

## THESIS

### **Adventure related work methods in social services**

Facilitating transfer effects through support person

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# ABSTRACT

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This paper researched the positive effects of adventure related work methods in the field of social services. In this thesis all helpers and workers of different facilities are all referred mainly as support persons, because it was expedient to choose one comprehensive term for all. For the same reasons adventure education, experiential learning and outdoor education are all explained, but are all referred as “adventure related work methods” because of their multiple confluences.

This thesis investigates how one skillful person can facilitate lifechanging positive transfer effects through adventure related activities. In this thesis the work of a support person is perceived as mentally challenging, and it is suggested that adventure related methods of working, and their thoughtful execution will also reduce the risks of work-related exhaustion.

The knowledge base of this thesis explains what adventure is and what is meant by the term “transfer effect” in this context. Through investigation and observing the results of multiple interviews this thesis aimed to answer two main questions: “What are the elements leading to permanent change from destructive behaviors?” and “What are the professional skills needed to facilitate transfer effects leading to permanent change”? In search for answers to these questions, two target groups were interviewed, one of experience specialists and one of professionals working in the field of social services. All interviews were planned to reflect and produce dialogue between the two groups and were performed in semi-structured way to allow spontaneity and freedom to initiate further discussions.

This thesis relies on its knowledge base, but also uses quotes of the interviewed subjects as sources of information. Those quotes are perceived as important references and were thought to have essential practical value. As this thesis is also a journey to discover new ways of working,

reflective suggestions to implement different theories are used to build a more developed framework for professional support person work.

This study shows that adventure related work methods have profound effects on people having challenging life situations. They can alter the course of life and provide an effective framework for rehabilitation processes leading to self-actualization and elevated well-being. The interviewed groups of experience specialists and professionals of social services both recognizes that adventure related work methods are an essential step forward towards elevated self-esteem, occupational well-being and effective results of rehabilitation processes. These results show that using adventure related work methods will also produce outcomes that can reduce the need for medical interventions. A classification analysis was used to analyze the interviews and extract relevant information for this thesis.

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Keywords: Adventure, adventure education, transfer effect, support person, social services, child services, youthwork, adventure related work methods, experiential learning

# Contents

ABSTRACT.....	2
1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2 DEVELOPMENT PLAN.....	9
2.1 Motivation.....	9
2.2 Commissioner.....	10
2.3 Goals of research.....	10
3 KNOWLEDGE BASE.....	12
3.1 Helping as a profession.....	12
3.2 Child welfare in Finland and current work methods.....	12
3.3 Adventure, what is it?.....	14
3.4 Transfer effect.....	15
3.5 Outdoor & adventure education and experiential learning.....	16
3.6 Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory.....	18
3.7 A word about medicalization.....	19
4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THEORIES.....	21
4.1 A reflection: applying Maslow's theory.....	21
4.2 A reflection: Setting facilitation of transfer as a method of working.....	22
5 RESEARCH AND METHODS.....	24
5.1 Methods.....	24
5.2 Analysis method.....	24
5.3 Two research subject groups.....	25
5.4 Integrity.....	26
6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS.....	28
6.1 Interviews of professionals.....	28
6.2 Interviews of experience specialists.....	30
6.3 Positive effects of adventure related activities highlighted.....	32
6.4 Reasons for failure.....	32
6.5 Characteristics of a good support person.....	33

7	CONCLUSIONS.....	35
7.1	What are the elements leading to permanent change from destructive behaviors?..	35
7.2	What are the professional skills needed to facilitate transfer effects leading to permanent change?.....	36
8	FOREWORD.....	37
9	REFERENCES.....	38
	APPENDICES.....	40

# 1 INTRODUCTION

My career at social services started shortly after my return from an eventful three-year journey to India, which in many ways defines my motivation for my career choice. The years of my early life towards adulthood had been shadowed by sense of being lost, but also by a need to be intoxicated every day as a treatment for my anxiety and looming depression. My challenges escalated eventually during my travels to India, where I made some poor decisions which resulted to my arrest and imprisonment. I was 21 years of age. My own poor decisions, but also the lack of guidance and help had led my life to a personal catastrophe. Stories and insights of this journey could be shared, but I will leave it here as a reference of my experience as a person, who could have benefitted from specific kind of help and support which could have steered me away from this destruction. I was eventually released when I was 24, after about three years of heavy life in one of the largest prison complexes in the world. Battered, but in away purified, my life had an open chapter to write.

After my release it took me a good year or two to understand fully what has happened in my life. Reflecting my experiences prior to my imprisonment, I began to have insights of how I could have been supported and guided as a young person growing up. I felt a calling to work with youth and started seeking education and work with social services, which eventually led to a fulfilling career and way of life, but also deeper understanding of myself.

Now, during my two-decade long career I have worked in various professions in the field of social services. My first assignment was an apprenticeship contract while I studied to be a school assistant in early 2000's. During that time, I worked in a special school for autistic and disabled children of about 7-10 years of age. After two years and my graduation I started to work in different children's homes and foster care facilities for about ten years altogether and experienced a variety of working cultures. I was fortunate enough to have some very inspiring people to work with and to learn from but luckily, I encountered also working cultures which clearly didn't provide solutions or successful rehabilitation results. I'm sure I learned much more from the latter experiences.

I was naturally drawn to ways of working involving adventure and outdoor related activities and always tried to bring forth how important active lifestyle was for youth and children. After all I had realized that my personal problems started to escalate in about same time, I gave up my hobbies as an ice hockey player and a kickboxer. Surely, there were many reasons for my downfall,

but those two elements were mediums I received positive feedback from, and which provided me the self-esteem I sorely needed.

Reflecting upon my early career, one of the best experiences was a boy's club, which my colleague and I formed for boys living in a foster facility owned by a non-profit foundation. We named the club as "Adventure dudes" and we gathered weekly to do something fun and active. Adventure dudes became something, that the boys were looking forward to and everyone followed the rules we agreed on together. No bullying, no swearing, homework must be done before the club, etc. The positive results were visible although I didn't yet quite know in theory what was happening. I hadn't heard of the term "transfer effect" before. Adventure dudes eventually ended a few months later when our supervisor decided it was too difficult to arrange anymore. Nevertheless, we as instructors received a valuable lesson of how transfer effect works and how important adventure and peer support is for children in foster care. The participants of Adventure dudes were too restless to maintain a steady hobby but gained immense benefits from participation to our special club. It just had to be formed and adjusted according to their specific needs and capabilities with a bit of extra understanding and support.

After these experiences faded, I eventually felt frustrated of, which I considered as poor results of child welfare system and moved to be a family worker in search of professional development. I worked for six different municipalities, inside people's homes, but also for a family rehabilitation centre for some years. During this time, I also studied and graduated to be a substance abuse worker, and a practical nurse specialized in mental health and substance abuse. I also studied to be a group leader for parental groups and took some additional courses for family evaluation processes and some other shorter courses to improve my understanding of different aspects of my profession.

For some years I conducted and produced content for parental groups and eventually got convinced that the best way to positive results also with adults was through peer support and self-knowledge or self-actualization, but also through group activities and participatory activities in general. There was something very interesting in the concept of experiential learning.

As more time went by, I noticed that I didn't have any true belief left for any method of rehabilitation, that didn't rely on activities and peer support. I had some thoughts about quitting altogether or starting my own company to provide services in line with my own values and way of working.

For me the most important realization was that those clients I had introduced to any hobby or repetitive, mainly outdoor related activity were doing significantly better than other clients. There was clearly an effect and consequence of adventure and outdoor activities producing positive change. The realization itself is not itself new, but the way it is used is more interesting. In my experience adventure educational activities are not being used as coherent tool of healing, but rather something fun to do occasionally. I felt that the parents and other adults around children are focused on school and its subjects, which oftentimes, and because of various reasons produce just another cycle of negative experiences. It almost seemed like professionals are expecting different rehabilitation methods to make its subject to do well in school and to take undesirable behaviours away, rather than to find out what kind of atmosphere would be ideal for psychological growth and healing.

