mental Health Counseling; BA Psychology, Syracuse University; background in student affairs, community mental health
- With SU Counseling since January 2020, previously with SU from 2013-2017 as an academic advisor
- Onondaga County Suicide Prevention Coalition, Higher Education Mental Health Community Task Force, Eating Disorder Multidisciplinary Treatment Team
- Adjustment and transition, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive/related disorders, career and identity development, family and relationship issues, eating disorders, LGBTQIA2S+ and first-generation students
- I play volleyball, enjoy yoga, rock climbing and skiing, and am in two book clubs

Agenda

- Provide overview of Adventure-Based Counseling (ABC) Series at Syracuse University
- Introduce Multidisciplinary Team Approach
- Examine Counselor Facilitation Experience
- Explore Impact of ABC Group Facilitation on Therapist Well-being, Burnout, and Professional Identity
- Identify Recommendations for Future Study
- Q&A



Adventure-Based Counseling at Syracuse University

A therapeutic group experience for college students

Overview

- Joint group program piloted by Counseling, Recreation and Office of Health Promotion in Fall 2020
- Designed to build leadership and relationship skills, self-esteem, communication, trust, respect and responsibility
- Facilitated through multiple teams within Barnes Center, primarily staff from Counseling and Recreation
- Involves a hybrid of adventure-based activities and experiential processing to foster personal growth
 - Outdoor High Element Challenge Course, Indoor Climbing Wall, ESports Room, portable team building activities, winter activities and more
- Students submit online application to join, typically take max capacity of 15 students per semester
- Group meets for two hours once per week for total of 10 weeks
- Process group feel, Recreation staff incorporate Experiential Learning Model: Do Something, Active Reflection, Application

Historical Background

- Rooted in experiential learning, outdoor education, group counseling and intrapersonal exploration, adventure therapy is relatively new to the field of counseling.
- Experiential education and therapeutic wilderness programs first began in the U.S. in the early 1900s in state hospitals, camps for children and adolescents, and later with the *Outward Bound* program (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002).
- Endorses *learning by doing* and involves the intentional processing of events to promote positive change (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002).
- Currently, adventure therapy is utilized in schools, community mental health centers, residential treatment centers, and wilderness therapy programs (Gillis, H. L., Gass, M. A., & Russell, K. C., 2014).
- Combining outdoor adventure and therapeutic processing engages the student as a whole and provides a more holistic way of working with students who may not be inclined to seek out traditional therapeutic interventions (Tucker, Norton, Itin, Hobson, & Alvarez, 2016).

Program Development

- 2014/15: Conversations between Counseling and Outdoor Education staff, ideas shared about engaging in teambuilding activities and ropes course elements lead to single session pilots
- Fall 2019: Call for group development with health and wellness team
- Spring 2020: Working group created plan for group implementation, including overall philosophy, activity schedule and facilitation considerations
- Summer 2020: MOU created to formalize responsibilities with campus partners, promotion strategy generated
- Fall 2020: Program launch
- Run each Fall and Spring semester from 2020-present



Barnes Center at The Arch

315.443.8000
syracuse.edu/BeWell



Adventure Based Counseling Series

Are you looking to build leadership and relationship skills, confidence and self-esteem, all while connecting with peers through adventure-based activities like indoor rock-climbing and the ropes course? Then check out our 10-week series, which will offer you tools and skills to aid you on your personal growth journey. We hope to see you there!

Applications open to Syracuse University students attending in-person.
Meets Friday's from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Application Deadline:
September 8, 2021



Apply through the Wellness Portal
under Outdoor Adventure!

