

# Camps as Social Work Interventions: Returning to Our Roots

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**ABSTRACT.** This article argues for restoration of the value of camping programs as effective social work interventions. Therapeutic camp programs provide a unique intervention through which vulnerable children and youth may make gains in their emotional and social functioning while having fun with peers. An evaluation of a camp program for children and adolescents with learning disabilities and psychosocial problems offers a compelling illustration of how camp can provide an effective context for social group work interventions. Evaluative findings are presented, along with campers' and parents' impressions of the program. Therapeutic camp programs link new approaches with enduring social work principles that reflect social work's roots. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Therapeutic summer camps, social work interventions, children and adolescents, social group work, learning disabilities, camp evaluation

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Social Work with Groups, Vol. 24(3/4) 2001  
<http://www.haworthpressinc.com/store/product.asp?sku=J009>  
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## INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, there has been a notable decrease in social work's involvement in camp programs, despite the therapeutic and social benefits that have been identified (Breton, 1990; Davis-Berman and Berman, 1989; Gentry, 1984; Kelk, 1994; Marx, 1988). Indeed, a literature search found a substantial body of social work literature discussing camp programs from the 1950s to the 1970s (Feldman, Wodarski, and Flax, 1975; Middleman and Seever, 1963; Ramsey, 1964; Schwartz, 1960a,b; Shalinsky, 1969a,b; 1965; Vassil, 1978; Vinter, 1965). In contrast, relatively few articles have been published since the 1970s (Gentry, 1984; Kelk, 1994; Langdon and Kelk, 1994).

This article examines some of the historical linkages between social work and camping programs, suggesting that recreation and camping programs can be effective social work interventions. In particular, the paper outlines the important contributions that social work has to offer the camping field. An evaluation of a camp program for children and adolescents with learning disabilities and psychosocial problems offers a compelling illustration of how the camping environment can provide an effective context for social work interventions. Pertinent program elements that illustrate social work values are highlighted.

## EXPLORING THE HISTORICAL LINKAGE

Social group work in particular has historically had a close affiliation with the recreation field (Alissi, 1980; Boyd, 1971; Coyle, 1948; Gentry, 1984; Newstetter, 1938; Schwartz, 1960a; Shalinsky, 1969a,b). This association seems natural, as many recreation activities occur in small groups in which individuals form relationships and because intrinsic recreation values range "from physical fitness to citizenship, from the attainment of skill to the improvement of taste" (Coyle, 1948, p. 7). Coyle (1948) explained that including recreation as a social service was partly due to the "increasing acceptance by the public of the essential character of constructive leisure-time activities for individual health and for society's well-being" (p. 5). Another factor that contributed to the association between social work and recreation was the view of group work as a "service for individuals who, through normal, satisfying group activities, are encouraged to grow and develop socially and emotionally and to participate responsibly in society" (Alissi, 1980, p. 15).

Boyd (1971) emphasized the impact of play and recreation on learning and social development and noted that the effects generalize to areas outside of the realm of play. Play and activity open “the way for growth and corrective experience” (Boyd, 1971, p. 103) and thus have enormous therapeutic potential as well as possible negative effects. Boyd identified many values of play, beginning with sheer enjoyment. Other values she emphasized include developing a wide range of social, emotional, intellectual and physical abilities and accessing individuals spontaneously, indirectly, and through acceptance by the group, all of which can effect change. When leading recreational activities, the group worker must attend to the activities and the process, showing concern “simultaneously with what the group is doing and how it is feeling” (Coyle, 1948, p. 169), and at the same time attend to the interactions and the meaning for members (Boyd, 1971; Coyle, 1948).