Adventure educational activities are often perceived as “fun”, or as a reward for good behaviour, like having fun itself would not be relevant in rehabilitation. Of course, there is fun, which doesn’t include any mental effort, but that is not what adventure education is about. Adventurous experiences will take a person slightly over one’s comfort zone and is rewarded with a sense of achievement and a set of new skills which one can use in various life situations. The agency of a person is not free or supported when there is no active and creative participation. Learning new skills is essentially learning by doing, through one’s own experience. (Salakari, 2007, 39.)

In my experience adventure and outdoor related methods of working can facilitate those positive transfer effects, which can make that crucial change on one’s perception of oneself. It is agreeable, that traumas and difficult experiences must be acknowledged, but eventually there must be a point where one must start moving forward.

But what it means to move forward, but new adventurous experiences, physical and mental satisfaction and fulfilment of ones needs? This thesis will study and bring forth the positive effects of outdoor and adventure related methods of working and positive changes they have produced to the subjects interviewed in this research.



## 2 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

### 2.1 Motivation

11477 individuals were in foster care in Finland in 2022 and 36 996 children were in non-institutional social care. (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos 2023) There was child welfare notifications made from 9.1% of all the children in Finland (THL 2022) That is 98364 children altogether. Child welfare costs were 1,2 billion euros annually (Tilastoraportti THL 2022)

Personal motivation for this thesis lies firstly in my own career and the positive experiences acquired using adventure educational methods of working. Statistics are secondary, but they reflect that social work sphere in Finland needs new solutions and insights. For the last decades the medicalization of the industry has developed, but statistics doesn't seem to show progress regarding the wellbeing of individuals through medical interferences. The number of children taken to foster care/guardianship reduced by 1,3% in 2021 (THL 2022), but having a reduction of 149 individuals in foster care seems to be of little significance. Already the following year of 2023, child welfare notifications were made from 10,2 % of the children in Finland which is a considerable increase of notifications comparing to the previous year. (THL 2023 Tilastoraportti)

We can observe the development of the situation also through the barriers our government is forming around the expenses of social services. Pulling funds out from the less fortunate is a debatable action, but a natural one when substantial amount of government resources is invested, but the results are not satisfactory. The funds do exist, but it can be debated if investing into variety of multinational companies is an ideal solution? Motivational aspect of this study is to show that adventure related methods work immensely well as tools of rehabilitation processes and as a framework for support persons and other helpers alike.

According to research made by Talentia in 2021, 42% of newly graduated sociology majors and social workers in Finland thinks their work is mentally too straining. (Landgren, Saana 2024) This can be because of working in demanding atmospheres, but also in situations where the needs of the helper are not fulfilled. A "conflict in values" means, that one is forced to perform activities, which conflicts one's own values causing pressure, stress, and difficulties to function. (Mieli ry 2024) This is also a motivational fact for a helper to learn how to recognise one's own values and seek workplaces where one can work in line with them.

It is expected that successful rehabilitation processes require highly motivated professionals, who can function in challenging atmospheres and can fully relate to the values and working cultures of their workplace.

Working with mental health issues is professional help and one of the key tools is one's own persona. This can make the profession at times challenging and exhausting (Kanerva 2012, 300.) As a student, but also as a commissioner I would like to examine this further and state, that being a support person doesn't necessarily have to have so many exhausting elements as its reputation suggests. The absence of desired achievements and attained goals creates a challenge to feel fulfilment and sense of belonging for the helper. The situation can occur in any profession, where the worker feels that he/she has no real value and individual efforts doesn't provide a sense of belonging and achievement. At the heart of burnout is a prolonged feeling of inadequacy or insignificance. (Levanto, Simo 2024) The aspect of occupational well-being and its relations to adventure related work methods are studied further in the interviews of professionals later in this study.

## **2.2 Commissioner**

Wildside outdoors is a private company founded by myself during my studies of community education at Humak university of applied sciences. Wildside outdoors provides support person work, which relies on adventure & outdoor methods, kayaking courses, experiential nature excursions for workplaces and adventure photography for websites of adventure-based businesses. Now, 60% of the revenue is generated from community coaching for a supported housing community owned by a large industry player.

Clients of this housing unit are at the age of 18 – 29 and are all experiencing a challenging life situation through substance abuse or issues with mental health. Wildside outdoors is also providing non-profit support for selected clients with high motivation in developing their skills in adventure sports. Wildside outdoors was developed from reasons above and to provide adventure educational experiences for its clients. The results of this thesis will be used to improve the commissioners work as a support person and future plans to expand its expertise as an entrepreneur.

### **2.3 Goals of research**

In short, the three specific goals of this research are to search improvements to occupational well-being, produce a professional framework for support persons and to develop understanding of how adventure related work methods can provide experiences leading to self-actualization and overcoming of difficult and destructive life circumstances.

This thesis will also seek answers from multiple research angles for those two main questions mentioned in the abstract: “What are the elements leading to permanent change from destructive behaviors?” and “What are the professional skills needed to facilitate transfer effects leading to permanent change”?

## 3 KNOWLEDGE BASE

### 3.1 Helping as a profession

Director of a foster home stated in an interview that in his perspective: “The most important characteristic of a helper is a capability to form a true relationship with the client.” Secondly, he said that: “Helping is not always what you want it to be, and surely not as easy as it sometimes seems in the helper’s own mind.” In difficult situations it is a challenge to find out and decide where to start. Already the evaluation processes are challenging, due to complexity and amphibology of all the aspects affecting the child. (Jaakkola, Anna-Mari 2023)

Challenges overlapping generations are rooted deep in the lives of individuals and it might take generations to heal. For example, the transfer of violent behaviours to the next generation is considerable. (Laajasalo, Peltonen 2021) One must understand, that working in rehabilitation and healing traumas is not for impatient person and the positive effects might not come to life inside a desired timeline.

In Finland 34% of women and 18% of men has experienced domestic violence in 2021. (Tilastokeskus 2021) We must consider that in most cases, there is a child witnessing or experiencing this violence in silence and is unable to voice out its needs. It doesn’t make it easier, that social workers perform evaluations primarily from other, than risk factors like domestic violence. (Jaakkola 2023) Violence itself it not only physical but consists of a whole spectrum of verbal and non-verbal actions, which are challenging to point out and which are also relatively effortless to deny if so desired. To heal from violence means, that an individual experience of well-being, trust, hope and lightness gradually increases. (Linner- Matikka 2019) All the factors are present and developed when one is practising adventure & outdoor activities when there is professional and thoughtful framework behind it.

### 3.2 Child welfare in Finland and current work methods

Child welfare services aim to secure child’s right for safe environment, balanced and versatile development, and protection from harm by law. (Lastensuojelulaki 417/2007) This responsibility is supervised by the ministry of social affairs and health, but wellbeing services regions are responsible of arranging actual services for child welfare. (STM 2023)

The ministry of social affairs controls the processes through central agency (Valvira), which then works with actual individual permissions and deals with possible breaches or transgressions of businesses in the industry with six individual regional administrative agencies. (Aluehallintovirastot). The bureaucracy seems complicated but works very well and is performed to the highest standard. Services for child welfare can be produced by the municipalities themselves or purchased from different public sector businesses, who have applied and granted to be a part of service provider register (Soteri) in Finland. For municipalities it is often more cost effective to purchase short term services from the public sector, instead of building their own infrastructures.

For example, this means using family workers, support persons etc. as preventive methods or family rehabilitation centers/child caring institutions provided by private business owners. Although there are variety of different studies on the subject, Finland is considered alongside Sweden to have the best child welfare system in the world. (Kidsrights 2023) The industry has also its challenges due to its current competitive nature and multinational companies providing service rates considerably lower, than smaller and local businesses. Like mentioned before, the industry is worth over a billion euros annually and can be considered as highly lucrative business.

