

# The Benefits of Summer Camps for Youth at Risk: A Circle of Courage Framework

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## Table of Contents:

Introduction.....	p. 3
Incidences: The Potential of Summer Camp.....	p. 5
Belonging: The Importance of Staff-Camper Relationships.....	p. 5
Mastery: Developing Meaningful Skills at Camp.....	p. 11
Independence: Importance of Skill Building and Supporting Campers' Decision-Making.....	p. 13
Generosity: The Power of the Camp Community.....	p. 15
Cultural Diversity: Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status at Camp.....	p. 19
Interventions at the Micro Level: Outcome-based and Benefits-based Programming.....	p. 21
Interventions at the Macro Level: Greater funding for summer camp to ensure accessibility for all youth at risk.....	p. 23
Human Services Implications: Working with youth at risk in a summer camp setting.....	p. 24
Conclusion.....	p. 25
Author's Note.....	p. 26
References.....	p. 28

## ***Introduction***

In our ever-growing and fast-paced world, there are fewer and fewer spaces where children are afforded the opportunities to simply play. Schools and other child-centered spaces where children are supposed to be able to engage in self-exploration and creativity are becoming more and more catered to adults (Ginsburg, 2007). Although all children are suffering the consequences, youth at risk suffer at a disproportionate level (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern et al. 2002). Youth at risk already are at a disadvantage when it comes to their projected successes in the future. Summer camp has the potential to serve as an effective human services tool in supporting youth at risk (Allen, Cox, & Cooper, 2006; Broecher, 2014; Garst & Ozier, 2015; Lawson et al. 2011). More specifically, effective summer camps meet the needs and criteria of the Circle of Courage child-rearing philosophies which include belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery. Summer camps which practice intentionality and autonomy with their campers provide youth at risk with meaningful experiences, skills, and achievements they are unlikely to gain elsewhere (Allen et al. 2006; American Camp Association, 2005; Barcelona & Quinn, 2011; Broecher, 2014; Garst & Ozier, 2015; Lawson et al. 2011; Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017).

Summer camp is often defined as more than a place where children can go for a certain amount of time, and more so as an intentional community where children obtain skills and benefits in their cognitive, behavioral, physical, social, and emotional development (Povilaitis &

Tamminen, 2017). Focusing on youth at risk is especially important in measuring the positive aspects of summer camp as this population faces greater difficulties than youth not at risk. Brendtro et al. 2002 intentionally use the term “youth at risk” to remove blame and shame rhetoric when referring to youth who are impacted by environmental hazards including poverty, substance abuse, and violence. This way, the focus is on their environment and shifts the focus from blaming the individual, to encouraging consideration of the greater social ailments youth may be facing.

Brendtro et al. (2002) integrate a Native American child-rearing philosophy with Western psychology to offer a unique perspective on the disadvantages facing youth at risk. The authors discuss the causes of discouragement for youth at risk, the alienation of children in society, the impact of destructive relationships and the learned irresponsibility of youth. In response to such issues, the authors propose the implementation of the Circle of Courage which is built on the idea that educating children is the most important function of society.

The Circle of Courage defines belonging, independence, mastery, and generosity as four areas to help youth develop their strengths and identify needs (Brendtro et al. 2002). Through the employment of these quadrants, the Circle of Courage can be used as a tool to identify destructive relationships, climates of futility, learned irresponsibility, and the loss of purpose as factors that prohibit youth from developing strengths in the four areas (Brendtro et al. 2002). This particular framework based on Native American philosophy provides a powerful alternative in the approach to education and youth development, placing youth at risk at the forefront of care.

The findings of Brendtro et al. (2002) speak volumes to the ways youth at risk are at a greater disadvantage than youth not at risk. The authors employ developmental psychology as well as psychiatry to discuss the ways youth at risk are disadvantaged. While these findings do not discuss the importance of camp or its potential to be used as an intervention with youth at risk, Brendtro et al. (2002) emphasize the need for an environment such as summer camp to restore trust in youth at risk who have learned to reject adults and support from traditional services.