Schwartz (1960a) traced the roots of organized camping to the late 1800s and the rebellion that opposed the Industrial Revolution’s destructive effects on individuals. Accordingly, an important purpose of camp was the renewal of values considered endangered, such as “the dignity of work, the healing effect of life in the outdoors, and the importance of communal responsibility” (Schwartz, 1960a, p. 422). Numerous summer camps were established by settlement houses (Alissi, 1980), as were many recreational, cultural and social programs and associations (Boyd, 1971). The camp environment was considered ideal for social work services, both because of group work’s emphasis on education and play and the intrinsic value associated with the small group (Schwartz, 1960a). In turn, social group work made a valuable contribution to the camp movement through its emphasis on the importance of the small group and the counsellor’s relationship with children in cabin groups (Schwartz, 1960a).

Increased understanding of human personality, growth and behavior in the 1920s shifted how group workers viewed the use of activities. Specifically, “the experience in and through the group began to emerge as a significant part of the group work process” (Reid, 1978). This understanding has informed certain programming accommodations. These include programs developed to decrease competition, activities created for cabin groups and criteria used to group campers (Schwartz, 1960b; Shalinsky, 1969a,b).

The historical association between group work and camps is apparent through research conducted at camps precisely with the aim of studying group process and informing group work theory and practice (Newstetter, 1938; Shalinsky, 1969a,b). In the 1920s and 1930s,

Newstetter (1938) conducted research to study groups at a camp attended by 30 latency aged and adolescent boys. The results led Newstetter to suggest that adjustment should be defined on the basis of social rather than individual phenomena according to an individual's acceptance by and of the group. The findings served as the basis of five group work principles advanced by Newstetter (1938): individual characteristics, member status in the group, the social purpose of the group, the program of activities, and the need to deal with individuals.

Recognition of the group's powerful impact upon each child and upon the group as a whole is manifest through use of criteria to form cabin groups in order to maximize positive interaction and outcome for campers (Shalinsky, 1969a,b). Shalinsky (1969a,b) conducted a study at a three-week camp, with a sample of 113 children between the ages of nine and twelve years. The theoretical framework he used was derived from social group work theory, in particular identification of factors that affect a group's ability to function well and to positively influence its members. Cabins composed of compatible and of incompatible children were compared in order to examine the relationship between group composition and group functioning. Results were that cabins in which there was compatibility functioned better than incompatible cabins. The aspects of group functioning consisted of liking and acceptance among the cabin members, friendly and positive climate within the cabin, cooperative behavior and group productivity.

While there has been a decrease in social work's affiliation with camps, there has been phenomenal growth in the number and variety of camps offered (Kelk, 1994; Schwartz, 1960a), along with steady development of the recreation field (Gentry, 1984). Furthermore, camping programs are increasingly used with population groups who have special medical, physical, or psychosocial needs or who are considered to be at risk (Kelk, 1994; Langdon and Kelk, 1994). It is widely believed that camp programs offer children and adolescents valuable opportunities to grow and develop as they experience a wide range of psychological, social, emotional and physical benefits (Byers, 1979; Kelk, 1994; Schwartz, 1960a). Benefits include a return to nature and a respite from city life, increased self-esteem, improved relationships with peers and adults, greater ability to assume responsibility, and improved coordination and physical skills (Kelk, 1994; Levitt, 1994; Schwartz, 1960a; Shasby, Heuchert, and Gansneder, 1984).

In the scant social work literature on camp and recreation programs, there is agreement on their value as effective social work interventions and on the current lack of appreciation for their worth (Breton, 1990;

Gentry, 1984; Redl, 1966; Schwartz, 1960a). Several writers have acknowledged the compatibility of social work and camp programs (Davis-Berman and Berman, 1989; Gentry, 1984; Marx, 1988; Middleman and Seever, 1963; Newstetter, 1938; Shalinsky, 1969a,b). Kelk (1994) maintain that “camping programs may be an effective, or at least adjunctive, intervention for a wide range of client groups commonly serviced by social workers” (p. 41). Davis-Berman and Berman (1989) argue that through environmentally based camp approaches “the uniqueness of the person-in-situation truly comes forth, which serves to define and distinguish the social work profession from other professional groups” (p. 280).