If there is money to be made from child welfare, can the integrity of all the produced services be indemnified without a doubt, and does the aim for income interfere with the motivation to make a difference? Are we forced to focus on income rather than developing the methodology of the industry according to the changing world and circumstances of the children and youth today? Relevant questions to consider for every service provider of a billion-euro industry, but also questions that we must answer to our clients.

Finland, as most European countries have a variety of third sector organizations and other operators in the field of social services. They are mainly focused on substance abuse issues and other angles which supports the child welfare system and are a significant contribution to the industry. Especially parental groups, workshops and other methods of peer support are often provided by third sector operators. As an example, Sininauhasäätiö is a foundation, which has its beginning in 1957 and is making relevant, non-profit work in various locations in southern Finland employing up to 75 people as substance abuse workers and other healthcare professionals. (Sininauhasäätiö 2024)

### 3.3 Adventure, what is it?

When we think about adventure, we might think about Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norgay making the first ascent to the summit of Mount Everest in May 1953, or maybe Alex Honnold climbing free solo on the walls of El Capitan. Some might remember polar explorers like Roald Amundsen or Amelia Earhart first to fly over Atlantic Ocean. The list is long, but we can all say, that these people are adventurers. We can make an argument that it is completely mad to try summiting the world's highest peak with no guarantees of even survival. Same goes with flying on top of raging ocean or skiing into the abyss of snow facing death by freezing or as lunch for polar bears. So, if it is “mad”, why do humans keep doing it?

The word “adventure” has different meanings for different people and adventure can be both individually and culturally relative. (Beams & Brown 2016, 20). The practice of adventure has been used to build nations, referring to Norwegian Amundsen in search for south pole, but also through adventure the humankind has gained immense amount of research-based information about our world and its wonders. One could argue, that without adventure, we wouldn't have much knowledge of ourselves. We wouldn't have acquired maps, met with other cultures, or sought the limits of human body and psyche. But this, of course we understand to be in the high end of the spectrum of adventure.

On the other end of the spectrum there is a child exploring the wonders of the nearby forest with safety of its mother or father, or a teenager giving his first lecture in front of the classroom. For a toddler everything can be an adventure, from waking up until going to sleep, life is new and exciting. When we truly think adventure in depth, its presence or absence will define our lives from the beginning to the last unknown adventure of death. One goes on an adventure when moving to another city, starting a new education, or going on a vacation to a new location. But what happens when we cease to have adventures completely? One might start to look at the world from inside of a box or like through a window. One might feel that it is not possible to participate in one's own life. One might ask a question if complete absence of adventure is a synonym for depression?

This thesis offers adventure as a method of healing. One must take an adventurous step to the unknown after traumatic experiences, violent incidents or first painful steps after a divorce or personal loss. It is safe to state, that taking those steps are quite essential for anyone who wants to move forward and overcome their challenging life situations.

Since the word “adventure” has so many meanings for so many people, one must somehow break it down to different elements. Beams & Brown suggests that there are four key elements in true adventure (Beams & Brown 2016, 20,21.), which are as follows:

1. **Authenticity:** The adventure must happen in a space and time free from fabrications or artificial elements.
2. **Agency:** The person must have power to shape, what and how it is done.
3. **Uncertainty:** There can't be any prescribed processes, and the activity must allow creativity in finding solutions.
4. **Mastery:** Eventually helping learners to develop knowledge and skills through challenge.

So, an ideal adventure would be a situation with no simulations or artificial fabrications (authenticity), which allows you to be who you are and to do things your own way (agency). It must allow you to have some doubts and possibilities for different outcomes (uncertainty) and eventually possibility to master a skill by learning through challenge. (mastery).

Developing behavioural change is difficult to “coach”, but activities within adventure education, that are thought to foster personal growth require some elements of coaching. (Berry & Hodgson 2011, 84.) One can obviously go for an adventure on their own, but without goals, there is a slim possibility to arrive in one by mere accident. This would be the reason to bring forth the importance of professional and skilful adventure & outdoor educational minded support persons, who can facilitate activities leading to behavioural changes.

A skilful facilitator of adventure experiences will seek to develop skills, that one can transfer to other situations. This means also learning to cope with the unexpected, whether that relates to changes in individual behaviours. (Berry & Hodgson 2011, 85.)

### **3.4 Transfer effect**

“Transfer” is a key concept in facilitation. It represents the integration of learning from the adventure into the client’s life. (Priest & Gass 2005, 283.) This can be explained in various ways, but basically it means to learn something in one setting and to transfer that skill to another. Michael Gass talks about three different levels of transfer in adventure programming, which are in short explained as:

**Specific transfer** involves the learning of skills habits or associations for use in closely related situations. For example, this skill can be a specific climbing knot, which can be used again during sailing, camping, etc. Same skill applies in various situations.

**Non-specific transfer** refers to the learning of general principles or behaviours like trust or different problem-solving skills and attitudes facing challenges and obstacles.

**Metaphoric transfer.** A metaphor is an idea, object, or a description. Metaphoric transfer occurs for example, when one is abseiling down a high cliff and must take a leap of faith trusting the rope and other equipment. In this kind of activity, the risks are perceived to be physical, but it can be transferred for one to take a social calculated risk in real life and thus, facilitating individual growth.

So, facilitating transfer means to provide the learner a medium to learn new physical skills and ideas, which will improve one's life. Trust, patience, communication skills, accuracy etc. can be all learned through climbing, kayaking, team sports or much softer environments like producing art, handicrafts etc. The aim is that it must be facilitated and planned according to whatever the facilitator aims to teach or to transfer. Transfer ideology is in the very core of adventure education and the reason, why it can provide such significant positive changes through well thought activities and facilitated situations.

### **3.5 Outdoor & adventure education and experiential learning**

The forefathers of adventure related work methods are often considered to be philosophers and psychologists Kurt Hahn (1886-1974) and John Dewey (1859-1952), who's insights on experiential learning are the foundation of adventure education. Dewey debated for outdoor and experiential learning over indoor studies and Kurt Hahn eventually initiated the birth of Outward bound, an international network of outdoor organisations, which today has 36 schools in six continents (Outward bound 2024) teaching experiential learning and development facilitated into various adventure and outdoor settings. Especially Hahn's philosophy has guided the enduring belief of adventure educators properly facilitated experiences can provide a catalyst so powerful that it may elicit positive behavioural change amongst the disaffected population. (Berry & Hodgson 2011, 166.)



Disaffection in this context is perceived by me to describe all behaviours, that are considered not socially acceptable, and which eventually has led to interference from social services or law enforcement.

So, we can loosely define experiential learning as “learning by doing with reflection” and outdoor education follows the experiential philosophy through involvement with the natural environment. (Priest & Gass 2005, 28, 29.) Outdoor education itself identifies four different types of relationships, which goes as follows:

***Interpersonal relationships*** refer one’s interactions in a group of people involving communication, conflict resolution and problem solving.

***Intrapersonal relationships***, on the other hand refers one’s self-efficiency and self-concept and confidence. Basically, intrapersonal relationship is a relationship one has with him/herself.

***Eco systemic relationship*** refer to the interdependence of living organisms in an ecological system. Aspects of these relationships include basic biological concepts, such as the web of life, the food chain, and the energy pyramid.

***Ekistic relationships*** refer to the key interactions between human society and the natural resources of environment and how one influences its quality.

Adventure education is a branch of outdoor education concerned primarily with interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Adventure education uses adventurous activities that provide a group or an individual compelling tasks to accomplish. By responding to seemingly insurmountable tasks, clients often learn to overcome self-imposed perceptions of their capabilities to succeed. They turn limitations into abilities and learn great deal about themselves and how they relate to others. (Priest & Gass 2005). This is the very core of how and why adventure educational activities can be a healing and rehabilitating experience and doesn’t really include limitations set by gender, age, or other factors. It is a universal tool to improve one’s perception of life and of oneself.