Group Implementation

- Meet with planning team at onset of each semester to develop schedule of activities, reserve locations, assign staff
- Work with Marketing & Communications and Group Therapy Coordinator to promote group on university media channels, develop flyer, update website
- Update and post application on Wellness Portal, review applications and contact students
- Review MOU, confidentiality considerations and staff reporting responsibilities in first group meeting; students sign safety waivers for each physical activity
- Weekly email updates reminding students of meeting location and transportation coordination
- Administer post-survey during group termination
- Meet with planning team for end-of-semester debrief, begin planning for following semester
- Technology utilized: Fusion/Wellness Portal, Qualtrics, Medcat (Counseling EMR)

Application and Participant Data

Overall number of applicants/participants after attrition:

- Fall 2020: 7/4
- Spring 2021: 7/5
- Fall 2021: 17/5
- Spring 2022: 24/8
- Fall 2022: 26/7
- Spring 2023: 22/8

Participant demographic considerations:

- High engagement relative to population among international, graduate, female-identified, and BIPOC students
- 54% graduate students, 46% undergraduate students
- 54% domestic students, 46% international students
- 73% of participants female-identified, 27% male-identified, 0% identified as TGNB
- 78% of participants identify as BIPOC
- 8% student veterans

Quotes from ABC Students

"I was temporarily able to let go of comfort for the sake of new experiences that would unknowingly have a lasting impact on my life, which is freeing."

"I learned of my mental blocks and realized that I can overcome them if I am willing to put the effort and seek help. I always thought that having supportive people is helpful, but I never thought that having support is sometimes all I need."

"This experience was beyond worth it. I would suggest even those who do not particularly love being active to join, as there is an element for each type of participant to take away."

"I really valued the connections made, as well as this greater understanding and compassion for myself. The experience itself and the people I shared it with really made me feel validated."



"Adventure-Based Counseling Series was a great blend of adventures and emotions. It taught me how to provide support and overcome some of my fears. I also did some really cool things like belaying, zip lines, and other exciting stuff."

"It was a huge boost for my personal growth. In terms of learning about myself, building new friendships, being comfortable sharing thoughts with others, trusting and learning from others etc."

"I love how the series are set up. we can't really understand ourselves if we don't show up or put ourselves into all circumstances. That's one thing I learned during the series. Keep showing up and shaping who you are."



Multidisciplinary Team Approach



ABC and Integrated Care

- Barnes Center at the Arch:
 - Hub for student wellness, features programs, services and offerings that promote holistic health and well-being, in one accessible, centralized space on campus
 - Major units: Counseling, Healthcare, Health Promotion, Recreation
- Wellness Philosophy:
 - "Health and wellness is a multifaceted journey, a unique and ever-evolving experience for each individual. The Barnes Center at The Arch team approaches health and wellness holistically, encompassing mind, body, spirit and community. Our services and resources are organized placing individual student needs at the forefront. No matter where a student engages with the Barnes Center, they are empowered and encouraged to Be Well in the way that best meets their needs."

Recreation: Recreation staff are responsible for supporting participants through provision of venues, materials and providing guidance in navigating various elements and activities that are a part of the ABC Series.

Counseling: Counseling staff will be generally responsible for facilitating verbal processing, debriefing and promoting awareness of mind-body connection within ABC Series activities.

Health Promotion: Health Promotion staff are responsible for collecting participant applications and data, as well as providing support through assigning peer educators that may help facilitate certain activities.

Benefits and Challenges

- Working with specialized Recreation staff; counselors gain first-hand experience of recreational and outdoor adventure activities and programs available to students, learn how to use equipment, understand physical safety precautions and procedures
- Recreation staff benefit from working with Counseling staff; observe and learn approaches to sensitive, trauma-informed communication, active and reflective listening, and other relevant group facilitation skills
- Confidentiality vs. Privacy; helping students understand the difference between a confidential resource and a responsible employee, reminding students of this throughout group experience and directing them to appropriate resources as needed
- Different approaches across professional disciplines in communicating about and managing physical and emotional safety
- Counseling temporarily took ownership of application management, marketing responsibilities, and assessment efforts due to staff shortages in Health Promotion