### SOCIAL WORK AND CAMPING PROGRAMS

Activities planned by staff to optimally challenge the participants, in order to improve their self-esteem and enhance their social abilities and skills (Kelk, 1994; Tassé, 1978), are key components of camps designed as psychosocial interventions. Participants grow and develop through the processes involved in meeting these challenges. Alongside growth and development are fun and relaxation, which are fundamental to camp experiences (Boyd, 1971; Kelk, 1994).

There does exist a sizeable body of therapeutic recreation literature on camping programs, such as wilderness and adventure-based programs (Berman and Davis-Berman, 1989; Powch, 1994; Williams, 2000), as well as research that points to the effectiveness of these programs (Williams, 2000). This literature is not typically produced from within social work. Whether in the wilderness or another environment, activities or “challenges” organized by therapists, each of which has a particular goal for participants, characterize these programs (Houghton, Carroll, and Shier, 1996; Kiewa, 1994; Mitten, 1994; Powch, 1994). Wilderness and adventure-based programs are used with a wide range of populations and age groups. These populations include young offenders and individuals with mental health difficulties and with special needs (Berman and Davis-Berman, 1989; Byers, 1979; Castellano and Soderstrom, 1992; Clagett, 1992; Fashimpar, 1991; Winterdyk & Roesch, 1982).

Some comparisons have been made between wilderness programs developed by social workers for individuals with special needs and both traditional wilderness programs and therapeutic wilderness programs not informed by social work. The observed differences pertain to goals,

staff structure, and use of the group (Berman and Davis-Berman, 1989; Gentry, 1984; Marx, 1988). Programs for individuals with special needs utilize outdoor adventure as the means by which therapeutic goals are achieved (Davis-Berman and Berman, 1989; Marx, 1988). Wilderness programs that do not offer counselling for teenagers with special needs have been found to suffer from limitations, for example the regression that may occur for a participant as a result of not succeeding in the traditional wilderness program (Marx, 1988). Marx (1988) described a wilderness program for teenage boys that included a community component in order to “integrate teen developmental progress in the home environment better and to provide an opportunity for parental involvement and support” (p. 519). Berman and Davis-Berman (1989) similarly distinguished typical wilderness programs “geared toward well-functioning youth” (p. 272) and that do not have counselling from programs for youth with difficulties that do in fact incorporate individual and group treatment.

Utilization of the group is considered to be a primary element in adventure programs (Williams, 2000). Social work’s focus on the use of the group as the medium to effect change (Davis-Berman and Berman, 1989; Gentry, 1984; Middleman and Seever, 1963) further suggests that social work has much to offer camps. This paper attempts to illustrate the extent to which social group work interventions can be highly compatible and effective in the camp context.

### DESCRIPTION OF THERAPEUTIC CAMP PROGRAM

The camp program discussed in this article is operated by a Children’s Mental Health Center in Toronto Canada. The agency serves children and adolescents with learning disabilities and psychosocial problems. Services include individual, family and group treatment, and community outreach. The camp is a three-week residential therapeutic program, with two sessions and is located on a lake in a resort community a considerable distance from the city. As the agency’s co-founders included social workers with extensive camping background, social work principles are fundamental to the camp program (Tassé, 1978).

The counsellors use a range of therapeutic and outdoor recreational activities in a safe environment to enhance the campers’ social skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem. The group-centered program includes activities, such as swimming, canoeing, outtripping, arts and crafts, and sports, and adventure-based learning, such as a ropes course and climb-

ing wall. Social work interventions are utilized, for example, through provision of group treatment. The camp has a low staff-to-camper ratio, considered vital to the success of therapeutic camps programs (Wetzel, McNaboe, and McNaboe, 1995). The camp also offers a unique training experience for students in psychology, social work, child and youth care, education and recreation. Students work with children and youth who have learning disabilities and simultaneously learn about the value of therapeutic camp programs (Tassé, 1978).