Experiential learning theory offers a fundamentally different view of the learning process from that of the behavioural theories of learning based on an empirical epistemology. (Kolb 2015, 31.) This view is tied closely to its origins in the work of Dewey. Experiential learning theory differentiates from rationalist and other cognitive theories of learning that deny any role for consciousness and subjective experience in the learning process. (Kolb 2015).

### 3.6 Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory

Abraham Harold Maslow (1908-1970) was an American psychologist, who was developing so called humane psychology. He wanted to discover the specific motivations behind human behaviour and developed the so-called Maslow's hierarchy of needs which still is taught at universities around the world and referred as the basic knowledge one can have about what drives us humans to behave like we do. Maslow mapped these needs on to a pyramid shaped diagram, with levels for certain category of needs.

The first step and the ground level of the pyramid represents physiological needs, which can mean food, water, sleep, etc. The following level is humane need for safety, which might mean a feeling of being protected towards abuse, not being threatened by an illness, war etc. Reaching to the top of the pyramid you have levels for need of belonging, esteem and finally self-actualization on the very top. The pyramid shows how Maslow believed that human needs are hierarchical and that one can't rise to the top of the pyramid and self-actualization before fulfilling the needs below the next one.

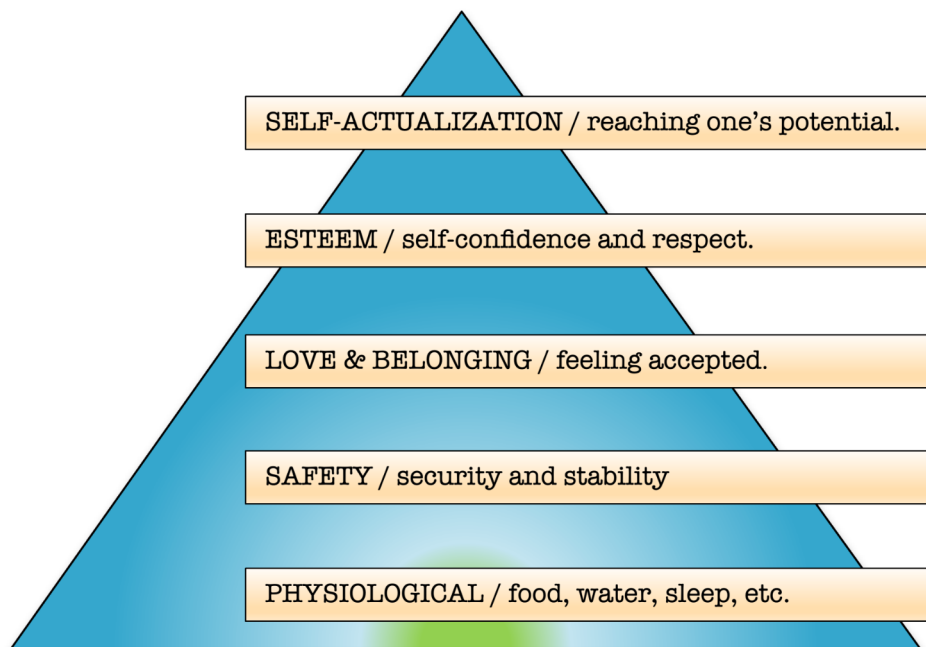


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs illustrated as a pyramid shaped diagram with five hierarchical steps leading to self-actualization.

To be conscious of one's needs is not always an in-built life skill. Roots of self-neglect might stem from deep childhood traumas and developed evasive maternal bonds, when the child has learned not to express its feelings and needs. (Söderholm, Kivitiie-Kallio 2012). The concept of maternal bonds is explained in the "attachment theory", which is based on the work of British psychiatric and psychoanalysis John Bowlby (1907-1990). Because of the nature of this thesis, it is not considered necessary to introduce attachment theories or other more profound psychological studies in depth. This being stated, it is considered always helpful to acquire awareness of different aspects of basic psychology, which can help one to develop resilience and professionalism through knowledge.

### **3.7 A word about medicalization**

In Finland 55% of early retirements are caused by mental health problems and over 700 000 people is consuming medication for mental health problems in Finland. (Terveyskirjasto 2023) Also 10-15% youth are having repetitive suicidal thoughts in 2023. (THL 2024)

Irving Kirsch, an American professor of psychology at the Hull university and the emeritus professor at the University of Connecticut has done a substantial amount of research on the effects on antidepressant etc. medication. Kirsch and his team elaborate the whole process of FDA (food and drug administration) and how specific medications eventually reach their status and how they are tested to find out if they have drug response on the test group. "In FDA tests it is shown that about half of the study groups find placebo drugs as effective as the actual drug." (Kirsch 2010, 52.) A natural conclusion from this would be, that there is a valid reason to at least consider if medical intervention is the ideal path to take upon when treating depression or anxiety disorder. In his book, "The emperor's new drugs, exploding the antidepressant myth", Kirsch states from various angles, that FDA has actively hidden the results of clinical tests done for antidepressant medication for the favour of drug companies. To keep this thesis less opinionated I will leave this to be explored, but also as an example that there are substantial amounts of studies made showing, that professionals and parents alike should be mindful, when searching for different solutions. Having these specific guidelines for medical professionals, diagnoses almost always leads to prescribed medication.

Depression is a relatively common mental illness and about 6% of Finnish population are suffering from it in 2024. (Terveyskirjasto 2024) Symptoms of depression fall into categories of mood, cognitive, behavioural, and physical. Depressed people generally describe their mood as

sad, depressed, anxious, or flat. Victims of depression often report additional feelings of emptiness, pessimism, uselessness, worthlessness, helplessness, unreasonable guilt and profound apathy. (Ainsworth 2000, 7.)

According to modern Finnish standards the most effective treatments to depression are antidepressants, psychotherapy, bright light therapy and electric shocks in most difficult cases of clinical depression. (Käypähoito 2024)

Contradictory the most effective ways to prevent clinical and chronic depression are loving relationships, sense of accomplishments, sufficient sleep, nutrients, and exercise. (Terveyskirjasto 2023) The question arises that why we offer medical solutions so easily to problems so basic and humane?

While working on this thesis, an effort was made to find statistical information about the number of children and youth is consuming prescribed medicine for mental health related illnesses like depression in Finland today. This information could not be retrieved, and statistics done by any medical publications, or third-party operators on the subject was non-existent. There are clear and easy to find statistics on consumed medicine for skin diseases, bowel issues, etc, but information on antidepressants, sleeping aid medication, etc. consumed by minors is not published. The reason for this is left to be explored.

## 4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THEORIES

### 4.1 A reflection: applying Maslow's theory

When you examine Maslow's pyramid considering it to be a healing process, it can give guidance to a support person. When you take more time and examine it through adventure and outdoor related work methods, one might have a revelation. It is a perfect fit and can be integrated fully inside an actual single meeting with a client. In my experience, meetings with a client which concentrates on the negative will only increase low self-esteem and the negative perception of oneself. I call them "what did you do now?" – meetings. "Did you skip, school, swear to the teacher, smoked a cigarette, got drunk?" We somehow feel that it is our responsibility to jump into that cesspool and imagine, that we'll find a gem at the bottom.

