

ReTribe's Mechanisms of Change

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“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”
Carl Rogers

Our Concept Map assessment shows that ReTribe works. This paper is to discuss *why* ReTribe works – i.e. to discuss the mechanisms of change in our program.

ReTribe's History

ReTribe began in 2009 with roots in four traditions –meditation, play, nature, and healing, and it manifests those roots in four branches, offering programming for four different age groups, each of which uses meditation, play, nature, and healing in age appropriate ways.

Our meditation focus root and our retreat format, came out of our experience working with iBme (Inward Bound Mindfulness Education), a teen program with a 30-year history originating at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, MA. Jane Martin, Julia Martin, John Hunt, and Howard Moody all worked with iBme. John also trained in Mindfulness Education with Daniel Rechtschaffen's program at Omega Institute, in Rhinebeck, NY, and Jane has been practicing meditation for 40 years. At the ReTribe teen programs, John teaches meditation every morning.

Our Play and Adventure Game Theater (AGT) root came from ReTribe Elder, Howard Moody's 30-year career teaching play at Omega Institute. Howard co-created the Adventure Game Theater program, and mentored Julia, who has been on the staff of AGT at Omega for a decade.

Our Nature Education root is headed by John who brings a decade of experience teaching outdoor education at Willowell's Walden High School, Crow's Path, and Earthwalk. He brings many of the processes he learned at Art of Mentoring (Plymouth, VT) from Jon Young, and from Tom Brown's Tracker School.

Our Healing root is held by Jane Martin, who is a Licensed Professional Counselor. Jane studied transpersonal psychology and child psychology, practices and teaches body psychotherapy, and is skilled in working with altered states of consciousness. Julia and John also trained as Breathwork Facilitators with Carol Lampman's Integrated Concepts.

The Operative Elements of ReTribe's Rite of Passage Program

While ReTribe has Coyote Clan and Forest School for youth, and programming for adults, this paper is focused on ReTribe's teen Rite of Passage program which brings these four root processes together to create a program that is deeply transformative while also being 'awesomely fun.'

The meaning and significance of a Rite of Passage is discussed below, as are a few of the many research studies showing the efficacy of individual elements of our programming. But what makes ReTribe so effective is the symbiosis of its four types of elements. The following is a description of the contribution of each element to the whole ReTribe experience.

Rites Of Passage

If you do not initiate the young people,
they will burn the village down to feel the heat.

African Proverb

An anthropological study found that 94% of cultures, throughout time around the world, have some kind of socially sanctioned method of inducing a non-ordinary state of consciousness (NOS) for emotional healing and spiritual growth. Usually these methods are incorporated into a rite of passage (a/k/a initiation). A rite of passage is a ceremony or process that supports the move from one stage of life to the next.

Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, in his book, The Rites of Passage, explicates four stages incorporated in most initiation processes around the world – separation, preparation, threshold (or NOS state process), and integration back into the community. ReTribe follows this basic format.

When our children are 11 or 12 years old, the prefrontal cortex of their brain begins to proliferate. More brain matter grows. And this biological addition brings with it, new capacities. Just as our one year olds, as they become ready to walk, begin to experience a biological drive to walk, our teenagers also begin to experience a biological drive to use these new prefrontal cortex capacities.

One of these capacities is to make conscious decisions, i.e. holding both sides of an issue in mind at once. This is why it is so important for parents of teens to begin to move from authority to guidance. Other capacities that are arising in the teen years are a stronger

identity, or sense of self, or what we might call 'ego.' In a Rite of Passage, "Who am I?" is a central question.

Another PFC capacity, that tends to be overlooked by our society, is the capacity for transcendence. Transcendence means to have a NOS experience; to experience something beyond the material realm.

Candace Pert, Chief of Brain Biochemistry at the National Institutes of Health, made the connection between transcendence and the prefrontal cortex, "In long term meditators, the frontal cortex starts to light up and shows itself to be very active. If there's a part of the brain that has God in it, the frontal cortex is the way I think about it. That's not very scientific!"