### ***Incidents: The Potential of Summer Camp***

The American Camp Association (ACA) conducted a national study of the outcomes of camp experiences in 2005, which showed that about 75% of campers reported that they learned something new at camp and became more adventurous. Additionally, 94% of campers reported feeling good about themselves, and 70% of parents say their campers gained self-confidence at camp (Henderson, 2012). Overall, the research showed that parents, staff, and children report significant growth in, e.g., self-esteem, independence, leadership, social skills, environmental awareness, and spirituality (American Camp Association, 2005). An interesting finding of their work is that older campers (ages 10 and up) tended to show slightly higher rates of positive change from pre-camp to post-camp, as opposed to younger children. The study occurred over the time span of four years involving instrument development, data collection, and analysis from various camps. The results prove that long-held beliefs regarding the positive influences of summer camp can be supported by scientific validation (American Camp Association, 2005).

### ***Belonging: The Importance of Staff-Camper Relationships***

In traditional Native society, it is understood that treating others as powerful social values and instilling a sense of belonging in them transforms human relationships and is crucial to childhood development. Furthermore, belonging to a community continues to be the most significant factor in Sioux identity (Brendtro et al. 2002). Summer camp creates an environment which allows for a strong sense of community to be upheld. One of the most common and effective ways a strong sense of community is achieved is through the ways campers create meaningful relationships with staff and other campers (Allen et al. 2006; American Camp Association, 2005; Arnold, Bourdeau, & Nagele 2005).

Broecher (2014) describes The HighScope Summer Camp for Teenagers, founded in 1963. The program was developed as an international, gifted education program supporting young people, mostly from disadvantaged social strata. The program was six weeks long and supported youth in active thinking, problem solving, and responsible action in both educational and social classes. Most of the classes were heavily based on a social justice agenda. Broecher (2014) argues that through activities based in social and emotional learning, meaningful counselor-camper relationships, and holistic pedagogy, camp serves as an effective environment for youth, in this case disadvantaged teens, in improving their personal development. Additionally, Henderson et al. (2007) prove youth organizations provide opportunities for young people resulting in positive outcomes. On a large scale national study of ACA (American Camp Association) accredited camps, the authors discuss various programs at camps contributing to positive youth development. Their findings suggest that meaningful relationships between camp directors, leadership staff, and campers are essential elements of camp.

Allen et al. (2006) measure the direct correlation between adequate contact time between staff and camp participants. By conducting a project in a southeastern U.S. city, the authors studied two randomly selected camps serving youths ages eight to 12. Their studies determined that 80 percent staff participation and interaction with campers over eight weeks for six hours a day was sufficient to have substantial impact on youth. Allen et al. (2006) stress the importance of quality time being spent between campers and counselors, meaning staff are trained to not only be present with campers, but to provide caring, supportive, and positive environments to help campers feel their best selves. Similarly, Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) discuss staff-camper relationships as meaningful opportunities for campers to belong. By conducting a case study over the time span of one summer, Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) conducted interviews with campers, staff, and camp management of a residential sport camp to measure and assess the influence of the camp on campers. The study concludes that an important way to ensure campers attain belonging is through the interconnectivity of all levels of camp. In other words, the camp's focus on supportive relationships between campers and leaders, and leaders and management staff, is critical to promoting positive developmental outcomes among campers (Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017). Relationships between campers and staff remain the most important relationships at camp because they provide a foundation for campers' ability to grow and feel connected to camp (Allen et al., 2006; American Camp Association, 2005; Arnold et al., 2005; Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017).

Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) also report opportunities for campers to belong to come from positive encouragement and acceptance from camp staff. At the residential sport camp, feelings of positivity and inclusion were created in the ways staff allowed campers to be

themselves. Counselors often encouraged individuality amongst their campers, while coaches strived to create an environment of belonging despite camper's athletic abilities (Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017). One coach is recorded to have expressed the importance of individuality beyond camp into their personal life aspirations, "I definitely want them...to believe in themselves. To know that they can be who they want to be" (Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017, p. 17).