The camp's purpose is to offer a camp experience and associated benefits for children and youth with learning disabilities and psychosocial problems. These children and youth tend to be marginalized in regular camps, where they are ignored and/or bullied, and may even be "kicked out" due to behavioral problems with which the camps are not equipped to deal (Tassé, 1978). The children and youth's experiences at camp often mirror their lives in the community, resulting in further damage to their self-esteem (Marx, 1988; Redl, 1966; Schwartz, 1960b).

Early writers in the field cautioned that despite the potential benefits of camp life, it is essential to acknowledge the risks and to identify capacities necessary for children to benefit from a camp experience (Redl, 1966; Schwartz, 1960b). Accordingly, the aim of the camp program's screening, staff training, programming and accommodations is to ensure that the children and youth will have a successful experience.

Just as in group treatment, a vital element of the camp experience is the microcosm of the world that is created (Kiewa, 1994; Williams, 2000). Campers invariably display behaviors and interact in ways that replicate their difficulties in the community, school and at home (Schwartz, 1960b). Structure and modifications are implemented in a manner that utilizes the social microcosm of the cabin groups and camp environment, with the group as the medium through which change is achieved (Berman and Davis-Berman, 1989; Vinter, 1965). A milieu is created to provide the campers with experiences that are positive and different. Success is seen as vital, in order to foster campers' self esteem and sense of efficacy (Kiewa, 1994; Marx, 1988).

Many of the children and youth express both their excitement and fears about attending the camp. Their behaviors often reveal their expectations of failure and rejection, based on experiences at school and home, and with peers (Schwartz, 1960b). The majority of the children and adolescents who attend the camp have been victimized at the hands of their peers. Bullying is recognized as a serious worldwide problem (Olweus, 1984; Roland, 2000). Children and adolescents who have special education needs are at particular risk to become involved in bully-

ing (Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994). A sizeable body of research reports the increased risk of adjustment problems experienced by these children (Olweus, 1984). Comprehensive training of the camp staff is essential to enable staff to respond to campers in a manner that reflects understanding and that promotes positive behaviors and interactions.

Agency case managers initiate the majority of referrals to the camp, consisting of children and youth who are receiving services with their families. The case managers play an important role in ensuring coordination and communication among the agency, camp, and family. Steps are taken to prepare campers, train staff, and implement procedures to enhance the campers' ability to feel safe and accepted and to have fun. Agency staff carefully screen campers and compose cabin groups in order to enhance the social experience, functioning and outcome for campers (Shalinsky, 1969 a,b). Criteria for grouping cabins include demographics, such as age, characteristics related to each child, as well as interpersonal functioning, for example, problematic behaviors and ability to tolerate others' behavior (Shalinsky, 1969 a,b).

The staff works very hard to ensure that there is positive experience for the individual camper as well as for the cabin as a whole. For instance, a 14 year old adolescent boy referred to the camp was described as extremely active, distractible and loud, and as suffering with severe anxiety. Peers typically found him very irritating and criticized and rejected him. The staff determined that he required a cabin of boys who would be able to both tolerate his behavior and worries without making him feel worse about these, and give him constructive feedback without rejecting or shaming him. The staff created a group composed of boys who would be tolerant, yet in which one or two members were thought to have the leadership ability to give this boy feedback. As well as helping the boy receiving the responses it was thought that providing feedback would benefit the boys who would be able to give it and the others who would witness feedback being provided without rejection.

Prior to the program, staff members work with campers and their families to increase each camper's likelihood of having a successful camp experience (Marx, 1994). This process includes identifying individual goals and, together with campers and their parents, developing agreements for children with behavioral problems or for whom accommodations are required (Marx, 1994). The strategies are individualized for each camper, for example individual time with staff, phone calls home, or consequences for behavioral problems. These agreements underscore the camp's philosophy of adapting to the campers' needs, in accordance with Schwartz's recommendations that individual and free

time be valued at camp and not viewed as “violating cabin groupness” (1960b, p. 432).