Part of most rites of passage worldwide, includes a very intense experience, so intense, that most of the time it includes the very real possibility of death. The Vanuatu people of the South Pacific have their teens do land diving, which is similar to bungee jumping, except they use vines instead of elastic cords, and the objective is to brush their head on the ground - to come as close to death as possible. The Mazai boys of Tanzania had to kill a lion with just a spear. The aboriginal tribes of Australia send their boys out to survive by themselves for 6 months. The Matis tribe in Brazil put poison in the boys' eyes, and inject them with poison from the Giant Leaf Frog. Young women of the Fula people of West Africa must have their faces tattooed without grimacing. Young Spartan's would have to kill slaves. The girls of the Ticuna people in the Northwest Amazon were put in isolation chambers for several months. Many rituals include 'scarification,' where the body is pierced, cut, circumcised, or maimed. At ReTribe, while we don't actually put the teens in danger of death or dismemberment, we do provide experiences that are very intense.

So with the proliferation of the prefrontal cortex, this transcendent capacity arises (our experience is that it is around age 14 that this really takes hold) and the teen also experiences a strong biological drive towards these experiences. If we provide no socially sanctioned channel, they will go for these experiences in their own ways, and often these ways are quite dangerous. This line of thinking is not well known in our culture, so the following quotes are provided to illustrate this idea.

These studies confirm that when youth lack a rite of passage experience, there are extraordinary consequences related to such problem behaviors as violence, substance use, gangs, bullying, and delinquency. Citations in professional literature and popular media ascribe risk-taking behavior of youth (Lewis and Lewis 1984; Merten 2005) as their attempts to create rites of passage for themselves.

-Rites of passage during adolescence, Scott D. Scheer and Stephen M. Gavazzi, The Ohio State University, David G. Blumenkrantz Center for the Advancement of Youth, Family, and Community Services, Inc.

In modern culture, our Rites of Passage are often missing or minimized in importance. We seem to have lost many of our communal and sanctioned ways of taking risks and acknowledging the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Daniel Siegel, M.D., *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain.*

One reason for the great demand for psychiatric services for adolescents today may be the absence of socially sanctioned rites of passage. Throughout human history these rites have served humanity well. The desire for some rites and rituals at puberty as well as at the end of the teen years is natural, even today. Young people seem to want the real thing, an authentic initiation. There is truly a 'hunger for initiation.'

Louise Carus Mahdi, *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage*

Most spiritual life calls for times of sudden radical transformation brought about by powerful initiation and rites of passage. For modern young men and women this is a desperate need. If nothing is offered in the way of initiation to prove one's entry into the world of men and women, it will be done unguided in the road or the street with cars at high speed, with drugs, with weapons.

Jack Kornfield, Ph.D., Psychologist and Buddhist teacher

The well known anthropologist, Margaret Meade, believed that the fact that modern society has lost sanctioned rites of passage is a critical contributing factor to the increase of various forms of social pathology.

-Christina Grof, developer of the Spiritual Emergence Network

This is why rites of passages are so crucial to our teens and why it is so important to re-introduce them into our culture. Yes, there are Bar Mitzvah's and Confirmations, but these tend to be more of a commemoration of the move from childhood to adulthood, rather than the transformative process to create the inner maturation itself. Some rite of passage programs try to recreate indigenous ceremonies, and they are wonderful retreats for teens, but they tend to lack the intense NOS experience which is so core to the transformation.

The news is full of reports of our young adults going through an 'extended adolescence.' There is much consternation about the inability of our young adults to take up responsibility for their lives. ReTribe believes that rites of passage would help with this.

Non Ordinary State Processes (Healing elements)

The heart of a Rite of Passage is the altered state (Non Ordinary State, or NOS)

experience. It is here that the deepest transformations can occur. Healing on the shadow level, healing preverbal trauma, healing on a body or energy level, providing transpersonal experiences, are available in the NOS experience. Most psychotherapeutic interventions only offer simple cognitive restructuring.

Without the Small Group and NOS experience, ReTribe would be just a camp. With them it is a Rite of Passage.