In addition to recognizing the importance of staff-camper relationships as a means of crucial mentorship for youth at risk, a residential camp in Oregon demonstrates the significance of camper-staff relationships and how such connections further fulfill an individual's need to belong. When youth participate in programming that makes them feel included and comfortable, they benefit from the programming in positive developmental ways (Arnold et al. 2005). This inclusion and comfort is fulfilled by camp staff, and their authenticity with campers allows campers to feel connected (Arnold et al. 2005). In contrast to previous mentioned studies, Arnold et al. (2005) examine the difference between boys and girls experiences at camp in regards to staff relationships. One way girls and boys experiences differ is that girls record a higher level of emotional responses to the connections they made at camp (Arnold et al. 2005). Girls were more likely to respond to the questions "I liked my camp counselor(s)" and "I made new friends at camp" with more enthusiasm and in higher numbers than boys (Arnold et al. 2005). It is significant to note that the gender differences found in this study have important implications for future research, however, they should not be understood to prove that girls get more out of summer camp than boys (Arnold et al. 2005). Recognizing that such interview questions are

rooted in social-relational domains which girls tend to be more comfortable discussing will help avoid assumptions that are biased by developmental gender differences (Arnold et al. 2005).

In an interview with Anna Hopkins, camp director for Friends Camp, an overnight camp located in South China, Maine, the importance of staff-camper relationships was emphasized, especially in reference to campers at Friends Camp who are considered youth at risk. Friends Camp serves a wide range of campers in the Maine area, and has specific programs for youth at risk. One of their more unique programs, One Child at a Time, is for children whose parent(s) are incarcerated. Each summer, this population makes up about 10% of all campers. Hopkins considers staff relationships with this population to be one of the most important aspects of their camp experience, “The relationships create a unique, special power for kids having a hard time” (A. Hopkins, personal communication, April 4, 2018). Hopkins mentions a particular instance in which a camper formed such an important bond with a staff member, that even after his time at camp, the counselor and camper remained in contact through writing letters. This instilled in the camper an important sense of trust in his adult counselor, as the camper had previous experiences that made it difficult for him to find comfort and support in adults. Additionally, Hopkins discussed the importance of belonging for youth at risk and the ways she has seen its effectiveness in practice at Friends Camp. Hopkins recalls a conversation she had with a camper who was a part of the One Child at a Time program. The conversation occurred after an incident in which he and another camper got in an argument which escalated into physical contact. After having taken some time to debrief the situation, the camper expressed to Hopkins his regret and apologies for what he had done. What Hopkins considers to be most significant of this camper’s regret and perception of the incident is that he was not sorry that he broke the rules, rather, he

was sorry he threatened the well-being of the community. He had come to respect Friends Camp and feel connected there because of the important staff members who earned his trust, and once he realized that his negative behavior could threaten the greater community his role-models were a part of, he regretted his decision and learned more effective ways to deal with his anger (A. Hopkins, personal communication, April 4, 2018).

Another population of youth at risk who would benefit from environments which provide opportunities for belonging are youth with disabilities. Briery and Rabian (1999) study the effectiveness of camps in addressing the psychosocial needs of children with chronic illness, with a particular focus on changing attitudes toward illness, as in most cases it results in anxiety. Their findings suggest that participants reported more positive attitudes about their illness at the end of their 1-week camp session, which proves that specialized camping experiences support children with pediatric conditions. The findings also suggest that campers report lower levels of anxiety at the end of their camp sessions. Because campers with chronic illness were experiencing camp with others in similar circumstances, the inclusive environment of camp allowed them to form social connections, think about their illness more positively, and alleviate levels of their anxiety, resulting in an overwhelming sense of belonging this population is less likely to experience elsewhere (Briery & Rabian, 1999).

Brendtro et al. (2002) conclude that when youth at risk are not given opportunities to belong and the only relationships they have are destructed, they develop a lack of trust between themselves and adults. In addition, such destructive relationships lead to low self-esteem and self-destruction. When youth learn to expect rejection, they employ protective behaviors learned in previous interactions with threatening persons (Brendtro et al. 2002). For these reasons, it is

crucial that youth at risk are given support and provided with services which allow them to re-form or reestablish their perceptions of adult relationships, and instill in them a sense of belonging which restores their belief in themselves. Summer camp is an environment that has the powerful capacity to achieve such a belief, fulfilling one's need for belonging (Allen et al., 2006; American Camp Association, 2005; Arnold et al. 2005; Brendtro et al. 2002).

### ***Mastery: Developing Meaningful Skills at Camp***

According to Brendtro et al. 2002, children need to have opportunities to be competent in order for further motivation and achievement to take place. In Native culture, it is important that everyone feels a sense of competency, as well as encourage others competency and acknowledge the achievement of others (Brendtro et al. 2002). At summer camp, there are multiple opportunities for campers to develop a wide variety of physical, social, emotional, environmental, and thinking skills (Allen et al. 2006; American Camp Association, 2005; Barcelona & Quinn, 2011; Broecher, 2014; Garst & Ozier, 2015; Lawson et al. 2011; Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017).