Addressing Ethics and DEIA Issues

- Developing MOU with support of legal counsel, including acknowledgement in application, sharing document and reviewing with students, offering opportunities to ask questions, providing space as needed for students seeking enhanced privacy
 - Ex) Brought student to counseling center after group for one-on-one session, used private Recreation office space for brief one-on-one conversation with counselor
- Transparency around and managing expectations for physical touch within group (e.g., checking equipment, holding a group member or facilitator's hand/shoulder during a team activity); highlighting importance of consent and choice regarding physical contact and activity participation during every session
- Identifying and processing accessibility concerns, advocating for equity and inclusion to the degree possible
 - Ex) 300lb weight limit for outdoor challenge course participation; offering private try-on for equipment, ordering additional harnesses for larger-bodied individuals
- Responding to injuries; Recreation staff training and certification, SU Ambulance

Counselor Experience



Counseling Philosophy

Inspired by Yalom's philosophy of therapists as fellow travelers

- "Them" vs. "Us"
- "We are all in this together...no person has immunity..."

Responsibilities:

- Supporting developmental stages of group
- Containment
- Linking
- Somatic interventions
- Psychoeducation



Facilitation Style

- Process group feel with added elements
- Set expectations, individual and group goals for each session
- Delegate activity and safety orientation to Recreation staff
- Therapist engagement as a participant-facilitator; listen, learn, consent, demonstrate, facilitate
- Combination of observation, milieu-style facilitation, large group process

Supporting Training Program

- Barnes Counseling is a practicum and internship site for master's and doctoral level clinicians
- First year supporting APPIC internship program
- Added responsibilities with intern co-facilitator: post-group supervision, consultation and feedback, orienting intern to non-traditional therapy group program and working with non-clinical campus partners, completing formal written evaluations each semester, monthly attendance at intern training committee meetings

Self of the Therapist Considerations

- Intensity and pace in managing countertransference, reactivity, expectations for professional comportment, self-disclosure
 - Ex) clothing/attire, physical contact, emotional expression, phobias
- Cultural and identity factors; ability status, access to sports and physical activities, familiarity and experience with ABC challenges, gender dynamics in predominantly male-dominated field

Therapist Well-Being



Adventure Therapy and Therapist Well-being

- Well-being itself has been difficult to define in research. Multiple constructs have been proposed to speak to hedonic well-being; which largely entails satisfaction of positive/negative affect, and eudaimonic well-being; which has largely focused on elements that contribute to pursuing what is meaningful despite difficulties (Huta & Waterman, 2014).
- Research on the wellbeing of therapists has typically focused on domains of wellness and professional quality of life (Lawson & Myers, 2011), as well as compassion satisfaction and psychological well-being (Martin-Cuellar, Lardier Jr., & Atencio, 2021).
- Although there is a wealth of research on education, training practices and clinical outcomes for participants in adventure therapy programs (Bowen & Neill, 2013), our review of literature found no research related to therapist well-being in adventure therapy and/or adventure-based counseling programs.

Defining Well-being

“Stable well-being is when individuals having the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge” (Dodge, Daily, Huyton & Sanders, 2012).

Well-being itself is the balance point between a person’s resource pool and the challenges they face (Dodge, Daily, Huyton & Sanders, 2012).

Therapist Lived Experience: A Thematic Analysis

Reflective journaling prompts:

1. Describe experiences in Adventure-Based Counseling that enhance/bolster your well-being.
2. Describe experiences in Adventure-Based Counseling that pose a threat to maintaining your well-being.

Benefits to Well-Being

Transcendence

- "...hopping down the stairs, the energy of going out feels like I am casting something off, maybe the fetters of what I should look like or be doing as a therapist in an office."
- "I don't think in any one of these groups I have ever been at my absolute best...I have been more ok with that than I would ever be in the office."
- "I return to my office...looking forward to settling in with my individual clients and feel a deeper sense of presence..."

Mutuality

- "There are times where I almost feel like I can fall away, become deeply connected with the experience."
- "I felt my students shake as they crossed each wire..."
- "It's like a weird assembly line of learning and engagement..."
- "I have been shaky, scared, blow around by the wind and looked for support..."