For example, one girl, Janey, who had significant difficulties with peers, had always insisted that she would never attend camp. Because of her intense anxiety when separated from her mother, Janey could be present at school for the full day only with the knowledge that her mother was available. After successfully attending group treatment in the agency, Janey spontaneously asked about camp during a meeting with her parents and social worker. The social worker, Janey, and her parents then worked for many months to negotiate arrangements that would allow her to attend. Suspicious that once she got to the camp these arrangements would not be followed, Janey declared, “I know those counsellors. When I went to day camp, they said nobody was allowed to phone their parents.” The social worker promised that this time would be different. Together, they developed a written contract, in which they wrote how often and when Janey and her parents would phone each other. The social worker added, “next time we meet, I will have the Camp Director join us. We will give her a copy of this contract, and in front of you I will tell her that if anybody tries to stop you from phoning your parents, I will be phoned and I will deal with it.” This type of negotiation went on until Janey boarded the bus to camp. Counsellors supported Janey to phone her parents in a way that did not single her out. She enjoyed camp so much that she wanted to attend the following year.

A camp-wide anti-bullying program is implemented, with staff trained to provide a safe milieu. An orientation is provided to campers and parents. A combination of five programs serves as the basis of the camp’s therapeutic approach. These programs include adventure-based learning, outtripping and outdoor living skills, instructional and recreational aquatics, experiential arts, and group treatment. Each program is designed to maximize camper success and physical, social and emotional competence. The programs are planned to allow for a gradual progression, from simple acquaintance activities that require minimal co-operation and positive interaction to more complex problem-solving activities that require mutual trust and affective communication. A supportive atmosphere in which campers are encouraged to take safe social, emotional and physical risks fosters this progression.

Further, the philosophy of “challenge by choice” allows the campers to choose their own level of participation. No camper is pushed to do more than his or her comfort level will permit. With the staff’s facilitation, campers engage in reflection and discussion to process these expe-

riences in ways that may contribute to transfer of the learning and outcomes back to the home, school, and community environments. The campers' experiences within each program, and the reflection on the meanings and power of the experiences, together contribute to change.

One boy, for example, was so terrified of deep water, and of therefore even sitting in a canoe, that he could not join his cabin on their five-day outtrip. During the first few days that his group was on the outtrip, staff worked intensely with this boy in a canoe, progressing slowly from the shallow camp waterfront to deeper water. He finally was prepared to join his group, which he did on their last day. When this boy arrived at the site, his cabin mates were so happy to see him that they cheered and staff members were moved to tears. After camp, this boy's mother wrote a letter to agency staff in which she described her son as gaining confidence and control of his emotions. She attributed this change to his experience at camp in general and specifically to the support and encouragement of the staff and his fellow cabin mates in this example.

Other key components surround the camp intervention, including the initial preparation and orientation as earlier described. During the camp session, each camper's agency case manager visits to review progress with the child and camp staff. The agency clinical director, camp director, and camp staff attend case conferences, in which the progress of each cabin and camper is reviewed. After camp, each case manager has a follow-up meeting with campers and their families, to review the child's camp experience and to develop a revised treatment plan that builds on the camp experience. A camp reunion is held in the autumn to encourage social interaction among the children and to provide an opportunity for parents to discuss ways of integrating the progress made at camp into their son or daughter's life. Continued support and treatment are provided for the majority of campers and their families for some time following camp. A common feature consists of helping campers maintain contact with one another, which is a central issue for many of these children and adolescents.

The following are three examples of utilization of the group to promote change. Example one relates to adventure-based activities within the camp program, such as high ropes. Campers climb in the presence of their cabin group, with each cabin member assuming a role considered critical to the success of the climb. No members are viewed as observers. Thus, a member who may choose not to climb is recognized for his or her support to the climber. For example, some campers who are not comfortable actually climbing the high ropes may be given the task of "belaying," which consists of being clipped to the same rope that holds

the climber and holding the rope in both hands. Should the climber begin to fall, it is the “belayer’s” job to keep holding the rope tightly which prevents the climber from falling. Campers feel very proud for being able to do something important. For instance, one camper who felt he never “measured up” and was excluded by peers exclaimed, “It felt so good that Jim trusted me with his life! No one has ever trusted me before.”