Many youth at risk, especially those from low-income areas, face disadvantage when it comes to certain skill sets (Garst & Ozier 2015; Lawson et al. 2012). One disadvantage low-income youth face is a lack of academic resources and support during non-school months (Garst & Ozier 2015). In an effort to try to reduce the reading loss that affects many children between the school year and summer time, Garst and Ozier (2015) discuss camp-based reading programs as an effective strategy to reduce summer reading loss. The authors explore the adequacy of a reading program called "Explore 30," and how it can be implemented into camp

programming to enhance youth reading outcomes. The authors conclude that 70% of participants read for at least 30 minutes per day, and that overall the program is an appropriate tool for enhancing children's reading skills through camp-based activities and models. This study explored the adequacy of a camp-based reading program while examining practices for reading interventions in camps as a means to enhance youth reading outcomes. The authors conducted both qualitative and quantitative research with camp directors and youth campers, which were then analyzed. Data derived from both staff and camper survey answers prove that Explore 30 Camp Reading Program is an effective approach for improving youth outcomes not only with their reading level, but their enjoyment in reading as well. Similar to Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) who focus strictly on sports at summer camp as an effective tool for youth to develop skills and increase self-esteem, Garst and Ozier (2015) focus explicitly on reading and how camp serves as an effective environment for youth at risk to improve their reading skills and confidence in the subject.

Similarly to Garst and Ozier (2015) and Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) who use summer camp to improve a very specific skill set for youth at risk, Lawson et al. (2012) focus on evaluating a low-income, minority-focused, urban youth summer camp dedicated to water safety curriculum. Though the curriculum is available to Safe Kids Coalition across the nation, this is the first study to evaluate it. The intent of this study is based on the fact that children in low-income, urban communities are at a greater risk for injury, especially when it comes to water safety. More specifically, a 2006 study showed that minority populations (especially Black and Hispanic male youths) are at a greater risk of drowning than their white counterparts (Lawson et

al. 2012). The work of Lawson et al. (2012) demonstrates that children who attended the camp implementing a water safety curriculum gained knowledge on water safety.

The participants included children from pre-K to third-grade who were instructed to watch a video on water safety and then received further information regarding water safety. The researchers used retention exams to measure the children's comprehension of the curriculum. The study proves that children were able to retain the information after the camp experience. It is noted that future research should examine the combination of water safety curriculum with swimming lessons to interactive components of the intervention (Lawson et al. 2012). Garst and Ozier (2015), Lawson et al. (2012), and Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) argue that not only is summer camp an effective tool for benefitting youth at risk, but that it can be incredibly valuable in establishing a specific set of skills for particular populations. In this case,

As Brendtro et al. (2002) point out, when children are not provided with ample opportunity to feel mastery in a variety of skill sets, their risk of participating in delinquent behavior is higher. Therefore, it is imperative that there is space available for youth at risk to participate in meaningful achievement. Summer camp provides youth with such availability by not only teaching campers certain skills, but also encouraging and assuring them of their capability to be successful (Brendtro et al., 2002). Specialized programs serving youth at risk are especially important in meeting their different needs that are not always recognized in schools, or other services they may be participating in (Garst & Ozier 2015; Lawson et al. 2012; Povilaitis & Tamminen 2017).

***Independence: Importance of Skill Building and Supporting Campers' Decision-Making***

The third core need the Circle of Courage identifies as crucial to children's development is independence (Brendtro et al. 2002). Developing a sense of independence is especially important for youth at risk since they have learned to internalize a sense of learned helplessness, and a lack of intrinsic motivation (Brendtro et al. 2002). Summer camp provides youth with opportunities to be independent by demonstrating their sincere interest in camper's well-being and interest in camp (Allen et al. 2006). Allen et al. (2006) discuss that not only do certain summer camps implement certain programming allowing campers to be masterful and independent in their skill sets, but camps also participate in activity processing. This means after an activity, campers are asked questions regarding their interest in the activity, what they believe to be their greatest successes within the activity, and what they learned about themselves from the activity. This feedback requested by camp staff suggests to campers that their thoughts and beliefs are important, and they are fully capable of being independent thinkers in discovering what their skills and interests are. In addition, activity processing assures campers that their thoughts and feelings are not only validated at camp, but genuinely cared about by the leaders supporting them. It is understood that if a camper suggests negative feelings towards a specific activity, camp staff will work to change that camper's experience, understanding that the camper knows what is best for them better than anyone else (Allen et al. 2006).

