

The JourneyMen Project – An Adventure Therapy Option in Domestic Violence

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Men who have used abuse and violence in their intimate relationships are limited when it comes to counselling options – especially when mandated to do so. While some men respond well to traditional “in the chair” counselling methods of individual or group counselling, others encounter resistance to the idea of therapy conducted within an office setting, that is talk-based, and built around a defined timeframe. Engrained gender social expectations and negative stigma regarding men attending therapy, not to mention the stigma associated with mental illness in general, further complicate matters (McKelley and Rochlen, 2007).

The purpose of this literature review is to present a well-informed case for creating an alternative therapeutic platform – Adventure Therapy – for men who have violent domestically. Although there is no shortage of programs targeting more common mental health presentations, a scan of the available literature reveals little in the way of adventure therapy programs working with men who have used violence and abuse in their relationships.

To this end then, it is essential to explore the historical underpinnings of adventure therapy, while also examining common threads of successes and downfalls – logistical, clinical, ethical or otherwise. Since little exists in the way of directed adventure therapy programs engaging this specific population of men, it is necessary to examine programs that *indirectly* address family violence, consult experts from the fields of adventure therapy and family violence, and synthesize the information into a formalized, therapeutic program for these men.

Drawn from across the adventure therapy international community, Gass, Gillis, and Russell (2012) define adventure therapy as, “...*the prescriptive use of adventure experiences provided by mental health professionals, often conducted in natural settings that kinesthetically engage clients on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels.*”

Dating back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, early programs (camps primarily) systematically sought to address – to varying degrees and using a host of ‘adventure’ media – the physical, social and psychological wellness of participants.

By the late 1900s, a host of adventure therapy-based services evolved to specifically address the mental health needs of communities. In the last 20-30 years, numerous peer-reviewed studies and evidence-based adventure therapy programs have demonstrated success at meeting many of those client needs. The vast majority of client populations that were – and continue to be – served fall into one or more of the following groups: at-risk and/or incarcerated youth; clients with eating disorders, depression, anxiety or addictions; or victims of domestic violence – typically women and/or children (Gass et al., (2012).

Research conducted on men using adventure therapy who present with a variety of mental health concerns clearly illustrates that “...an enriched therapeutic experience is available to men sharing with other men in the alternative, structured and therapeutic environment of an adventure or wilderness experience.” (Scheinfeld et al., 2011).

Given the social imperative the work in the field of domestic violence, it is anticipated that the addition of an adventure therapy option to the menu of available therapies will translate to more men moving away from violence and abuse, and towards respect in their relationships, thereby encouraging healthier families and communities.