Stan Grof, MD, psychiatrist, researcher and author of The Psychology of the Future, describes particular NOS, which he calls 'holotropic,' as having "healing, transformative, and evolutionary potential." He says "The work with holotropic states has thus shown that emotional and psychosomatic problems are much more complex than is usually assumed and that their roots reach incomparably deeper into the psyche... and that [traditional talk therapy] approaches fail to recognize and appreciate the extraordinary healing potential of the deeper dynamics of the psyche."

There are many means that cultures worldwide have used to induce these altered states; fasting, dancing, drumming, breathing, chanting, spinning, extreme pain, social and sensory isolation, psychotropic substances such as ayahuasca, peyote, psilocybe mushrooms, etc. Altered states are used in over 90% of societies (Papadimitropoulos, 2009)

At ReTribe's Rite of Passages the main processes we use to create the NOS experience are Breathwork, Sweatlodge, Solos in nature, Shamanic Journey and Trance dance, and Adventure Game Theater.

Breathwork (Healing element)

The collective unconscious that is often largely a theoretical construct in Jung's theories becomes a living reality in breathwork experiences.

-John Mack, Harvard psychiatry professor

Throughout history, virtually every culture has provided an opportunity and a method to access nonordinary states of consciousness for inner exploration and healing. Drawing from centuries of such wisdom and adding insights from modern consciousness research, breathwork facilitates access to all levels of human experience, including unfinished biographical material, birth memories, transpersonal phenomena, and residues of trauma stored in the body.

Some researchers in Chile found Breathwork to be a strong catalyst for the maturation from adolescence to adulthood. (Contreras and Zenteno, 2014)

Research shows Breathwork to be a salutary adjunct to psychotherapy (Watjen, 2014) because it brings insight into subconscious processes, and disinhibits emotional flow by

relaxing the emotional inhibition of the prefrontal cortex through hypocapnia induced by full breathing (Rhinewine and Williams, 2007).

Many researchers have reported positive results with Breathwork in therapeutic settings, with no negative side effects; for example, Epworth Children's Home in South Carolina, used breathwork with adolescents; 11,000 inpatients at Hyland Behavioral Health in Missouri (Eyerman, 2013), and addicted patients found long term abstinence. (Brewerton, Eyerman, Cappetta, and Mithoefer, 2011).

Sweatlodge (Nature element)

Research shows sweatlodge's health benefits to the immune system, as well as supporting participants' access to psychologically therapeutic factors such as acceptance and interpersonal action (Colmant, 2005), and an increase in emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Schiff & Moore, 2006).

Solo (Nature element)

On our Inner Journey's Rites of Passage, the teens spend 7 hours alone in the woods, usually fasting. By removing outside stimulus, the teen becomes more in touch with their inner psyches.

Adventure Game Theater (Play element)

In Adventure Game Theater, the teens and staff enter an imaginary world, create a character for themselves, and without script, they play out an epic adventure, full of myths and archetypes.

See attachment below from the Windy Hill Newsletter of the Waldorf School of Princeton

Shamanic Journey and Trance Dance (Healing and Nature element)

For a list of many research studies showing shamanic and other altered state practices' psychological healing effects, see <http://michaelwinkelman.com/alternative-medicine> and <http://www.human-studies.com/articles/presence-in-existential-humanistic-psychotherapy.php>

Sit Spot (Nature elements)

The daily sit spot and journaling time gives teens a chance to integrate and gain insight.

ReTribe is very intense and fast moving, but believe it or not, we get almost no pushback about Sit Spot although we are asking teens to do the unthinkable – go off into the woods by themselves, and leave all their friends behind. No TV. No music. No phone. Even no books usually! Just being with nature and with themselves. Examining their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and journaling about them. Making sense of themselves and their world, and integrating. And they do it because they know they need to.

A study by Larson and Csikszentmihalyi (2006) found that the ideal percentage of time for teens to spend alone is 30%. Although they don't enjoy it, they report better psychological adjustment.