In the largest research study of camper outcomes ever conducted in the U.S., the American Camp Association (ACA) supported in part by Lilly Endowment Inc., discusses the ways summer camp greatly contributes to one's need for independence. Being away from home and experiencing social connections and achievement nurture children's independence. Camp provides youth at risk with the opportunity to experience challenges or conflict in a community

that encourages their self-sufficiency, while also supporting them when they need to (American Camp Association, 2005). By assessing campers' responses to a survey measuring the outcomes of camp, the ACA was able to conclude that on average, campers reported a statistically significant increase in independence at the end of their camp session. Additionally, the ACA sent out follow-up surveys which suggested campers independence continued to grow in the months following camp. A camper named Christopher, age 14, who participated in the study stated, "I believe at camp I have an alternative personality that is different than at home. I'm less cautious to do fun or exciting things and while feeling independent I don't feel as alone as I sometimes do at home." Camp counselor, Robert, age 22, who participated in the study is in agreement with the statistical findings regarding campers' growth in independence stating, "The first change I see in my campers is the transition from defensive to comfort. The comfort then leads to positive risk taking and self-confidence that increases daily" (American Camp Association, 2005, p.7).

Broeche (2014) examines The HighScope Summer Camp for Teenagers, an international, inclusive gifted education program aiding many youth at risk, including those from disadvantaged social strata. The foundation of the camp is based on the idea that with an effective balance of freedom and structure, campers can be independent in their actions. By being able to choose activities and content to focus on at camp, campers developed skills in self-discipline and feeling high levels of accomplishment (Broeche, 2014). Similarly to the findings of the American Camp Association (2005), Broeche (2014) discusses campers finding freedom and independence at camp by making their own decisions and further developing their learning processes.

### ***Generosity: The Power of the Camp Community***

Brendtro et al. (2002) identify generosity as the final core need of the Circle of Courage. Generosity is considered to be the highest virtue of living a good life. To fulfill such a need, Native culture places much importance in sharing and community responsibility, based on the idea that youth at risk increase their self-worth as they learn to care for others (Brendtro et al. 2002). By placing importance on community values and upholding such values, summer camp is an effective environment for youth at risk to learn to trust others and themselves as a part of a greater, interconnected community (Briery & Rabian, 1999; Broecher, 2014; Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017).

In studying The HighScope Summer Camp for Teenagers, Broecher (2014) discusses how campers are taught to understand their camp community as representing the global community. This way, campers not only feel connected and responsible for caring for others within their camp community, but feel more closely connected to other communities when they leave camp. Community was upheld at The HighScope Summer Camp by staff demonstrating positive encouragement to campers, who then learned to practice positive encouragement towards their fellow peers. For instance, the staff training manual instructed counselors and coaches to give praise and recognize successful effort in their campers, who responded by praising and encouraging other campers (Broecher, 2014).

Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017) expand on the findings of Broecher (2014) by discussing not only how community is achieved at camp, but also the importance of integrating camp community into campers' home communities as well. This is achieved by camp staff encouraging campers to think about how they can integrate their camp experiences into their

everyday lives at home. Campers are encouraged to transfer the skills they learned at camp to other programs they participate in, especially when it comes to social interactions with family and peers at school. A camper who attended a residential sports camp comments on his experiences with transferring camp skills to his personal life stating, “I feel like one year at [camp] you get the sportsmanship but now at this point...I don’t just do that at camp. That’s how I live my entire life. Just because...I’ve been here so long, it wouldn’t make sense for me to do it here and not do it anywhere else” (Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2017, p. 20).

In an interview with Laura Kriegel and Jack Schott, camp directors for Stomping Ground, an overnight camp serving some youth from low-income areas and transitional housing settings, they discussed the importance of generosity at summer camp and the ways they have seen campers directly benefit from opportunities for generous action and language. Before getting into the concrete ways Stomping Ground provides opportunities for generosity, Kriegel brought up an interesting cultural difference related to the Circle of Courage. In contrast to Western psychology and Western child-rearing philosophies, we don’t always consider acts of generosity as crucial to children’s development. Kriegel brought up self-determination theory which identifies an individual’s three basic needs as relatedness, autonomy, and competence. While all three are closely related to three of the needs identified by the Circle of Courage, the theory does not include the acknowledgement of any need related to generosity. Kriegel’s observation represents her understanding of the importance of generosity in a child’s development and experiences, and her dedication to providing children with opportunities for generosity through the development of her camp programming.