In the second example, early in the program a boy was weeping in his bed after lights were out. Another camper asked if somebody was crying. With the counsellor’s encouragement, the crying boy said he missed his parents. Other boys then acknowledged that they similarly felt homesick and some confessed that they had cried earlier that day. In their beds, with the lights out, these boys who typically were bullied by peers and called names such as “crybaby” and “wimp” had a discussion about homesickness and being rejected by peers for being different. The boy who had been crying got support rather than the ridicule, that he expected. The next day he told a counsellor that he was very relieved that others also were homesick and proud for being the first one to say he missed his parents. Knowing that others felt similarly reduced this camper’s embarrassment as well as his sense of being different.

The third example illustrates another common situation at camp, in which a camper’s behaviors may irritate his or her peers, leaving the camper vulnerable to being rejected and/or bullied, which may be a typical occurrence for this child or adolescent. Staff members intervene to help the group provide feedback in a way that is helpful. Thus, the group members learn more effective ways of expressing their irritation, and vulnerable campers are offered feedback in a way that is minimally hurtful, and that has greater likelihood of helping them to change. For instance, two boys became frustrated with a group member, Brian, who they complained was always “so hyper” and always talking “at” them loudly and invading their personal space. These boys complained to one of the counsellors and wanted the counsellor to deal with the problem. The counsellor asked the boys if they could tell Brian what they would like without hurting his feelings. The boys were unsure, but with the counsellor’s help they did so. Notably, the boy who was able to give feedback most successfully usually had a great deal of trouble controlling his temper. Telling Brian to “tone” it down cemented this boy’s gains. Not only did he handle his own frustrations with Brian productively for himself, that is, without losing his temper, but further, he provided Brian with helpful feedback in contrast to the typical reactions of shunning and put-downs that Brian usually got from peers.

Some have argued that more systematic research is needed on therapeutic camp programs (Byers, 1979; Marsh, 1999). Thus external researchers conducted an impact evaluation of the aforementioned therapeutic camp, with active collaboration and input from agency staff.

### EFFECTIVENESS OF THE THERAPEUTIC CAMP PROGRAM

The evaluation focused on the impact of a three-week therapeutic summer camp program delivered in July and August 1998. The camp included two sessions, first for 48 children aged 10-13 and then for 48 adolescents, aged 14-18. The research design focused on three main program objectives: (1) enhancing campers' social competence; (2) increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem; and (3) decreasing their sense of isolation. The evaluation used a multi-method approach involving standardized instruments, feedback questionnaires, and telephone interviews. The data were gathered through a pre-test (T1), post-test (T2), follow-up (T3) design.

The evaluation team selected standardized instruments to measure self-esteem, social skills, and loneliness or social isolation. The Self-Esteem Index (SEI) contains 80 items and produces an overall summative rating that can then be converted to a normed and standardized Self-Esteem Quotient with parallel distribution properties of typical intelligence tests (Brown and Alexander, 1991). These data are ideal for averaging and profiling scores, testing mean score differences, and reporting group data. The SEI has four sub-scales that measure different dimensions of self-esteem: perceptions of familial acceptance, academic competence, peer popularity, and personal security. The test was administered during all three testing periods.

The Children's Loneliness Questionnaire (CLQ) contains 16 primary items that focus on children's feelings of loneliness, social adequacy and inadequacy, and subjective estimations of peer status. The items use 5-point scales; scores can range from a minimum of 16 to a maximum of 80, with higher scores reflecting greater loneliness. The scale has performed well in the past in terms of internal consistency (alpha of .90) and test-retest reliability (Asher and Wheeler, 1985). There are no normed population data, however, with which to compare the campers.

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) includes several complementary measurement systems with population norms established for both primary and secondary school levels (Gresham and Elliott, 1990).