Journaling (Healing element)

A core practice of ReTribe is journaling. As part of the opening Bear Ceremony, the teens are gifted a journal and pen. The teens are given one question every day to write about in their journals. The questions encourage self reflection and deep thinking. During their sit spots or free time, they can write, draw, or reflect on these questions. During small groups they can share what they wrote.

The questions start with a “who am I?” focus, and then move to where in their life they've had pain, how they have caused pain to others, what they want to let go of in their life/actions/personalities, what they want to cultivate, what is 'cool' about them, and what gifts they might bring to the world. Each successive ReTribe they attend brings them deeper versions of the questions. They are asked to identify feelings and needs of themselves and of others in order to teach nonjudgment, and sometimes to evaluate poems or quotes designed to increase their level of consciousness.

Research supports positive effects such as increased IQ, mindfulness, goal attainment, emotional intelligence, memory, self discipline, psychological healing, and more (Purcell, 2016; Nguyen, 2015).

Nature connection (Nature element)

Nature Deficit Disorder is a term originally coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book Last Child in the Woods. He contends that a whole host of behavioral problems stems from the decline in the amount of time children spend outdoors. In fact an entire field has emerged called Ecopsychology, that deals with this connection. Research has found that connection with nature is essential for child development (Faber, 2006; Kaplan, 1995).

Small Groups (Healing element)

A mainstay of ReTribe is the Small Group. Six to ten teens and mentors meet once or twice

daily in private spaces. Using a graduated set of exercises, (check-ins, lightning rounds, hot seats, journal questions), teens can test the waters of self-exposure to discover that honest self expression, no matter what the content, is honored and respected at ReTribe. They can unzip their ‘cool’ mask and show their vulnerable underbelly, and still find themselves loved and accepted – this time, for who they really are. This acceptance by others, almost always leads to self-acceptance which is carried with them into their everyday lives. The ripple effect on other teens from this unconditional acceptance can be enormous.

Once the teens have shared in small groups, and the mentors and staff are aware of the issues they are struggling with, our team can focus on each teen’s individual needs, and provide the support they need. Our interventions take many creative forms. Some examples from the past: assigned mentors to help socially phobic teens connect with the group; made and carried out plans to help conquer OCD; confronted teens whose behaviors were painful for others; strongly encouraged teens to step up and be responsible for their chores, their personal belongings, and the belongings of others; helped teens deal with PTSD; helped resolve current unhealthy life situations at home; helped teens to realize their own self worth; to set clear boundaries; to resolve conflicts using Social Harmony conflict resolution processes (see our sister organization at www.SocialHarmonyInstitute.com); encouraged self expression and confidence; relieved self hatred by self understanding and forgiveness; relieved long term family tension by understanding and forgiveness; made a place for mourning of losses, etc.

In small group, the teens gradually feel safe enough to be authentic and open so that deep healing through NOS interventions can occur.

46% of our youth will have a mental health disorder before the age of 18. (NIMH)
Group therapy is a very effective change agent for teens. A British study by Dr. Patricia Conrod (2013) showed a 25-33% decrease in mental health issues in teens from just two 90 minute group therapy sessions. This decrease lasted for over two years. Group Therapy is shown to reduce stress in teens (Kurlan, 2007).

Psychologically healing Workshops (Healing elements)

Body Psychotherapy workshops

Although we can’t do psychotherapy with each ReTribe participant, nevertheless, since most of us have common thematic wounds, workshops can be structured to provide a place for each teen to heal in the way that works for them. Teens tend to respond best to body oriented processes rather than intellectual processes. We develop workshops around story and myth, which is developmentally appropriate for the teen psyche.

Workshops in the past have included, dream interpretation, inner child workshop, the “Tiger” workshop (exploring anger on a body level), The Inner Battlefield workshop, which

is a combination of core energetics and Internal Family Systems Therapy ideas put together in an epic inner exploration and expression. These modalities are part of the psychological field called body psychotherapy. See USABP.org, or (EABP) or (Bloch-Atefi and Smith, 2014).