Instead, the meeting could start with a nutritious snack followed by motivational conversation, which increases safety and makes the youth feel accepted. You can take the problem outside and shake it out with a mountain bike, climbing experience or producing a piece of art of some kind, something slightly over the comfort zone, which produces a sense of achievement. The meeting can end with positive feedback and a brief reflection. There are no proven benefits on concentrating on the negative and it doesn't develop anyone's self-esteem. Self-esteem itself protects against the development of more anxiety/depression symptoms in clinical psychiatric sample of adolescents. (Hendriksen, Ranoyen, Indredavik, Stenseng 2017)

A support person can be a guide towards healthy self-esteem and self-actualization. This would be the essence of facilitating transfer effect through a support person. The only obstacle is, if we perceive adventure methods to be a reward or just fun, which the youth doesn't deserve because he misbehaved or did something undesirable. An attitude, that is actually very common, and which can stop any progress from occurring. A former client said in an interview that: "You never judged me, so it was very easy to spend time with you". He thought that it wasn't necessary to feel afraid of my perception of his actions. Our time together was about moving forward and developing the positive qualities he had behind his obvious disadvantages acquired from the past destructive experiences. Adventure educator facilitates progress and doesn't introduce obstacles to a client, which doesn't produce feelings of joy when the client overcomes them. As an example, a support person can get stuck trying to make a client to do his math homework and offers him a trip to McDonalds if he submits to the task.

Neither one receives any true benefits in the process. Perceiving the global Pisa results (OECD program for student assessments) as relevant for youth happiness doesn't have value when a student is struggling to cope with uncured traumas or active destructive life circumstances. The aim of rehabilitation can't be focused solely on school performance.

According to Maslow, people who become self-actualized find motivation in growth and possibility rather, than trying to gain something they lack. (Medical news today 2022) Maslow's research shows that self-actualized people possess a realistic perception of reality, acceptance of imperfections, flexibility and spontaneity, autonomy, responsibility, strong morals, appreciation of life and creativity. (Medical news today 2022) He also mentions that being self-actualized is not a fixed goal, but an ongoing process where one needs to keep working on ones needs and taking care of each step all the time, continuedly.

#### **4.2 A reflection: Setting facilitation of transfer as a method of working**

When a municipality makes an agreement with a support person and the client, together they determine the goal of working, how many weekly meetings there will be and where is the emphasis of them. Classically the goal is to improve school performance and make positive effects in the dynamics between the client and rest of the family. Often at this point there has already been discussions of placing the youth into a facility and many times support person is hoped to act as a preventive method for this. When a support person is hired for a young adult, the goal is usually to help finding education, maintain financial balance, assist with applications, doctors' appointments, or rather fill the void where family or other supportive relationships should be. Most of the contracts are made with broad goals and the implementation of different methods of working is not usually planned. After the contract, the designated support person is often left with whatever he has to offer to better the clients life.

The process described above is acquired experience from countless meetings attended in course of two decades. The most interesting fact is, that framework of working is not usually agreed upon and the support person is left with whatever methods he possesses.

If a framework would be established and agreed upon, the observation processes and follow up evaluations could have more professional angles and more specific evaluation targets which a support person can utilize in planning and reporting his work. Also having a set framework, the client can better understand what can be expected from the process.

But how do you improve schoolwork, family dynamics, motivation and possibly heal from domestic violence incidents, criminal behavior or mental health issues like depression, anxiety, or possibly self-destructive behaviors the youth has had possibly for years?

This exhausting question is not simple to answer and the weight of responsibility a support person can feel at times is overwhelming. My experience is that having a personal designated support person can have a profound effect on the client's life. Comparing the positive personal results as an instructor for a facility is not similar because of the dynamics of the two professions towards a client. An interviewee for this thesis stated that: "Having my own support person facilitating adventure related activities worked for me much better, than foster care and supported housing". It is a considerable statement which needs appropriate attention. He in fact understood, that our work together aimed for better his life through transfer effect.

With a designated personal support person, the client has significantly more agency and control over the relationship, and this alone will explain why this relationship often has better outcomes. It resembles more like teamwork, rather than a service provided by a restricted facility. But how does a team with good connection reach their goals? The situation is similar when a trekker tries to orienteer his way to a destination through wilderness. It is unlikely, that he will reach his destination without a map, compass, and a route plan. This example has many similarities with support person work. One needs to have a destination, skills, and a plan how to get there. As an example, facilitating transfer through an activity one needs a variety of different plans. One must comprehend what it means to go over comfort zones, what means physical and mental safety etc. One must understand that facilitating transfer doesn't mean to go kayaking. It means that kayaking is a medium to transfer specific, nonspecific, etc. skills to a person who suffers from their absence.

A support person with a skillset of adventure educational methods will understand the aspects of what adventure is, what it means to facilitate transfer effect and how important it is for both parties to understand one's hierarchy of needs like stated in Maslow's theory. Having these tools, a support person can concentrate on building the relationship with the client trusting the process and the positive effects of a professional, adventure educational framework.

## 5 RESEARCH AND METHODS

### 5.1 Methods

As mentioned in the abstract, this thesis is based on two main questions: “What are the elements leading to permanent change from destructive behaviors?” and “What are the professional skills needed to facilitate transfer effects leading to positive change?”. It was anticipated that surveys etc. quantitative methods of research would not be ideal for this thesis due the distant nature of them towards the research goals. Also, having a large quantity of interviewees was not considered to add any extra value or essence to this thesis. After some consideration, individual interviews were chosen as a sole method of researching the effects of adventure educational methods of working in social services. These interviews were designed to collect information of feelings, attitudes, opinions and especially to extract the vital “silent” information from the experiences of the interviewees. Most of the questions needed multiple improvised follow-up questions to extract the information I felt I needed to have sufficient depth on the subject. Most of the interviews turned, at times into conversations and sharing of experiences. An effort was made not to lead the interviewee to say what I would like them to say and to leave space also for statements, that might contradict my own views on the subject.

Interviews are the most effective for qualitative research because they help to explain, better understand, and explore behavior, experiences, phenomenon, etc. and interview questions are usually open-ended questions so that in-depth information can be collected. (University libraries 2023)

### 5.2 Analysis method

A classification analysis was chosen to be best for analyzing the interviews. After interviewing all the attendees, significant topics were discussed and was used to extract the information relevant to this study. The topics discussed with the interviewees were:

- Experiences on what can be considered as adventure related activities, effects of those activities for the rehabilitation processes and their overall influence for their mental health.
- Experiences of failure and if there were situations when adventure related methods didn't produce positive outcomes.



- Characteristics of a good support person, helper, or a worker of a facility.
- Other topics was considering the traumatic past experiences of clients, but also experiences of helpers and workers of those facilities.

These discussions were then reflected and observed through the main questions relevant to this Thesis and presented as following findings. Same topics were discussed with both interview groups but modified to suit both and reflecting experiences from each side. The specific questions are listed in the appendices.

### **5.3 Two research subject groups**

“If one wants to know, why a person thinks as he does, it’s wise to ask it from himself” (Tuomi & Saarijärvi 2018, 63.) Stating this has a hint of sarcasm to it, but studies involving these types of questions are rarely seen in publications involving rehabilitation processes.

This indicates that questions about substance abuse, domestic violence and traumatic experiences are not easy to voice out. It helps, if a researcher has some understanding of the boundaries, one must have while asking questions regarding emotional topics. Both research groups were selected upon the fact, that I’ve worked with all of them in course of two decades. This provided increased possibilities to understand their individual experience on the subject and there was hope, that they would have more trust on the purpose of the research.

The designated research subjects of this thesis consist of two groups. The first group are young adults with long experience in foster care, after care and as clients of supported housing. Most members of this group have been consuming prescription medication for mental illnesses such as ADHD (Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) and anxiety. ADHD is a frequently occurring, brain based, neurodevelopmental disorder with often significant life consequences. (McGough 2014, 1). Anxiety disorders can be diagnosed when critical combination of negative life events, environment and psychological vulnerabilities occur, producing misery, problems in sleeping, eating, etc. (Winning Ghinassi 2010, 45.) Some of the members of this group has also a history of substance abuse. All clients have taken part to various adventure & outdoor activities during their time in different facilities.

Altogether seven people at the age of 18-29 with experience of being clients of social services was interviewed for this research. In this thesis they are referred as “experience specialists”.