In general, the student forms of the SSRS emphasize positive behaviors or prosocial skills. Higher scores on any of the sub-scales indicate a greater tendency to exhibit prosocial behavior in the realms of co-operation, assertion, empathy, and self-control. In particular, higher scores mean that socially desirable behaviors occur with relatively greater frequency (e.g., "I control my temper when people are angry with me"). The campers completed the SSRS forms during all three waves of data collection.

The researchers administered these instruments to all 96 campers within 48 hours of their arrival at camp. The campers completed the same questionnaires plus a camp evaluation on the second last day of camp. A majority of campers completed the same instruments six to eight months following their return home. As well, parents completed a parental version of the Social Skills Rating System prior to their children's participation, about one month after their return home, and then again during the six to eight month follow-up period. The parents completed a camp evaluation form and a random sample participated in brief telephone interviews during the follow-up period.

To test for statistically significant differences over time, paired t-tests summarize the average differences in scores for each observation period. Using the matched results for participants who completed the questionnaires for each time period produced a sample size of 65, or 68 percent of all campers. The results showed that campers mirrored the general population in terms of their average Self-Esteem Index (SEI) scores at the start of camp. Campers reported an immediate camp effect via a five-point increase in the SEI from the start to the end of camp. The observed differences seemed to be sustained during follow-up.

The SEI has four sub-scales to measure different dimensions of self-esteem: perceptions of familial acceptance, academic competence, peer popularity, and personal security. The paired t-tests revealed no significant changes in either academic competence or peer popularity. In terms of familial acceptance, the results pointed to an immediate benefit from camp in the form of a more positive attitude toward their families. With respect to personal security, there were no differences before and after camp. However, personal security increased between camp and the follow-up. Females experienced an even greater increase in personal security than males.

With regard to the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), the paired t-tests suggested no statistically significant differences among campers across the three data collection periods for any of the self-reported social skills. The children's self-reported behaviors related to co-opera-

tion, assertion, empathy, and self-control did not change measurably during the three weeks at the camp. However, at the six-month follow-up, these children displayed positive changes in both co-operation and self-control. The adolescents experienced immediate benefits from camp, with statistically significant improvements in the areas of assertion, self-control and overall summative scores. The adolescents' immediate gains dissipated between the end of camp and the follow-up period to pre-camp levels.

The most substantive changes were those associated with social isolation, as measured by the Children's Loneliness Questionnaire. Although there are no normed population data, the results indicate an unequivocal positive camp experience in comparison with their school experience. The largest differences occurred in comparing pre-camp and post-camp, which yielded large, statistically significant positive changes for the campers, with slightly greater gains among the adolescents. Campers experienced lower levels of loneliness and social inadequacy at school the year following camp than in the previous year, regardless of age and gender.

About two-thirds of the campers believed the camp helped them with various developmental issues related to their social skills and behaviors. The campers, in the aggregate, expressed extremely high levels of satisfaction with the camp program, including the staff, activities, facilities, and general feelings of being "safe" at the camp.

The parents provide another perspective. The results of the parental version of the Social Skills Rating System, also subjected to paired t-tests, indicated a summative gain of more than three points in comparing before to after camp ratings of their children ( $p < .05$ ). These gains were sustained at follow-up. Based on their SSRS results, the parents found their children more co-operative and responsible, with greater self-control compared to pre-camp ratings.

In terms of parental perceptions of the extent to which camp enhanced their children's social and emotional development, the SSRS measures indicated that the strongest levels of agreement occurred in four areas: improved self-esteem, increased independence and self-reliance, improved awareness of self and/or others, and better expression of emotions. As well, more than 40 percent of the campers' parents noted significant improvement in their children's ability to take social risks and resolve problems.