Dream Interpretation Workshop

Dream interpretation processes help teens get in touch with subconscious material, and aid in becoming more whole and healthy psychologically (Berube, 2008; Marszalek and Meyers, 2006; Provost, 2008).

Gender and Consent Workshops

Issues of gender awareness, sexuality, and consent are vitally important for today's young people. ReTribe provides an open forum for teens' questions to be answered by mentors that they trust.

19% of undergraduate women experience sexual assault according to the Center for Disease Control (2016). Yet being falsely accused of rape is traumatic and violating as well. The proliferation of consent workshops in U.S. colleges gives testimony to the need for more clear communication and respect during sexual encounters. Our consent workshops teach both request making, and setting clear boundaries, in all relationships, not just sexual ones. What we have found is that some of the teens experience quite a bit of difficulty in saying 'no' to requests.

Vocation (Healing element)

We use simple exercises learned from the Counseling Laboratory for the Exploration of Optimal States (CLEOS) at the University of Kansas, designed to help high school students explore their vocational paths.

Addictions (Healing element)

Although our Adventure Game Theater program targets video game addiction in particular, by getting teens off their computers, and giving them the opportunity to live into a fantasy adventure using their bodies, as well as their minds – our addictions workshop addresses all types of addictions. We teach the basic psychology of multiplicity analysis (part of me wants to do the problematic behavior, and part of me doesn't) through the acting out of the parts, with humor, and other workshop processes.

Gratitude Circle (Nature element)

As a daily practice, every morning at ReTribe we gather for morning circle, and express our gratitude. Positive psychology shows that gratitude increases happiness levels (Harvard Mental Health letter, 2011).

Ceremony (Nature element)

As our mentors begin a bow drill fire, drumming and singing in our ceremonial space, the elders meet with teens to talk about ceremony, and respect. The teens enter the ceremonial space one by one in silence.

Our ceremonies are eclectic, as we are interested in fostering internal spiritual experience, not in imposing external rules or forms. From our calling in the directions (Native American as well as other cultures), to the Half Boy Myth (from Borneo), to a recitation of our own ReTribe history (such as the visit by some bears – thus our Bear Ceremony, and a visit from a bobcat – thus our Bobcat Ceremony, to a visit from many woodpeckers – thus our Woodpecker Ceremony a/k/a gender circles. Yes, this is true!), to our farewell Sufi song Ishkala, to the singing of “Rainbow” songs from many countries, we incorporate and welcome beautiful traditions from all over the world.

Ceremony creates a solid framework that lets the teens know that this is serious business, gives them a sense of safety in being held in the wisdom of their ancestors, creates a sense of awe and reverence, and serves to commemorate and celebrate their transformation and growth.

Fun (Play element)

Fun is the spoon full of sugar. Let’s face it, if the teens didn’t want to be here, there’s no way any of this could work. You can’t force healing. The element of choice is a fundamental prerequisite to change, which might explain the lack of results in forced inpatient and rehab programs. The extreme enthusiasm of the teens at ReTribe is the grease that makes everything happen.

At ReTribe, you will find teens and mentors (and elders too), pretending to be a bicycle, or dressed in black, killing each other with foam swords in the middle of the night in silence (Ninja the flag), or doing Original Play (like puppies do), or sliding around the wood floor on pillows, or playing watermelon water polo, or cracking up at an improv workshop or a performance at our Bardic Circle.

Leading play is both a skill and an art, and Howard Moody is the quintessential play teacher, while the rest of the staff – Julia Martin, Teddy Pietrzak, Emily Dipaola, Emily

Tompkins, Christopher Niedt – bring a humor and enthusiasm infused with kindness and acceptance, that pervades the culture.

When you laugh and feel happy, you are in an optimal state for growth.

Peter Gray (2011), makes a strong case for the connection between the decline of time children spend in play, and the rise of psychopathology. Play develops executive functions (prefrontal cortex) of decision making, planning, creativity, focus, problem solving, impulse control, and the social functions inherent in teamwork.

Healthy Living (Nature element)

It's hard to grow if you don't feel safe and happy, and its hard to feel safe and happy if your basic physical needs are not being met.