There was some consideration of interviewing old clients of foster care, who still had severe challenges in their life, but that was rejected after studying the situation of few of the candidates. It was perceived, that interviewing active substance abusers, people with violent behaviours etc. would not contribute to this thesis although it would be very interesting to learn from their experiences in foster care. It was decided to preserve that idea for future research.

The second group are long term professionals of social services and child welfare including a functional therapist, workers of foster care facilities and a director in charge of such facility. All the members of this group have minimum of ten years of working life experience each. The second group consisted of five professionals whom which all, but one possessed a university degree on the field of social services or/and healthcare. The education base for the participants were Sociology majors, Occupational therapist, Master of humanities and a Youth worker.

Interviewing the first group one must consider that these individuals have profound information on the manner the employees of social services, support persons, family workers and staffs of foster care facilities has succeeded or failed in their goals in meeting the challenges of a young person with traumatic experiences. The aim of the interviews is to follow up their experiences from early childhood until moving on their own and at the beginning of their own independent life with reflection of different working methodology and working cultures of different facilities.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview style, which allowed deviations from the main subject to allow further questions and general conversations on anything that might increase the value of the interview for the thesis.

#### **5.4 Integrity**

Three of the interviews was done over phone, but nine of them was implemented face to face. All the interviewees were informed, that any information, which might reveal their identity is not used in this thesis. This includes the institutions they were in, while in foster care, in supported housing, etc. Also, the professionals in the second group were informed, that no names or workplaces were not to be revealed in this thesis. All the subjects were given a chance to pull out their interview if so desired. Both research groups were informed, that an individual agreement can be signed to guarantee vow for silence and the duty of confidentiality.

This study followed the guidelines (reliability, honesty, appreciation, and responsibility) of Finnish code of conduct for research integrity by the Finnish national board on research integrity. (Finnish national board on research integrity / TENK 2023)

## 6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 6.1 Interviews of professionals

All five professionals interviewed had facilitated in their work different kinds of activities, which can be considered adventure educational, and adventure related. These activities varied from climbing, football, floorball etc., but also fishing, orienteering in the forest and other outdoor related activities. These are perceived in this thesis to be adventure educational, because the activities facilitated were introduced to the client for the first time and oftentimes preceded motivational conversations with the client to help them to participate in the activity. None of the interviewees had heard the term “transfer effect” before but understood immediately when it was explained to them.

All professionals thought it made perfect sense but hadn't really thought about how much it can affect one's life through specific and non-specific transfers explained in the knowledge base. Only the occupational therapist possessed a clear process-like methodology in facilitating activities aiming towards elevated self-esteem, etc. positive effects.

The occupational therapist emphasized the importance of surroundings. She explained that surroundings must enable various possibilities of activities to choose from. After finding an activity of interest the helper then can support and develop that with the client. She also perceived physical activities as methods, which has the most positive response. Berry & Hodgson talks about similar observations:

Wrong kinds and artificial environments are major contributors to various challenges in the lives of children. “Environments containing cars, roads, unsupervised media access etc. increases experiences elements of fear, but in the other hand elements like open spaces, freedom to explore etc. increases feelings of elevated self-confidence.” (Berry, Hodgson 2011, 148.)

All the interviewed professionals thought that adventure educational activities with clients improved their mutual relationships and made their profession feel more pleasant. They also felt that shared memories of those experiences had immense value in long term.

Professionals had experiences of failure with clients, who would not participate open mindedly to activities offered. The main reasons were specific situation of the client, but also of their parents.

Workers of foster care thought that substance abuse and the parent's negative attitude towards the staff of foster facilities etc. played a vital role. The occupational therapist thought that family rehabilitation centers were environments, which were the most challenging. The situation of the parents is reflected on the child and: "confusing / unstable surroundings doesn't allow the client to sufficiently concentrate and commit to processes." All interviewees thought that it is necessary to have individual work with a client and a helper, which supports the idea, that a having a support person for an individual client has good response in successful rehabilitation process. Two professional's thought, that peer support is essential element for positive results. All the interviewees thought that all the successful rehabilitation processes they've had in the past involved either hobbies or repeated activities performed with a support person.

After a pause, no-one of the professionals remembered a rehabilitation process which was not successful if there was an active hobby or repetitive activity performed with workers of a facility. In the other hand it seemed like almost all their clients, who's situation seemed to be hopeless, didn't have any hobbies or they didn't want to participate in activities offered by the workers in general. All professionals had experiences, where substance abuse issues prevented positive change and development from happening. A severe life crises or difficult mental health issues were also stated as elements leading to failure and leading to issues in safety and trust.

Two of the interviewees had thought during their careers, that they can't work in an environment not supportive of active style of working because they were positive that it would result to their exhaustion. All the workers of foster care facilities thought that activities with clients improves their own mental health and makes their profession more enjoyable. They felt that there was a clear and positive effect on the clientele mental wellbeing, but also their own wellbeing. By wellbeing they meant tangible things like laughter, increased motivation, and shared feelings of achievement. It was discussed that it is important for the clients to forget their challenging life situation for a moment especially in the beginning of the foster care process. Professionals thought, that being passive will most probably result in undesirable behaviors, depression, etc.

Two of the professionals with supervisor experience stated, that they would only hire people, who themselves has hobbies and strong interest toward sport, art, etc. in their lives. It is likely, that as an example a person, who plays football would introduce that to the facility and thus contributes to the community. They thought that a good employee is a person, who has capabilities to connect with the clients, which is not something that can be taught.

They felt that an ideal support person, or a helper is a person who takes care of his/her own needs, has an active lifestyle with hobbies and capabilities to open mindedly accept people with traumatic experiences and their challenging behaviors. They felt that introducing hobbies and facilitating activities was in the very core of day-to-day life of a well performing facility.

## **6.2 Interviews of experience specialists**

All interviewees had participated in activities introduced by workers of foster care facilities or of supported housing. The mentioned activities were kayaking, climbing, fishing, floorball, football, but also playing cards, geocaching, walks in a forest, cooking together etc. All interviewees had similar positive memories of doing adventure related activities with the workers of housing unit, foster care facility or with their support persons.

One of the interviewees participated to the “Adventure dudes-club” mentioned in introduction. This club took place 17-years ago, but he seemed to remember the activities like it was yesterday. Quote: “Spending time with you (and another support person) made me feel like a human being. I felt awful most of the time, but doing these activities with you made me feel different”. Some of the experience specialists stated, that living in a facility was very hard, but when performing adventure related activities, they felt like being normal children.

During the interviews the topic of feeling “normal” was repeatedly encountered and perceived as an important finding. Most of the experience specialists thought, that living in foster care felt somehow shameful and a reality which they had to hide from their schoolmates or peers at their hobbies. Doing adventure related activities made them forget their challenges in life, which were at times considerable.

Interviewees brought up domestic violence experiences, substance abuse issues in their families, mental health challenges, but also deaths of loved ones and other traumatic life events. Adventure related activities, but also the attention of a caring helper was mentioned as most important elements to feel “normal”. All the interviewees also thought, that having positive and supportive peer support from other clients was an essential factor for wellbeing.

One of the interviewees perceived his hobby as lifechanging, but others felt that it was those activities of more spontaneous nature which produced most memorable outcomes. This confirms that the element of uncertainty mentioned earlier as one of the defining characteristics of true adventure is correct.

One interviewee discovered floorball through one of the workers of a foster care facility and is now playing in national level. He perceived his hobby and the acceptance of his teammates as “lifesaving”. He had severe behavioral issues like aggression which manifested as severe bullying of other children and destructive self-willed behavior. Finding a hobby through a father figure of the facility was a turning point in his life, which is still bearing fruit as he is close to be a professional athlete. The transfer effects are very clear.

