

Kátia Almeida – Pressley Ridge (Portugal)

SURF.ART Program

Summary

The project SURF.ART is an initiative that promotes the improvement of social well-being through well-trained teacher counselors and Surfing instructors that work with the kids 2 times a week in Carcavelos Beach, helping them learn and develop the skills that will lead to successful living, by using surfing.

ART (in Portuguese) stands for: To Dare, To Accomplish and To Transform. The SURF.ART project has begun in January 2013 as a 6 months pilot project. We've worked with 14 Roma and African Portuguese kids from a vulnerable community.

Currently, the project is still operating in the same area, with about 30 vulnerable kids. The program operates during the school year.

Target Group

The target group currently is 30 vulnerable kids (boys and girls), age range from 7 up to 13 years of age. All of the kids are referred from the municipality social services and the public primary school. They all face some kind of issues especially at home: neglect, emotional and behavior problems and learning difficulties.

The main challenges are related to the relationship with critical partners and their education strategies. For instance, it is a common strategy of schools to punish students that misbehave, by not allowing them to attend to special activities like the SURF. ART program. We are working with the school teachers in order to address this issue in a more effective way for all.

Trainers

The program is running and implemented by a master trainer from Pressley Ridge. He works on a daily basis with 2 volunteers: one surfing instructor and a volunteer specialized in surfing and

knowledgeable of Pressley Ridge's main guidelines in the work with kids. The ratio is 14 kids for 3 adults.

Our master trainer is a licensed sports psychologist, a surfer and is specialized in therapeutic crisis intervention, experiential education and in the re-education philosophy (Nicholas Hobbs).

Methodology

There are 4 main methodologies that we use:

4.1. Therapeutic crisis intervention – we use 2 main models:

- Life Space Crisis Intervention (<http://www.lsci.org/>) LSCI is an advanced, interactive therapeutic strategy for turning crisis situations into learning opportunities for children and youth with chronic patterns of self-defeating behaviors. LSCI views problems or stressful incidents as opportunities for learning, growth, insight, and change. This non-physical intervention program uses a multi-theoretical approach to behavior management and problem solving. LSCI provides staff a roadmap through conflict towards desired outcomes using crisis as an opportunity to teach and create positive relationships with youth;
- Response Ability Pathways (RAP) (<https://www.starr.org/training/youth/circle-courage>) RAP (developed by the Circle of Courage®) provides essential strength-based strategies for all who deal with young persons in family, school, or the broader community. Children and youth need supportive persons who respond to their needs rather than react to their problems. RAP provides these response abilities which enable people to guide young persons on pathways to responsibility.

4.2. Re-Education Philosophy by Nicholas Hobbs

Nicholas Hobbs has developed 12 principles of Re-Education as a foundation for recruiting and educating professional, competent, and nurturing staff. Re-ED is an ecological model that

views the child as inseparable from his family and social context. Treatment impacts the different settings of the child's life space through careful coordination of care. Re-ED is strength-based, emphasizing children's assets and the importance of relationship and structure for children and youth. It is holistic, concerned with physical as well as mental health.

4.3. Experiential Education

This is a philosophy that involves many methodologies, in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities.

As a main references, we use the Priest's experiential learning and judgment paradigm and the experiential learning cycles.

4.4. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development

How is a child's development affected by their social relationships and the world around them? Ecological systems theory provides one approach to answering this question. Bronfenbrenner believed that a person's development was affected by everything in their surrounding environment. He divided the person's environment into five different levels that are interdependent of each other.

Why do you use this practice?

We believe that there is a major impact of sports and nature in one's development and well-being. The connection with nature takes us to our deepest roots as human beings, facilitating our knowledge about ourselves, the surrounding and the others. Sports in general, provides a perfect environment to learn from the group process and as a consequence to learn how to

be and live in a society. All the rules and expectations among sports are the same in the societies where we live.

Adventure Therapy components

The fact that the kids are outside their natural living environments, will facilitate the exposure to risk and as a consequence, they will be moving out of their comfort zones. When they do so, they might experience failure, frustration and fear. Providing skilled and specialized staff will help them go through these feelings and live through the experience in a therapeutic way. We believe that, in order to call it Adventure Therapy, there have to be 3 conditions:

- 1) The kids experience dysfunctional behavior and/or dysfunctional ways of coping with stress and stressful events at the beginning. They might also experience emotional difficulties/problems.
- 2) The staff has to be qualified both as a therapist and in the outdoor sport that we use (in this case surfing).
- 3) The staff has to master the skill to help the child cope with the stressful events/incidents, to facilitate the process of learning more effective ways of feeling, thinking and behaving and to help them transfer the learning to other meaningful contexts in his/her life. The new learnings have to sustain over time.



References/ Background

Besides what we have already referred to above, Pressley Ridge has had a residential therapeutic wilderness camp for delinquent boys for 30 years in the USA. It was a learning school for most of our staff for over 10 years.

We were also members of the Association of Experiential Education (<http://www.aee.org/>) and are active members of the Adventure Therapy Europe group.

For over 20 years in Portugal, we've been using the outdoors and Adventure Therapy in our programs to help the most challenging kids thrive.

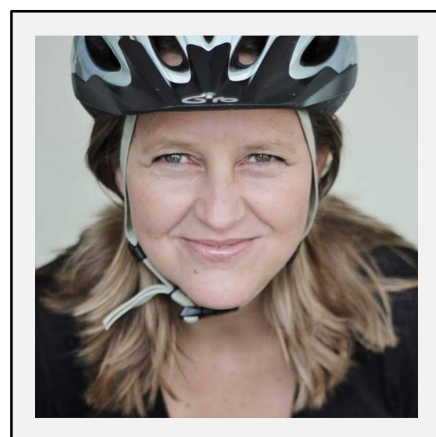
<http://www.pressleyridge.org/who-we-are/re-education-philosophy/>

<http://www.wilderdom.com/experiential/elc/ExperientialLearningCycle.htm>

Author

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Master in Sport Psychology; postgraduate in Psychosocial intervention with children, youth and families; specialized in therapeutic crisis intervention. Founded Pressley Ridge in Portugal in 2000 and has been leading the organization ever since. Has extensive experience in the development and implementation of skills programs for vulnerable children, youth and families, especially in outdoor settings; is a trainer/supervisor



in many different contexts mainly in the areas of therapeutic crisis intervention.

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