



“What are professional’s perspectives on the benefits of adventure therapy for adolescents who engaged in the adventure therapy programmes”.



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Introduction

Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams (hereafter MDT) in the South Eastern Trust.

Who is the MDT?

There is an urgent need for substantial changes in mental health services. Currently, only 40% of adolescents with mental health issues can access the necessary care. This means that 60% of young individuals are not receiving the effective mental health support that they require.

The Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 highlights the importance of restructuring mental health services from a community level as this is at the heart of the primary care multi-disciplinary team (DoH, 2021).

Existing research around mental health service provision and outcomes are largely focused on statutory services, leaving a gap in the research on service provision at a primary care level.



Aim of the research

The central aim of this research is to use qualitative methods to ascertain teachers' perspectives on the benefits of participation in adventure therapy programmes in enhancing students' emotional and social wellbeing.



What is Adventure Therapy?

This research augments on the Systematic Narrative Review which was completed as part of the Evidence Informed Professional and Organisation (SWK 751) which examined Adventure Therapy (AT hereafter) as an alternative treatment model for adolescents with low level mental health issues.

The findings from this research study can help to guide and implement service reform for adolescents experiencing mental health issues who present to GP services.

The nature of AT, being a service that can be accessed within the young person's community, can help to break down the barriers to access mental health services, and can also encourage participation. This is in line with current strategies with mental health being an integral part of the primary care role.

Furthermore, this research sought to raise the profile of AT and nature-based therapy for adolescents within MDT teams. This research will present a tangible first-hand narratives about the benefits of the therapeutic intervention for children in addressing mental health issues and supporting emotional wellbeing.

Theoretical background

Adventure Therapy differs from the traditional modes of intervention as the emphasis is based on interaction with therapeutic properties of nature and engaging in adventure-based activities to promote and improve mental health and wellbeing .