Kriegel notes that one of the most profound ways generosity is achieved at Stomping Ground is through their conflict resolution system. At Stomping Ground, conflict is viewed as a solution, and all members of a conflict are involved in the resolution process. As Kriegel puts it, “When you are in a disagreement, our culture’s response is to come together to discuss the matter, hear all sides of the story, and generously give each person empathy for their perspective” (L. Kriegel, personal communication, April 29, 2018). Such an approach to conflict helps children to understand that conflict does not always have to be something to fear or result in punitive measures; there are opportunities for generosity even in times of disagreement and conflict.

Schott adds an interesting perspective to the discussion, comparing how generosity is approached at camp versus other child-centered spaces. For instance, Schott discusses that outside of camp, most children’s exposure to acts of generosity are through the ways their parents or other figures of authority teach them manners. When children resist the request to be polite, they often times are blamed or punished. What makes Stomping Ground unique as Schott explains, “We celebrate generosity and narrate for kids generous actions and language without forcing them, which gives them the opportunity to not practice generosity if they so choose. The hope is that in time they have the chance to experience the positive feelings of what happens when they do lead with generosity, and the benefits that both themselves and the greater community receive because of it” (J. Schott, personal communication, April 29, 2018).

Kriegel shares a personal anecdote of a specific camper who she considers to have explored the path of not participating in generous acts. This camper, age 9, attended Stomping Ground the first summer with the intention of being kicked out, as he had been kicked out of

every previous summer camp he had attended. Additionally, this camper expected adversarial relationships with staff members, as Kriegel assumes to be a possible means of protection from the rejection he expected to receive. In a discussion with another returning camper over an argument the two had had, this camper was very reluctant to participate in the conflict resolution system, showing no interest in sharing his perspective. Eventually, the other camper he was in conflict with said, “This is different...you aren’t in trouble, you just have to give this a try.” After hearing this from his peer, this camper began to open up and learned that this community was actually supporting him, and that there are benefits that come from acts of generosity. Later in the week, Kriegel recalls a conversation she had with the camper. After sharing a note he had written about his experience at camp to the rest of the camp community, he said to Kriegel, “You should pass out plastic bags to every kid so that they can breathe in the bag and take it home because that is their best breath...they should be able to take it home with them so they always have it.” Because opportunities to be generous were not forced upon this camper in any unauthentic way, he was able to open up and feel accepted into a community he had learn to accept rejection from so many times before.

### ***Cultural Diversity: Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status at Camp***

Forty three percent of children under the age of 18 live in low-income families in the U.S., with 21 percent living in poor families. When considering the racial makeup of such statistics, it is clear that Black, American Indian, and Hispanic children are disproportionately low income and poor (Jiang et al. 2017). For every child to feel that they belong in what historically has always been a predominantly white experience, it is crucial that camp is a place

that recognizes and understands culture, history, and the reality of children, no matter their racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background (Ditter, 2013). That being said, it is imperative that the ways children experience camp differently based on their race is taken into account (Ditter, 2013). For instance, many camps offer swimming as an important part of their camp program. This can be a stressor and point of tension for children of color at camp, as MSNBC's Audrey Washington reports that "according to the USA Swimming Foundation, 70 percent of African American and 60 percent of Hispanic children don't know how to swim" (2012, n.p.). Additionally, children of color are at greater risk of drowning and are less likely to take swimming lessons (Lawson et al. 2011). For these reasons, it is important for camp staff to be aware of cultural differences, and ensure their camp programs support children of various races and ethnicities (Ditter, 2013).

Lawson et al. (2011) study a water safety camp program for low-income, minority-focused, urban youth. Participants of the camp program are 27.5% Hispanic, 68.7% African American, and 3.8% biracial. The intention of the study is to measure camper's swimming abilities before and after the session, with the understanding that possible cultural and economic circumstances may put minority and low-income children at greater risk of drowning. The findings of this study suggest that the camp program to teach water safety curriculum was effective in improving campers' knowledge of water safety, and was maintained through the 3-week retention program. The development of such a camp program demonstrates that when cultural differences are recognized, summer camp can serve as an effective tool to provide youth at risk with specific services and needs they may not receive from other social services (Lawson et al. 2011).