Other interesting outcomes were insights regarding healing from addiction. An interviewee perceived adventure educational activities as making distance to his addiction. The more he runs, climbs, paddles, the greater is the distance to his destructive life as an addict. The spontaneous climbing and kayaking trips with the workers of supported housing were valuable and moments when concentration and mindfulness overpowered worry and anxiety.

Most of the experience specialists thought it was also important to leave from the facility premises to perform activities. This confirms the occupational therapist’s perception about the importance of surroundings and if they support finding activities and maintaining an active lifestyle.

Experience specialists thought that a good worker is someone, who is genuinely interested of the life of the clients. He/she should not stay in the office and be passive but rather ask questions about their daily life and take them to do different activities. Also “hanging out” skills, playing cards and good humor was considered important. Learning different skills were talked about with the interviewees and a good worker would also possess skills to teach new things like climbing, etc. in their perception.

Various activities were mentioned, but combining element was, that all the activities involved the presence of an adult and none of the interviewees wished to perform any activity alone. Constant presence of a worker was vital, and an interviewee thought that absent adult resulted to passiveness and distance also between the clients living in the facility.

In the end, the interview of one experience specialist was excluded from the research, because of his statements and views on the subject couldn’t be indemnified because he was still using intoxicants in contrary to his initial statements.

### 6.3 Positive effects of adventure related activities highlighted

Both groups thought that adventure related activities produced positive change and elevated feeling of wellbeing. Professionals perceived them as being crucial for their work and their absence was experienced leading to lowered motivation to work. One of the experience specialists said, that there might be a connection of being introduced to adventure sports and him being alive. Multiple interviewees thought, that if they didn't have a hobby or an activity performed repeatedly with a worker, their life would be in much worse state as of today. Most of the interviewees thought that adventure related activities had profound positive effects on the overall attainment of the goals set together with social services and the facility they were placed in. The following story was considered particularly important for the study, although multiple interviewees had similar experiences:

*A 20-year-old young adult said that he was feeling depressed and was drinking heavily before he started working with a Wildside outdoors. He described his mental state as depressed, but also fearful and he didn't want to go out of his apartment due to his anxiety disorder. He eventually took part in kayaking, climbing, and hiking excursions 2-3 times per week for two months and experienced reduced need to get intoxicated, elevated feelings of happiness and self-esteem. Initially he was very timid and didn't think that he can even enter a climbing hall due to high anxiety. The observed change in his attitude was quite remarkable and, in his perception, having a support person exceeded his positive experiences in foster care and supported housing. He felt that he benefitted from adventure educational methods immensely and experienced positive changes in his mental state, mood, and motivation to perform daily chores.*

All the experience specialists thought that adventure related activities made their difficult life situations to be easier. They thought that activities performed together with workers of the facility and other clients was important for general team spirit and relationships also with their peers.

### 6.4 Reasons for failure

Both groups perceived substance abuse as a major factor affecting person's ability to participate in any activity and thus prevents them from receiving their positive effects. Substance abuse of parents and the general negative attitude towards facilities of foster care, supported housing, etc. were also named as obstacles preventing successful outcomes. This topic sparked a significant number of conversations, which is possible to concentrate in depth only in future research.



Three of the interviewees had a history of addiction. Two of the interviewees said, that they have been sober for six months up to one year and one had an active addiction. One of the interviewees participated in all activities offered and experienced elevated feelings of well-being and activities “kept his mind of his old lifestyle.” Another subject didn’t want to participate in the activities, but it also turned out that he was in fact still using intoxicants and his sobriety was a fabricated reality. The other client still using intoxicants was interested to participate but was excluded from participating because of safety issues. This experience shows that an active addiction and substance abuse will most likely lead to failure, like professionals stated in their interviews. The foundation for participating in adventure related activities like kayaking and climbing is, that one should have high motivation, but also at least a short period of sobriety behind him/her.

In the end it was perceived that a successful rehabilitation process of minors requires at least some support and participation of their parents to attain desired positive results. This finding increases the perceived value of family work and the significance of enabling team-like efforts with parents collaborating with professionals towards mutual goals.

Clients of supported housing stated that in addition to substance abuse issues, mental illnesses can produce such severe mental states that they can prevent participation, although motivation can be high.

## **6.5 Characteristics of a good support person**

Professionals having supervisor experience thought, that when hiring new staff, they would expect the person to have skills in facilitating different activities. They perceived skills in adventures, outdoor related activities, and team sports particularly important, but thought that also any other activity like cooking, playing music, etc. would have similar positive effects on client’s life.

Professionals thought that without facilitating and performing activities together with a client, the worker doesn’t have a real possibility to form a good relationship. In the other hand they thought that a colleague or an employee must have other characteristics like empathy etc. to even work in a foster care, etc. facility and other factors would be secondary.

Experience specialists thought that a good support person is one, who takes genuine interested in them. They all had experiences when a worker didn’t show interest in their lives, didn’t ask

how was school, etc. or didn't make efforts to activate them or tried to find things to do together. They all thought that there are too many substitute workers in facilities, and it takes too much energy getting to know everyone. The interviewees thought that adventure related activities experienced with long time workers of their foster home, etc. has profound positive effects and created important memories for them, but also kept them away from destructive behaviors. They all had one or two specific persons with whom they had the best memories and experiences of long-lasting positive effects like acquiring new skills. Those persons had been working with them for several years, so the relationship had substantial amount of time to take its form.

After explaining what transfer effect is, all the interviewees thought it is a phenomenon which is very natural result of well-functioning relationship with a client and a support person. In the other hand all but one professional couldn't clearly explain, what kind of transfer they are aiming to facilitate. This indicates that most of employees of these professions do understand the value and effects of adventure related working methods but are not totally aware what is occurring. Considering the length of the careers of each of the professionals, this finding is considered as important. The natural occurrence of transfer effects while performing adventure related activities can be explained effortlessly to a professional. Increased awareness of transfer effect seemed to spark insights in each of the interviewed professionals.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 What are the elements leading to permanent change from destructive behaviors?

The elements leading to permanent change lies firstly in the motivation of the client, which can be sparked to life by a support person. This motivation can't be disrupted by substance abuse or chaotic and unstable environments. Difficult mental health challenges were considered not to prevent, but to produce some specific nuances for safety etc. aspects for planning the activities. Also, the support person can't be just anyone. According to the interviewed professionals and experience specialists a support person must be able to form an interactive and empathetic relationship with the client. According to experience specialists, they would rather spend time with whom they already know and there seems to be a limit how many people they can handle in their lives. To live in an institution can be socially exhausting and the surroundings of these facilities might not support growth or healing. Although playing cards, cooking, art etc. was discussed, outdoor related activities were considered more helpful and memorable. It seemed like especially those interviewees who were healing from addictions needed physically more challenging activities. A conclusion can be made, that those activities of more physical nature and those which were performed outdoors, were regarded as more effective. Gender did not have an effect this conclusion. Interviewees had experienced clear and profound positive outcomes from adventure related activities performed with support persons and their peers. Experience specialists used terms "lifesaving" and feeling "normal", while performing adventure related activities.

There was clear evidence, that adventure itself has elements helpful for permanent change. Like it was stated in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, one must work continually fulfilling ones needs to stay self-actualized. It was clear, that having adventurous experiences wasn't the same as having a continuous active lifestyle. Having adventure related experiences were clearly helpful, but those interviewees who had experienced permanent changes had turned those experiences into a way of life.

When basic elements are set, it seems like there must be a specific framework one has to follow for success and this requires participation from social services, but also from the people surrounding the client especially if the client is a minor.

## **7.2 What are the professional skills needed to facilitate transfer effects leading to permanent change?**

Professional skills needed to facilitate transfer effects leading to positive change can be regarded as a demanding skillset. The work of the adventure minded support person is to carefully plan and tailor activities for the client, that facilitates growth through transfer effect. The essence of his work is to provide missing elements to the client's life, so it is helpful to have some understanding of severe life situations, trauma work, substance abuse work and mental health factors one can use for professional support. In Finland, it is usually required to have a university degree to work as a support person. This is considered to secure adequate well-rounded professionalism and awareness of these specific factors involving this profession.

