

April 8th, 2022

Adventure Venture Completion Report

Adventure Venture Winter Program was an add-on to the summer project between The Outdoor Council of Canada and Cornerstone Youth Centre. The program was designed for at-risk youth in NE Calgary, focussed on building personal, social, self-efficacy and leadership capacity in an outdoor winter environment. The program was a skills progression program working towards a day in the mountains. All but one youth in this program were different from the summer program, and the age range was 12 - 16 years old.

As this program was presented in February and March, dressing for weather, packing for trips, emergency procedures and shelter building were key components explored in our group settings together. This was first done through exploratory and experiential mini-programs held in an urban park in Calgary. These were planned to create the opportunity for the youth to experience the hard skills required for getting outside while in a safe, supported environment that fostered a fun learning experience, in addition to preparing them for a future day that we would spend together out of the city, in the mountains.

Throughout our in-city time together, we explored the 10 essentials, food prep, trip planning, shelter building, simple first aid, fire building, animal awareness, a cooking challenge, as well as numerous fun games and group reflection! The intention was to take a youth-centered approach that emphasized building on youth's strengths and developing skills through hands-on experiential learning that focused on the self-efficacy and perseverance required for getting outdoors safely. In addition to this, another indoor evening was spent having a layering fashion show, where the youth were split into groups and tasked to model how to appropriately layer for various outdoor weather conditions.

Having the awareness to assess and manage risk forms the foundation of the Adventure Venture program. We believe that safety is everyone's responsibility and promoted this learning throughout our time together. The Adventure Venture program builds capacity in youth to not only assess risk, but to do so in a reflective manner that engages their problem-solving skills in their immediate and potential environments. This was accomplished through identifying unseen risks and incorporating them within experiential practice throughout our in-city mini-programs, with the intention of providing insight and judgment into assessing and managing risk in more wild, outdoor settings. During our mountain day, outdoor safety was at the center of our day and group management was practiced throughout the day. It was known to all that safety is everyone's responsibility, and that we all play an active role in keeping each other safe.

A key component of experiential learning in the Adventure Venture program is mobilizing youth to feel inspired and involved in their community, in whatever ways this resonates with them. We accomplish this by empowering youth to identify their strengths through feeling a strong sense of community amongst everyone in the program. In doing so, we build a physical and psychologically safe environment where youth feel supported and engaged while building positive, respectful relationships with the other

youth and adults in the program. This was exhibited by many of the youth throughout our in-city mini-programs, where our outdoor activities lead them to lively engagement and participation in groups they may otherwise not have been exposed to. Additionally, during our out of city mountain day, several youth took the initiative to volunteer as co-leaders, providing the opportunity to feel a sense of responsibility and belonging while being supported in their peer environment.

Many of the youth who were a part of the Adventure Venture program were entirely new to outdoor exploration and had not been previously exposed to this type of experiential learning, making this program completely out of their comfort zone. This program challenged all of the youth to navigate new activities through learning self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness in an exploratory, safe group setting. This was accomplished through problem-solving and working together through exposure to new outdoor activities, such as games that focused on skills development, problem-solving, quick thinking, communication and utilizing team work. The adventure venture program helped the youth develop self-efficacy by providing opportunities to learn and practice varying skills in a real-life setting, therefore fostering resilience and encouraging engagement. These new outdoor activities and experiences helped empower and assist youth in realizing their strengths and reaching their highest potential.

The Adventure Venture program takes a reflective approach to youth programming that promotes self-awareness with the main goal of supporting youth in their connection to the mental health benefits of being outdoors. These mental health benefits are reinforced through the experiential, exploratory and strengths-based nature of the program. Our program promotes healthy messaging about the benefits of getting outdoors through the facilitation of a fun, supportive, and safe day spent in nature. For example, throughout our mountain day, many of the youth expressed how this experience made them feel happy, motivated and inspired to stay connected to accessing the outdoors. Before ending our day, we led a mindfulness activity and gratitude circle where youth were able to tune into their surroundings and feel connected to their intuitive selves, expressing their joy and gratitude for spending a day playing outside, learning new skills and being ultimately present in the beauty that nature has to offer.

One of the main goals of the Adventure Venture program is to help youth develop a few of the key skills that would help them feel more confident, curious and inspired to learn more about getting outdoors. Through facilitating the exploratory in-city mini-programs where youth learned some of these key skills and then taking those skills to the mountains for a fun-filled day, we believe that the youth do feel motivated to learn and experience more in the outdoors after the program is finished. Three of the youth had expressed their desire to tell their parents about what they had learned during the mountain day and shared they hope they can spend more time outdoors with their families in the future.

Promoting and enabling outdoor education through experiential and exploratory activities is a key tenet of the Adventure Venture program. This allows youth to build the skills and knowledge it takes to feel more competent and confident to go outside safely while being able to practice in a safe and supportive environment. Through our activities, the youth had the opportunity to have important outdoor skills modeled for them while also learning how to use these skills for themselves in a safe, peer supported

environment. Experiential learning, group and self-reflection allowed the youth to make sense of what they were learning which instilled competence and confidence throughout the program.

Overall, we are pleased with what our program accomplished and how the youth engaged and responded to the program.