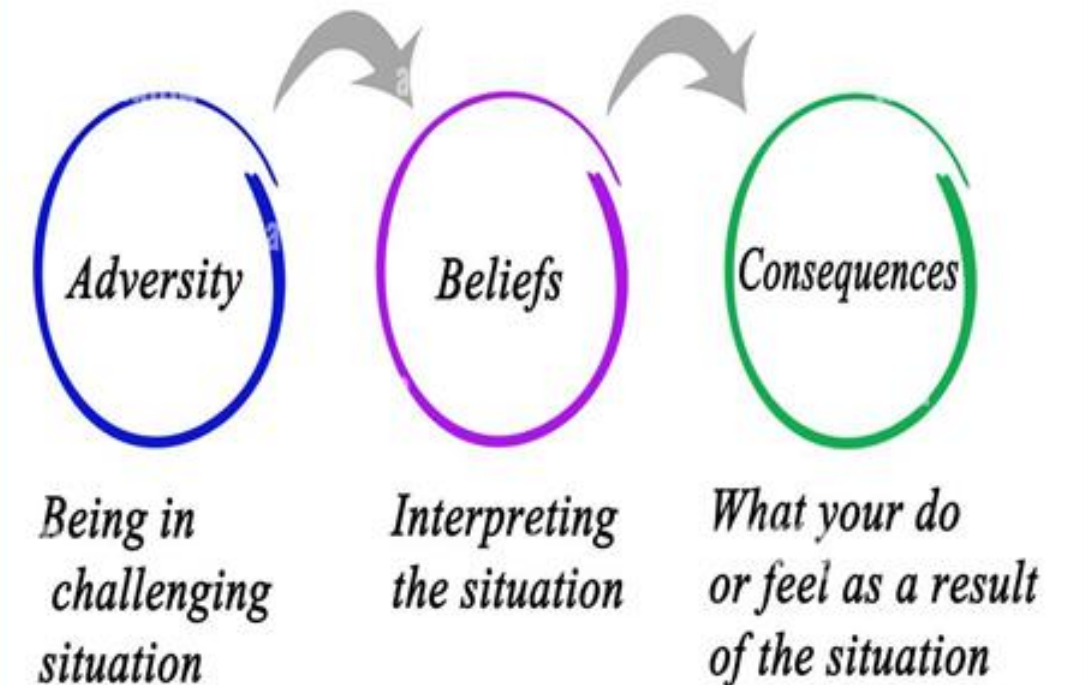


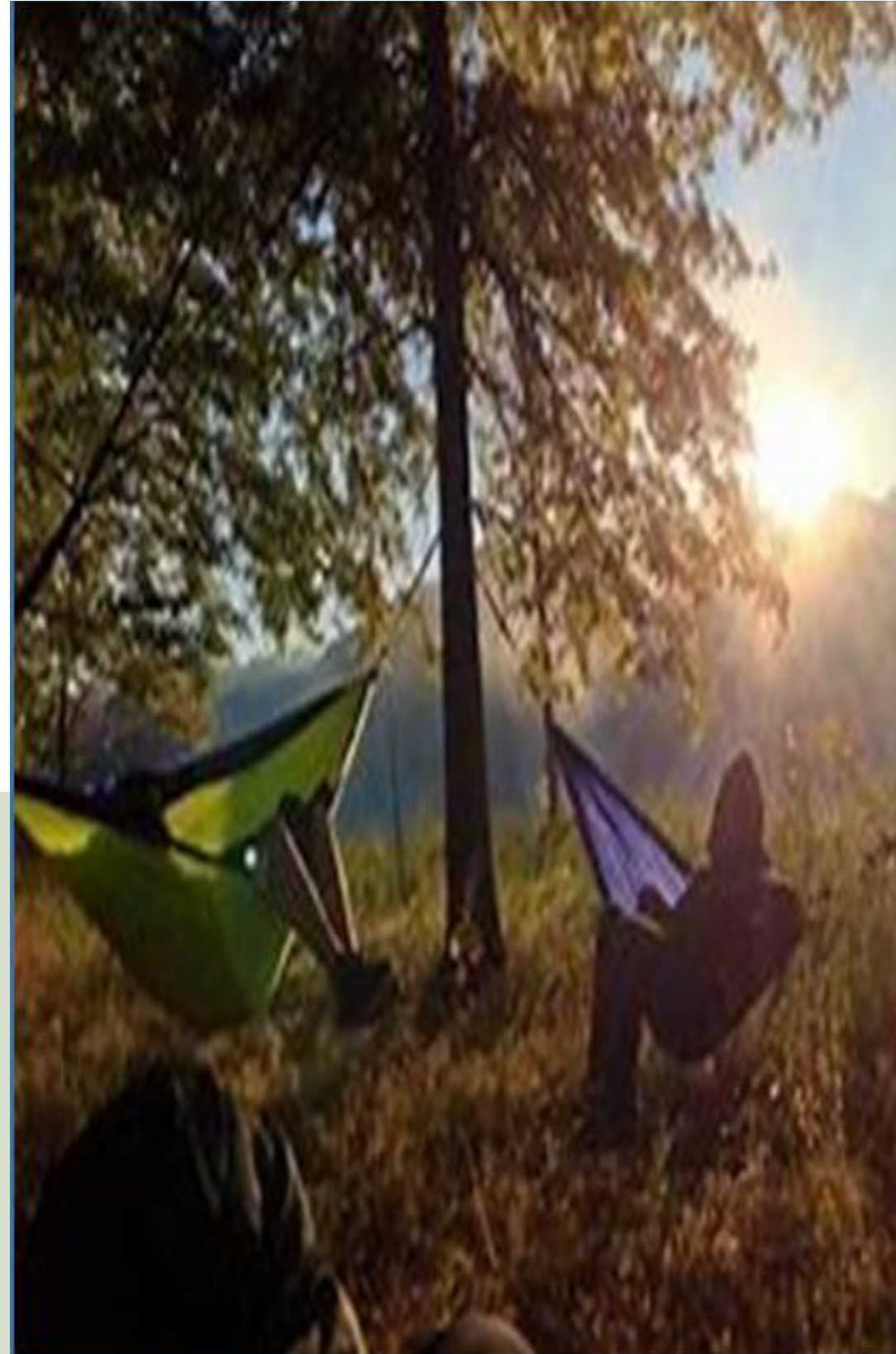
> Experiential Learning (Kolb & Fry, 1974)

> Resilience Theory (Van Breda, 2018)



ABC Model of Resilience





Methodology

Research methodology outlines the systematic process used to conduct the research.



**Design - Semi-structured
face-to-face interviews**



Purposive sampling



Access and Recruitment



**Data collection - qualitative
method**



Overview of Actual Respondents



Semi-structured interviews are valuable because they offer a balance between structure and flexibility.