Working with clients with traumatic backgrounds, one must also be aware that unexpected situations can occur. Personal experiences show that a client can have a complete temper loss when he is unable to perform like he would like to. Or a client can't even enter the climbing gym because states of fear or anxiety. This shows that the supervisor of a foster care facility was right stating that: "Helping is not always as easy as it is in our minds". It is expected that a support person would have enough maturity and patience to confront these situations with empathy and resilience. Qualities which can be acquired only through experience. To prevent work-related exhaustion it was also shown, that for a support person it is essential to work in line with his own values and his own hierarchy of needs to stay focused and self-actualized.

Like mentioned earlier: "One must understand, that facilitating transfer doesn't mean to go kayaking. It means that kayaking is a medium to transfer specific, nonspecific, etc. skills to a person, who suffers from their absence." To facilitate transfer through activities, one must have skills regarding those activities. The more technical skills a support person possesses, the wider is the variety of activities he can offer. Acquired set of skills and instructor experience is a solid foundation for a support person who is using adventure related framework in his profession. After stating these requirements, the interviewed experience specialists valued a genuine relationship with the support person to be the most important element. It can be concluded that the most important elements of support person work are empathetic approach towards a client and a capability to provide restorative and healing experiences.

## 8 FOREWORD

The process of making this thesis was rewarding. It gathered several insights of the subject in one study and provided professional confidence on the subject through research. There were initial difficulties not to have this paper as a personal manifest-like declaration of the superiority of adventure related methods of working. Fortunately, it was understood that there was rather an opportunity to study why I've arrived at this hypothesis in the first place. Another challenge was to concentrate on the actual subject of adventure related methods and not to get lost on the vastness of everything else regarding this profession. For this I thank the supervisor of this thesis, Kai Lehtonen.

This topic could be studied from variety of angles, and all of them could produce material for another complete thesis. While working with this study, it was at times concerning if there would be enough references of literature regarding the information provided by personal experiences. While finding most of the support from literature and from variety of publications, it became also clear that there was something new I could provide for this topic. In a way there was some relief for there wasn't another thesis regarding similar subject, and this added an element of creativity to the process.

The work of a support person or a worker of social services are professions where one needs to *feel* things and navigate at the borders of professionalism and personal "baggage" one might carry with him. Thus, an effort was made not to get carried away with emotion and rather use research data to produce evidence of adventure related working methods and particularly transfer effects profound way of producing positive change. "There is a long-standing and commonly held belief amongst the adventure education community, that adventurous experiences offer advantages for promoting personal development and pro-social behaviour." (Berry & Hodgson 2011, 166.) Working on this study turned this belief into knowledge. Interviewing colleagues was rewarding, but interviews of the experience specialists sparked new insights and validated the reasons adventure related methods of working was chosen as a subject of this thesis. In the end it must be reflected if this thesis achieved the goal of answering the questions which it initially sought answers for? The answer would be that it gave enough answers to have a feeling of achievement and of stepping over a threshold towards increased professionalism and knowledge.

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## APPENDICES

Appendice 1, main interview questions for professionals:

1. Can you tell me about your professional background?
2. What kind of adventure & outdoor related activities have you facilitated in your profession during your career?
3. What kind of experiences did you have, while performing those activities with your clients and do you think that they made a positive impact in your work and the relationship with clients? Please specify.
4. Do you think that those activities made a difference on the mental health of your clients and of your own wellbeing as a helper? Do they have some effect in your occupational wellbeing?
5. What is a good support person in your experience? What are the qualities of a good helper/support person?
6. What more would you like to say about these topics?



Appendice 2, main interview questions for experience specialists:

1. Can you tell me about your background?
2. What kind of activities, (which can be defined as adventure & outdoor related) were you a part of, while living in a foster care facility, supported housing or with your support person?
3. What kind of experiences did you have, and do you think that they made a specific impact in your life in the facility? For example, did they have an influence on your relationship with your support person or other clients of the facility?
4. Do you think that those performing those activities made a difference on your mental health? If so, can you explain what that means for you?
5. What is a good helper/support person like in your experience? What are the qualities he/she possesses?
6. What more would you like to say about these topics

### Appendice 3, participation and consent sheet

**Study title:** ADVENTURE RELATED WORK METHODS IN SOCIAL SERVICES:  
Facilitating transfer effect through support person

**Invitation to participate in a research study: Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to invite you to take part in my research study. I am studying the positive effects of adventure related work methods in social services. I would like to invite you for an interview because you have at some point expressed interest and experiences in adventure related work methods and activities. I would like you to share your valuable experiences and so contribute to this study with six other experience specialists and five professionals.

This information sheet describes the study and your role in it. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take your time to read this information and discuss it with others if you wish, if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like to have more information, please just ask. After that I will ask you to sign a consent to participate to this study.

#### **Voluntary nature of participation**

The participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. If You withdraw from the study or withdraw Your consent, any data collected from You before the withdrawal can't be included as part of the research data.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The aim of this study is to answer two main questions: "What are the elements leading to permanent change from destructive behaviors?" and "What are the professional skills one needs to facilitate transfer effects leading to permanent change?"

#### **Who is organizing and funding the research?**

This study is commissioned by Wildside outdoors and is done for Humak, university of applied sciences while studying in bachelor's program of community education. (adventure & outdoor)

#### **What will the participation involve?**

Your participation will involve one interview over phone or by meeting me in a cafeteria, your home or any other location of your choice. I will ask you questions listed below depending on which interview group you are a part of:

### **Group 1: Questions for professionals**

1. Can you tell me about your professional background?
2. What kind of adventure & outdoor related activities have you facilitated in your profession during your career?
3. What kind of experiences did you have, while performing those activities with your clients and do you think that they made a positive impact in your work and the relationship with clients? Please specify.
4. Do you think that those activities made a difference on the mental health of your clients and of your own wellbeing as a helper? Do they have some effect in your occupational wellbeing?
5. What is a good support person in your experience? What are the qualities of a good helper/support person?
6. What more would you like to say about these topics?

### **Group 2: Questions for experience specialists:**

1. Can you tell me about your background?
2. What kind of activities, (which can be defined as adventure & outdoor related) were you a part of, while living in a foster care facility, supported housing or with your support person?
3. What kind of experiences did you have, and do you think that they made a specific impact in your life in the facility? For example, did they have an influence on your relationship with your support person or other clients of the facility?
4. Do you think that those performing those activities made a difference on your mental health? If so, can you explain what that means for you?
5. What is a good helper/support person like in your experience? What are the qualities he/she possesses?
6. What more would you like to say about these topics?

### **Possible benefits of taking part**

Your participation will provide valuable information for support persons working with clients of social services seeking to use adventure related work methods in their work.

**Possible disadvantages and risks of taking part**

There are no risks involved for participating to this study.

**Financial information**

Participation in this study will involve no cost to You.  
You will receive no payment for Your participation.

**Informing about the research results**

After completion of this study, you can read it from [www.theseus.fi](http://www.theseus.fi). This study is bachelor's thesis. Your name to any other personal information is not placed into this thesis in any way.

**Further information**

Further information related to the study can be requested from the researcher / person in charge of the study.

**Contact details of the researchers**

Researcher / Student  
Name: Lari Laasjärvi  
Tel. number: (+358) 409639764  
Email: [laasjarvi.lari@gmail.com](mailto:laasjarvi.lari@gmail.com)

Person in charge of the study / Supervisor  
Name: Kai Lehtonen  
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**By signing this contract, I will voluntarily consent to participate in this study. Interview notes are preserved by the researcher digitally, behind a password. No names or other personal information are included in the notes.**

Signature of the researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:**

The original form signed by the participant and a copy will be kept in the records of the researcher.