ReTribe provides a healthy scaffolding that many teens do not have in their home lives. With 90% of families having two working parents, there just isn't time to make nutritious meals, to make sure teens are getting enough sleep and exercise, etc. This can adversely affect the psychological health of the teens.

But at ReTribe they eat local, organic, homemade food (by our Kitchen Momma, Emily T), without any synthetic ingredients. Their nutritional needs are met because there isn't much available in the way of empty calories. They experience fragrance-free and toxin free air (we arrange this with the retreat centers), go to sleep by 10:30 and develop strong circadian rhythms, get exercise and fresh air daily, and are screen and media free. They also get healthy non-sexual touch (a/k/a cuddle piles), and are free of their addictions (smoking, marijuana, video games, sugar). Many of the teens are inspired to continue these healthy habits at home.

One very big difference for some of the teens between home life and ReTribe life, is that they have no access to screens at ReTribe. We've never had any pushback from the teens about this. They are so engrossed in live personal connection with each other that they pretty much forget about their phones and computers.

But at home, screen use is so ubiquitous, and damaging that a new mental health disorder, called Internet Addiction Disorder, is slated to be included in the next version of the DSM, which is the mental health disorder codebook for therapists. Estimates are that this is affecting 1.5 to 8% of the population (Cash, Rae, Steel, and Winkler, 2012). This National Institutes of Health report states "Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) ruins lives by causing neurological complications, psychological disturbances, and social problems."

Healthy food

The body/mind connection is well documented when it comes to the relationship between physical and psychological health. Depression, anxiety, and aggression all have nutritional correlates. Depression is alleviated with the elimination of sugar, processed foods, caffeine, and alcohol because of their effects on the body's biochemistry (Werbach, 1991). Also increasing protein intake can support the development of mood elevating neurotransmitters (Gottlieb, 1995). Werbach (1991) reports that studies show that a healthy diet can reduce suicide risk and that depressed patients should be checked for deficiencies in biotin, folic acid, pyridoxine, riboflavin, thiamine, vitamin B12, vitamin C, calcium, copper, iron, magnesium and potassium, because all of these deficiencies can cause depression. Additionally, anxiety can be helped by supplementing the amino acid GABA (Gottlieb, 1995), avoiding caffeine, alcohol and sugar, and making sure there are no deficiencies of pyridoxine, calcium or omega-3 fatty acids (Werbach, 1991). Nutritional influences on aggressive behavior are well documented with empirical studies, and show that reduced sugar, artificial food additives and dairy products can reduce aggressive behaviors. Checking for healthy levels of copper, iron, cadmium, calcium, lead, cobalt and zinc might prove helpful as these levels were off in aggressive youth in studies (Werbach, 1991).

At ReTribe, the food is almost entirely organic, locally grown, whole food. Much of the produce is grown in ReTribe's own soil rich gardens. The teens often help cook as well and learn skills in the kitchen that they can then take home to continue a healthy way of eating.

Exercise

As part of ReTribe's commitment to healthy living, we make sure the teens and staff get ample exercise every day. Exercise has been shown to be as effective for depression as medication (Weir, 2011).

Sleep

The American Academy of Pediatrics declared insufficient sleep in teens a public health epidemic (Millman, 2005). 87% of teens get far less than the recommended 9 hours of sleep (National Sleep Foundation). A Japanese study showed poorer mental health status among teens who got fewer than 7 hours or more than 9 hours of sleep (Kaneita et al., 2007).

Teens at ReTribe develop strong circadian rhythms by sleeping and waking on a healthy schedule.

Chores

Each teen at ReTribe assists in the daily chores of cooking, gardening, and cleaning. We believe it teaches responsibility, meets their need for contribution, and helps them feel belonging.

Indeed, a study in Latin America showed just such results (Telzer and Fuligni, 2009).