In addition to race and socioeconomic status playing a role in how children experience camp differently, gender also influences the ways children experience camp. Research shows that girls and boys differ socially when it comes to their relationship development at camp (Arnold et al. 2005). For example, girls are more likely to make deeper connections with others and have more one-on-one interactions, while boys are more likely to spend more time in groups. Additionally, this study proved that girls rated learning new skills and cooperating with others in significantly higher rates than boys (Arnold et al. 2005). Findings of previously mentioned research emphasize the importance of effectively acknowledging cultural diversity through intentional efforts to dismantle negative racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes, and supporting campers who are part of oppressed groups. It is especially crucial for their experiences to be validated and complemented by camp (Ditter, 2013).

### ***Interventions at the Micro Level: Outcome-based and benefits-based programming***

Allen et al. (2006) study the impact of a summer day camp on the resiliency of disadvantaged youths through outcome-based programming. The authors prove that a benefits-based approach to recreational services, such as summer camp, involves identifying benefits designed to structure activities and opportunities to maximize benefit achievement and the assessment of such achievement. Using the Resiliency Attitudes and Skills Profile (RASP) scale, the authors find that children gain resiliency skills such as insight, independence, creativity, humor, relationships, initiatives, and values orientation. The study determined that 80 percent participation over eight weeks of summer camp is sufficient to have a profound impact on the youth participants (Allen et al. 2006).

To measure the resiliency of disadvantaged youth, Allen et al. (2006) used the Resiliency Attitudes and Skills Profile (RASP) which measures the skills that may have existed among the two groups prior to their camp experience. More specifically, this is done by determining whether camper's pre-test scores on each identified resilience skill were statistically different among the different groups. The findings of this study suggest that outcome-based programming has positive impacts on the development of resiliency skills for youth enrolled in summer camp programs. The authors call for further insight into other programming models effective for promoting positive youth behavior. Similarly to Povilaitis and Tamminen (2017), the authors call for the importance of counselor-camper relationships to be taken into consideration. This study is very effective in proving how summer camp can best serve youth at risk, though it is suggested that further analysis is needed with participants of various socioeconomic and ethnic groups, larger sample sizes, and other demographic factors. Overall, the study proves that intentional outcome-based programming is a useful recreational tool which produces positive results when done so effectively (Allen et al. 2006).

Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, and Thurber (2007) argue that youth organizations provide opportunities for young people resulting in positive outcomes. On a large scale national study of ACA (American Camp Association) accredited camps, the authors discuss various programs at camps contributing to positive youth development. Their findings suggest that meaningful relationships between camp directors, leadership staff, and campers are essential elements of camp. Additionally, elements of accountability, assessment of outcomes, and opportunities for skill building lead to positive youth development of camps (Henderson et al. 2007).

Jack Schott discusses the greater need for staff diversity at summer camp as a response to making summer camp more accessible for youth at risk. For many camps, this requires more staff of color as summer camp staff, and the camping industry as a whole, is predominately white. As a whole, if the staff are more representative of the youth they are trying to serve, their support will be more meaningful and beneficial to campers. Additionally, Schott stresses the importance of building personal relationships with organizations and families to get more youth at risk to come to camp. Schott mentions a long-term goal of Stomping Ground to be hiring a staff member of a youth organization to work for Stomping Ground in the summer, to best support the population they are familiar with and provide more youth at risk with important opportunities. (J. Schott, personal communication, April 29, 2018).

***Interventions at the Macro Level: Greater funding for summer camp to ensure accessibility for all youth at risk***

According to Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) “States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.” For this reason, many organizations and camp professionals are requesting greater funding for recreational activities, such as camp, for youth at risk to have access to (Allen et al. 2006; Broecher, 2014; Garst & Ozier, 2015; Lawson et al. 2011). In fact, in 2002, the White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth was created and charged with preparing a federal response plan to address the problems of youths and to increase positive youth development (Allen et al. 2006). As camp professional Anna Hopkins points out, children in custody of the state, such as

children in foster care, get a certain amount of money for camp. If this funding covered more costs and more children, it is more likely that youth at risk could benefit from summer camp (A. Hopkins, personal communication, April 4, 2018).

