

Harpa Ýr Erlendsdóttir & Guðrún Friðriksdóttir – Upplifun (Iceland)

Historical background of Adventure Therapy in Iceland

In Iceland there is no getting away from nature. It permeates our very being and makes us who we are. The strength of an individual's character was formerly measured by the way he or she could, in a way, converse with nature. How well they managed during the summer months, how they handled the winter, the ocean, wind, rain and snow (Gunnar Friðriksson, 1990). After towns started getting bigger there was and there is a societal agreement that youth at risk sent to the country to work on farms come back mature and stronger physically and mentally (Margrethe Andreassen, 2015). The National Icelandic Scout Association was founded in 1912 and the first Voluntary Rescue Service was formally founded in 1918. Both have been fundamental in keeping Icelanders in touch with nature and in the development of youth since the beginning. The main advocates of the most famous adventure therapy group, Hálandishópurinn, are originally scouts.

In 1982 The Operation Drake Fellowship (ODF) contacted the Icelandic Youth Foundation and requested cooperation with Icelandic professionals. The first group came to Iceland in 1983 and there were youth exchanges between the two countries until 1986. The basis of the group formed around ODF Hálandishópurinn (The Highland Group) was created. All the professionals in Hálandishópurinn had specific expertise regarding therapy work, nature, pedagogic effects of community and communication and had years of experience with youth at risk. The first Hálandishópurinn excursions were in 1989 and soon became popular as a therapeutic option (Sigrún Júlíusdóttir, 2002). Hálandishópurinn was influenced by writings and practices created by Kurt Hahn and the OUTWARD BOUND schools and were operated from 1989 until 2007, but none of the founders were a part of it from 2005. After the financial collapse of 2008 there has been no financial support to resurrect the group (Björn Vilhjálmsson, 2013).

There have been groups run by occupational therapists at the National University Hospital Mental Health Departments since 2001 and Æfingastöðin since 2006. And now with the partnership of Reaching Further there will be more groups in the future. It should be mentioned however that recreational centres, after school programs and various others have used experiential learning for a long time a great deal with good result without the therapeutic intervention.

References

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