The study investigated the perspectives of nine professionals (n=9) who were involved in the organisation and delivery of AT to young people.



Sample size included four teachers, three social workers, one occupational therapist, and one mental health nurse.

After the intervention was completed, five semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, while four were conducted in person at the request of the participants



This study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis as the theoretical approach to data collection and analysis. The six-phase process detailed by Braun and Clarke was adhered to; familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and name themes and the final stage of producing the report, (Braun & Clark, 2006).



Key Findings

The thematic analysis revealed four main themes, each comprising interrelated sub-themes :



Environment

- Therapeutic environment
- Physical environment
- Socio-economic environment

Group Synergy

- Working together
- Camaraderie
- Empathy

Strength based approach

- Overcoming challenges
- Reinforcement of strengths
- Learning new skills / skills based

Emotional & social wellbeing

- Social emotional wellbeing
- Self esteem
- Increased engagement with services



Discussion of results



Theme 1: Environment

The creation of a therapeutic environment that provides a safe space for adolescents to build trusting relationships and engage in open discussions was consistently recognised as a key factor in the success of outdoor therapy.

It allows for a more relaxed and engaging experience that can be particularly beneficial for adolescents who struggle to engage in conventional therapeutic settings.

The exposure to nature, as described by the participants, has a positive effect on mood, sensory processing, and overall mental health.

The participants' observations reinforce the idea that being in nature provides a different, often more positive environment that can help young people open up and engage more fully in the therapeutic process.



Discussion of results



Theme 2: Group

Synergy

Outdoor therapy uses a therapeutic focus and combines it with group interactions as part of the overall therapeutic milieu.

Group synergy is noted as the key component with the development of strong peer relationships and support networks being highlighted as a key outcome of the therapy

The sense of camaraderie and belonging that develops within the group setting not only helps young people feel more connected to their peers but also encourages them to be more understanding, empathetic, and respectful toward others.

This teamwork also contributes to their personal growth, as they learn to navigate social dynamics, manage conflicts, and support one another through shared experiences.

The theme of empathy was especially significant, as it reflects the deeper emotional connections that young people develop through the therapy which leads to increased well-being, increased social connectedness and promotes prosocial behaviour.



Discussion of results



Theme 3 : Strength Based Approach

This approach focuses on identifying and building on the strengths and capabilities of young people, rather than concentrating on their deficits.

AT helps adolescents recognise their own strengths, instilling self-belief and fostering leadership and mentoring skills. This empowerment is crucial for their development, as it encourages them to take on new challenges and responsibilities, both within the therapy setting and in other areas of their lives.

The process of overcoming challenges was highlighted, as adolescents succeed in the various tasks and activities involved in AT, they develop resilience and confidence, which they can then apply in other contexts, such as school or home life.

The participants provided several examples of how young people were able to translate the skills and confidence gained through AT into other areas, demonstrating the lasting impact of the program.



Discussion of results



Theme 4: Emotional and Social Wellbeing

Participants consistently observed that the therapy helped young people develop meaningful relationships, express themselves more openly, and acquire new coping mechanisms.

The team work and group synergy is pivotal to the young people who show significant improvements in their social and emotional wellbeing due to the group setting and the connection with peers.

The reduction of stress and anxiety, coupled with an increase in confidence and positive emotions, shows how AT provides a supportive environment where young people can safely explore and express their emotions.

The participants noted that the therapy helped young people build resilience and develop coping strategies that they could use in other areas of their lives.

The participants unanimously agreed that the therapy boosted self-esteem, with young people gaining confidence from their accomplishments and the positive feedback they received.

Moreover, the therapy's ability to increase young people's engagement with services, such as school and mental health services, was a critical outcome.

Conclusion and Future Recommendations



AT provides a unique and impactful way for adolescents to develop meaningful relationships, build self-esteem, and enhance their coping mechanisms in a supportive, nature-based setting.

Making Adventure Therapy More Affordable:

Training for Facilitators:

Integrating Adventure Therapy into School Curriculums:

Studying Long-Term Effects:

Promoting Adventure Therapy in Policy..

THANK YOU!

By focusing on the outcomes and recommendations, we can help AT reach its full potential as a powerful tool for supporting young people's long-term well-being and resilience. Making these changes will ensure that more young people can benefit from the healing and growth that AT offers.