Embodiment

- "My whole body shook while I walked across a wire...and felt the CNY wind rip through me, gripping a pole..."
- "I can walk around, reposition myself, I feel a freedom of mobility..."
- "...the feeling of being physically engaged myself, blood flowing and seeing people move, scream, shake laugh, balance."
- "That feeling of making it to the end, the top, coming back down to the ground and taking in the solidity, the sun..."

Benefits to Well-Being

Expanded Reach

- "It has been rewarding for me professionally to help evolve what it means to access counseling services..."
- "I get to see play in action, a serious student that would be a ball of stress and anxiety on campus making an instrument out of a blade of grass, try it out with them, and this is therapy."
- "I have helped students otherwise unfamiliar with therapy gain a better understanding of what it means to engage in therapeutic experiences and use campus resources."

Novelty

- "I learned how to rock climb, breathe through my own anxiety responses, stay focused on the task..."
- "...new activities and challenges, visited new areas of campus..."
- "I scaled our outdoor high ropes course and rode a zip line for the first time."
- "...challenging myself to get where I want to go, and making it."

Out of Office

- "It is rewarding and refreshing for me to leave my office...to do something active, outdoors/in nature, and be in the elements with students."
- "There is something exhilarating about casting aside work clothes and gearing up to go out of the office on an adventure with clients. I'm going, and until it's over, nobody here is going to reach me."
- "...maybe it has to do with spending time outside of the four walls of my office and not sitting in a chair all day..."
- "...not worrying if someone is looking for me or needs something from me, not hearing my computer notifications chiming, not wondering if that was a knock at my door."

Threats to Well-Being

Planning Demands

"It requires focused work every semester with seasoned staff and new staff."

"...the amount of time required for group facilitation and travel; more energy and effort to plan and organize..."

"...requires good time management."

Role Stress

"...managing working relationships with non-clinical staff and our different roles..."

"It is always stressful to call for emergency services for someone...a lot to hold, and it is difficult to wrap my head around all the moving pieces..."

"I can notice if someone's harness looks wrong, but what then, sometimes I don't even notice if mine is wrong..."

Lack of Control

"It is miserable to be underdressed on a cold day on the challenge course, shivering and trying to stay present..."

"...managing and minimizing environmental distractions, working with non-clinical staff..."

"The sense that I am unable to prepare because I don't know what or who I am preparing for..."

Overextension

"The group itself has become one of the Barnes Center's most visible and successful examples of integrated health and wellness and with that...has come more pressure."

"Doing something non-traditional and novel...comes with attention, expectations, and evaluation."

"It is also stressful to tweak something physically and then sit with it for the rest of the day. When I go beyond my limit, it carries over..."

Recommendations and Areas for Future Study

- As our data is preliminary in nature, it would be useful to explore therapist well-being through qualitative and quantitative methods across a large set of therapists engaging in adventure-based counseling programs (e.g., colleges/schools, outpatient & community settings, inpatient & residential settings)
- Based on our findings and the extant literature, established constructs and measures (e.g., RPWS, ProQOL) could be applicable to measure well-being of therapists engaging in adventure-based counseling
- Additionally, it may be fruitful to explore the impact of facilitating adventure-based counseling on strength of professional identity utilizing established measures (e.g., PIS) for therapists new to this area of counseling, as well those more as more experienced in this area
- The combination of themes that we found to have a positive impact on well-being may be quite unique to this type of program and there is ample opportunity for further investigation in this area
- In our thematic analysis we found connections to two established threats within therapist burnout literature: lack of environmental control and role stress
- Specific to our context, it was particularly relevant that the ways responsibilities are shared within a team or organization can contribute to role stress, which is typically associated with negative impacts on therapist well-being (Maor & Hemi, 2021)
- Thus, it would be useful to further explore how the elements of role stress and lack of environmental control are experienced and managed within different models of adventure-based counseling and generally within collegiate multidisciplinary settings

“I agree with Viktor Frankl that a sense of life meaning ensues but cannot be deliberately pursued: life meaning is always a derivative phenomenon that materializes when we have transcended ourselves, when we have forgotten ourselves and become absorbed in someone (or something) outside ourselves.”

— *Irvin D. Yalom, The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*

Questions?

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