

Wilderness programs and boot camps – are they effective?

Wilderness programs that include adventure activities and 'boot camps' involving military-like discipline are often promoted as effective crime prevention measures for young people in contact with the justice system or those at risk of criminal involvement. However, research reviews show mixed results for such programs.

One recent systematic review of boot camps showed no overall positive effect from the military type and physical activity aspects of these programs when recidivism was used as the measure of success (Wilson & MacKenzie 2006). This review found that camps might be more effective if the primary emphasis is therapeutic rather than militaristic and physical. Other reviews agree that it is the therapeutic elements of such programs that are crucial to success (AIC 2003; Wilson & Lipsey 2000). In a review of the crime prevention effect of wilderness challenge programs with delinquent youth, Wilson and Lipsey (2000) found the recidivism rate was eight percent lower for program participants (29%) than for control subjects (37%). In particular they found that established programs were more effective, indicating the need for ongoing core funding to assist programs to be more effective.

The following components are likely to increase successful outcomes for programs:

- thorough assessment and ongoing monitoring of participants
- a risk management assessment of activities and screening of program staff
- multi-modal treatments with a cognitive-behavioural orientation, e.g. behaviour modification techniques, drug and alcohol programs (Lipsey & Wilson 1998; Singh & White 2000)
- addressing specific criminogenic needs, e.g. attitudes supporting offending, peer groups, family problems, drug and alcohol use, anger and violence problems (Singh & White 2000)
- meaningful and substantial contact between participants and treatment personnel, and
- inclusion of an aftercare component (AIC 2003).

Programs for Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse youth should engage significant others, be culturally appropriate, and have staff who can relate to the clients (Singh & White 2000).

References

All URLs were correct at 30 March 2006

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