Parents' written comments on a post-camp questionnaire further reinforced their overall positive impressions of camp's immediate impact

on their children's development. For example, some parents clearly believed that camp enhanced their children's abilities to take social risks:

Making a friend is probably (my child's) most fearful issue and by his going to camp he faced his greatest fear and was pleasantly surprised. After (a negative experience with) a couple of his cabin mates, his first reaction was to come home/escape. But he was convinced to stay and deal with important issues, which made (him) feel that his last week was amazing. He was happy he stayed.

One parent discussed how the camp helped her child develop problem-solving skills, explaining that "she is quoting positive things she learned at camp." Another observed that her child seemed "more caring toward others (and) was offering to help others." Yet another parent commented at some length on her teenage son's improvement in several areas: "Although impatient at times, he listens and is more tolerant of others' actions, reactions and comments. (He) seems more mature and considerate of others. (He has a) much more positive attitude and dedication in what he does. He is smiling more often and expresses himself more."

While some parents were thrilled to talk about camp's impact upon their children, others were initially reluctant. Once engaged, however, the parents tended to speak freely, generally stressed the positive, and often revealed subtleties not captured in the standardized instruments. For example, one child registered a slight improvement on her social skills questionnaire, a small decline as measured by the self-esteem instrument, and a larger improvement on the loneliness questionnaire. From the perspective of her parents, however, the changes were quite dramatic:

My goodness, I think there were noticeable changes. The camp had a large effect. The main thing was that they made her feel really special . . . so different from her friendships at home. Just being away from home helped with maturing. She overcame certain fears, and she had a bit of bed-wetting before, but didn't do that away from home. It could be coincidence, or could be related to confidence. (She) was able to comfort (another girl). She felt like she was the most popular person. She said, 'For once, I was popular.' It was great for her to see she could be liked. They fought over who sat beside her; that's a big deal when you're 11.

Even when the standardized scores declined for a camper, the parent typically had something positive to report. One parent, whose son experienced declines on each measure, nevertheless stated that her son “seemed an awful lot calmer. The reaction to people around him was that he had matured a great deal. (His) teacher noticed the difference as well in terms of him being an entirely different kid.”

## DISCUSSION

The multiple measures employed confirm that to a certain extent, a therapeutic camp program can enhance campers' social competence, self-confidence and self-esteem, and decrease their sense of isolation. While individual progress obviously can vary dramatically, most of the campers either experienced a positive impact by virtue of the standardized measures or offered feedback suggesting that the camp had made a difference in their lives. Even the standardized measures, which are not particularly sensitive in detecting the subtle changes that campers experienced, often yielded statistically significant results. The camp evaluation forms for campers and parents clearly indicated unequivocal support for the program. The follow-up interviews with parents provided further evidence of the positive longer-term effects of the camp.

More generally, therapeutic camp programs can provide an opportunity for vulnerable children and adolescents to take part in camp activities, which they may not otherwise manage successfully. A systematic evaluation has provided support for renewed attention within social work practice to the therapeutic potential of camp programs for children and youth with psychosocial problems. Through its focus on social relationships and the interactions between individuals and their environments (Compton and Galaway, 1989; Macht and Quam, 1986) and on group dynamics (Schwartz, 1960b; Shalinsky, 1969a,b), social work has a unique contribution to make to the abundant camp programs that are in existence.

The profession's mission of enhancing the well-being of individuals, with emphasis on those who are vulnerable (NASW, 1999), provides particular support for social work assuming a vital role in camp programs that serve individuals who have special needs and who are at risk. Fundamental social work principles are interwoven throughout therapeutic camp programs, in the form of direct practice with campers and families, implementation of group principles, education and supervision of a multidisciplinary staff, and creation of a community that is

sensitive to the needs of diverse and vulnerable populations. These programs represent a unique intervention through which vulnerable children and adolescents may make important gains in their emotional and social functioning while having fun with their peers. Therapeutic camp programs link new approaches with enduring social work principles that reflect social work's roots.

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MANUSCRIPT RECEIVED: 04/03/01

MANUSCRIPT REVISED: 09/20/01

MANUSCRIPT ACCEPTED: 12/10/01