



# The Benefits of Restorative Retreats: Building Resilience in Youth and Communities

Most youth get to “go to camp” of some sort during their adolescent years, where they “*learn to take responsibility, work in teams, and accept the consequences of their own actions. This makes them more confident, capable, stable and self-reliant than other young people who lack the same experience.*”<sup>1</sup> Under-privileged youth and the service providers who work with them cannot afford to pay for the opportunity of such experiences without a full subsidy.

By co-facilitating Restorative Retreats with schools and community-based groups, we support them in enhancing their ability to build resilience in the youth they work with. Experiential multi-day programs improve trust relationships between leaders, their youth and the group as a whole. The McCreary Centre’s 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey “*showed that building protective factors such as family, school and cultural connectedness can assist even the most vulnerable youth to overcome negative experiences...[and] make healthier choices.*”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. James Neill is a leading researcher on the impacts of outdoor education (as facilitated by Outward Bound Australia) and has unequivocally demonstrated: “*Outcomes which have been found to be affected by exposure to nature include improvements in enjoyment, relaxation, mood, anxiety, attention, physical health and health-oriented behaviour, hospital recovery, self-constructs such as self-esteem and self-concept, life satisfaction, and mental illness.*”<sup>3</sup>

The benefit of exposure to nature is enhanced by physical group challenges away from home: “*Adventurous physical activity in relatively natural environments appears to offer a conducive context for physical and psychological restoration and development. In addition, natural environments tend to provide neutral, immediate, unambiguous feedback which encourages adaptive coping rather than reliance on defense mechanisms. Being in a distinctly different place, away from familiar contingencies, disorients participants but they are quickly re-oriented to a new normative culture, such as one which encourages tackling challenges, giving and receiving social and emotional support, and reflecting on one’s experiences.*”<sup>3</sup>

When compared to other possible interventions, Neill concluded the success of “*Special programs... adapted to meet the development needs of clientele groups with specific needs... suggests considerable therapeutic and remedial potential for carefully designed and facilitated outdoor education programs.*” Neill “*found robust evidence... [of] impacts on life effectiveness, with approximately 80% of short-term benefits retained after six months.*”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mackay, G. J. S., & Neill, J. T. (2010). The effect of “green exercise” on state anxiety and the role of exercise duration, intensity, and greenness. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 11(3), 238-245.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, A., Stewart D., Peled, M., Poon, C., Saewyc, E. and the McCreary Centre Society (2009). A Picture of Health: Highlights from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

<sup>3</sup>Neill, J. T. (2008). Enhancing personal effectiveness: Impacts of outdoor education programs. PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney.



To discuss this opportunity further, please contact Ken Millard, Director (250) 539-2424

# The Benefits of Restorative Retreats: An academic study of our multi-day programs



Megan Bondurant teaches Environmental Studies 11 at Edward Milne Community School in Sooke, B.C. Her 2006 Masters thesis with the University of Victoria documented the benefits of her high school students' multi-day outdoor education program with the Galiano Conservancy. Her findings support our anecdotal evidence: Restorative Retreats build trust, respect, coping skills, confidence, inspiration and hope for the future.



Through interviews and collecting journal entries, Bondurant noted: "Students often reported feeling calm or at peace whilst "chilling" near the ocean... For many students, this reflective time improved their emotional and mental states...They claimed that they were better able to cope with their days after a couple of hours in nature."<sup>1</sup>

*I had an overwhelming feeling of belonging in these completely natural places. The sound of the wind, the water, and the birds was very soothing. I felt like I was at peace. Like there was nothing to worry about at the time... Looking out over the ocean helped me get in touch with my inner self. The entire experience was beneficial for the spirit and the mind... it made me feel good.*

Chris Brodie  
Ethan  
Bryan  
Trevor



Bondurant noticed that, "As students worked, learned and played together on outdoor excursions, they developed respectful bonds. When reflecting on personal experiences in nature, students reported a sense of emotional and spiritual well-being."

*Going to Galiano Island really seemed to bring the class together, which is awesome! I really enjoyed the trip because I got to go camping with my classmates and two of my favourite teachers. I never really get to go hiking, so being able to get outdoors more and do this is something I am really enjoying...*

Sarah

*When we started planning for the camping trip, I was fascinated by the behaviour of the other students. How they naturally gathered into groups of friends. How they naturally became more organized and worked together as if it was normal... I had never noticed how smoothly a group of people can actually work together.*

Alana

*I just love getting out of town and getting into any environmental setting whether it be a beach, forest etc. It's just somewhere I can clear my mind of daily world troubles and just meditate for a while.*

Nate

*I have developed more respect for everyone in this class. We have all joined together by becoming closer and helping each other out.*

Erica

*All of the people we met on Galiano were inspirational. They were so dedicated in their time and thoughts and work to the island and its wildlife. It made me think about the things going on in and around Sooke that I could be a part of. These people were protecting and caring for what they love, and I love Sooke.*

Aaron

*Because of the volunteers on Galiano, I may spend some of my free time helping out nature. I too want to be part of the people who want to help nature because they respect it. It's amazing to see people respect nature so much.*

Ethan

<sup>1</sup> Bondurant, M. (2006) Culturing Respect: An exploration of student respect for self, others and the environment through marine experiences, ecological literacy, and Aboriginal ways of knowing. Masters Thesis, Victoria: University of Victoria.



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