Brendtro et al. (2002) also call for a greater importance placed on families and community connection. The authors note that public policy has not advanced in the ways that are necessary to support families today. Anna Hopkins discusses the ways camp and community connections can combat this. With more funding and organizing of programs such as foster grandparents, which pairs a low-income volunteer of the elderly population with a youth at risk to mentor and support the participant, it would be easier for summer camps to form connections with such volunteers and collaborate with other agencies to get more youth at risk to come to camp. Hopkins comments on the need for not only greater funding to get children to camp, but also agencies and organizations that will support children throughout the whole process including transportation to camp, packing for camp, and other needs campers may have in addition to covering tuition costs (A. Hopkins, personal communication, April 4, 2018).

### ***Human Services Implications: Working with youth at risk in a summer camp setting***

It is well understood that the most successful human services workers working with youth are those who can see beyond their problems and envision their greatest potential (Brendtro et al. 2002). When it comes to summer camp, the ACA identifies certain implications for camp staff to best support youth. Firstly, camps should employ strategies which are designed to improve youth involvement and strengthen consistency of care, enhancing youth's experience in relationships and safety. Additionally, staff should be trained to provide a wide variety of

diverse skills to provide their campers with the most opportunity. Lastly, a large emphasis must be placed on standards aimed primarily at improving the emotional and physical safety of youth at risk (American Camp Association, 2005).

Anna Hopkins offers her insight on social workers' connection to camp, suggesting that in her own experience, she has worked with youth at risk who she did not think camp was an effective environment for, though attended summer camp on account of their social worker. To avoid similar instances to these, it is important for social workers to make more comprehensive evaluations. Additionally, it is necessary for social workers to better understand the holistic social context of the clients they are working with, rather than take into account the needs of their client only. Had the social workers Hopkins worked with be more connected with their client's children, they may have been more likely to recognize that camp may not be the best environment for them to be a part of, even though it seemed to benefit their client (A. Hopkins, personal communication, April 4, 2018).

Laura Kriegel recounts a similar interaction she had when working with social workers to get their clients to attend camp. Kriegel mentioned a specific interaction she had with a social worker via email, who contacted Kriegel requesting an invoice for a summer camp session. Kriegel was surprised that there was no mention of the child this social worker was looking to send, nor questions regarding the program at Stomping Ground to determine if this environment would be effective for the child or not. It is important that human services workers are continuously asking themselves if their actions are in the best interest of the child, rather than make quick decisions without fully understanding the consequences. (L. Kriegel, personal communication, April 29, 2018).

### ***Conclusion***

Everyone deserves an environment where they can attain mastery, belonging, independence, and generosity. Summer camp is a space which affords children and youth this opportunity. While summer camp may not be an effective environment for all youth at risk, it is still important to recognize summer camp as a service which has the potential to meet the needs of youth at risk. Applying the Circle of Courage framework to measure the effectiveness of summer camps contributes to the well-being of youth at risk. Effective summer camps with the intention of providing youth at risk with generosity, independence, belonging, and mastery, provide a sense of resilience and perseverance for a population that needs it the most.

### ***Author's Note***

If you were to ask a stranger what the value of summer camp is, they will most likely tell you it is a fun place for children to spend time at in the summertime. They are not as likely to mention the social and emotional importance it can have on a child. I am calling for a more provocative way to view summer camp. By understanding summer camp as a service youth at risk are deserving of due to its abilities to meet their basic needs, it may become more accessible for youth, no matter their race, class, ability, or gender.

I am fortunate enough to say that I have experienced the advantages of summer camp not only as a camper, but as a staff member as well. As a camper, I made incredible connections with staff members who continue to mentor and inspire me today. As a staff member, I have learned invaluable lessons from children I've worked with, as well as camp professionals who have

inspired me in making the summer camp industry a part of their careers. I truly believe that greater accessibility to intentional communities such as summer camp for all children, not only those at risk, ought to be considered a human right and an accepted norm in our society. We all are worthy of a space to feel safe and supported, especially when we are young. When people are reassured that they are valued and have the abilities to connect with people in meaningful ways, conflict is able to be resolved effectively, and people are driven to better their own lives as well as others.

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