Cuddle Piles (touch)

Touch is an essential need for all mammals. In an increasingly litigious society, teachers and other professionals are warned against touching children. Parents give less touch as well, using plastic baby carriers, car seats, and cribs instead of carrying their babies and children on their bodies and using a family bed as has been the way of human beings for millions of years. It's no wonder 1 in 20 children suffers from sensory integration disorders. According to the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine, touch enhances attentiveness, alleviates depression, reduces pain, reduces stress, and improves immune function. For a complete study of touch see Ashley Montague's book, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*.

Meditation and Yoga (Meditation element)

Along with healthy habits of eating, toxin free living, exercise, etc., we offer the teens the basic skills of meditation and yoga. We hope that they will create a home practice. John teaches a basic mindfulness curriculum, as well as other meditation techniques, so that the teens can find out what techniques work for them.

The benefits of meditation and yoga are so well known there is no need to address these aspects in this paper.

One on One meetings with mentors (Healing element)

Programs don't change kids – relationships do. Every child needs one adult who's irrationally committed to his or her future. – Bill Milliken, Founder of Communities in Schools, [The Last Dropout: Stop the epidemic!](#)

I firmly believe that I'm alive today because of a caring adult. (Our mentors) didn't think we were worthless. They believed we had a future, something we could give. They didn't offer us an "answer" or a "program" – they offered themselves; they offered the time, love, and energy it takes to form a relationship with another human being. And there's no human being harder to relate to than an alienated teenager. (My mentor) walked me through 'the valley of the shadow of adolescence,' and, as I've learned dozens of times since, that's no easy walk. Without someone to believe in him, a teenager gets angry and he starts to take it out on other people and himself.

Bill Milliken, see above

Probably the strongest change agent in ReTribe is the loving and nonjudgmental relationships that form between teens, and between the teens and mentors/elders. These relationships continue throughout the year through social media as well as physical get togethers. Knowing you have a supportive tribe behind you makes all the difference in life.

New Cultural Norms (Healing element)

The very first day, (after playing some silly games so we can connect and relax), we meet to co-create our culture. We bring to the teens' attention the fact that the norms in society, and even in their high schools, were created by other people, and their only choices are to conform or not. But at ReTribe they have the opportunity to create the cultural norms themselves. Agreements that have come out of past ReTribes have included such things as -let the emotions flow, don't insult other people, respect property, humor and kindness can go together, anyone can join in, invite others to join in, it's ok to be different, etc. These norms, plus a host of silly cultural rituals that have developed over the years, such as cuddle piles, the good night group hug/song, goofy inside jokes, etc., create a culture of acceptance that leads to happiness and growth. It is our hope (and we are starting to see it happen) that the teens will bring this culture out to their own worlds.

Life Skills Workshops (Nature element)

Many different skills workshops are available to the teens. They range from primitive skills such as fire building, basket weaving, and herbalism, to acroyoga, sewing, poetry, music, or art.

Adventure Game Theater

Article from the Windy Hill Newsletter - June, 2002

If you happened to be at the Waldorf School on June 18-20, you might have witnessed the initiation of Arden LeMal, the new Royal Mage of the Land of Jaired. It took place at the Golden Lake (our sandbox transformed by cloth, candles, and a hidden smoke machine). Around the lake sat 30 warriors, alchemists, mages, and clerics, adorned in the costume of their native lands, toting swords, potion bottles, magic bolts, and horns (for time traveling).

To everyone's surprise, the initiation went awry, the mage was burned by the holy waters, and suddenly 5 black demons marauded into the sheep pen, scaring the warriors half to death. They all ran for cover into the Golden House woods. You'd have heard the excited voices of the teens as they regrouped. "Oh my God! What's going on?!" "Did you see that dead demon in the parking lot?" "Why did Arden LeMal get burned by the lake?" "You guys! What should we do?!" Though they were all in costume, the kids followed no script, and the decision as to what to do next truly lay with them. Their lives were in danger and they had a task to accomplish – together.

This was the experience at the 1st annual Adventure Game Theater at the Waldorf School of Princeton. We, and the children, hope it will be the first of many! At the closing circle on the last day, every single child expressed his intention to return, "This was the most awesome thing I ever did!"

While the kids see this as "the most awesome thing ever," I see AGT from a different perspective. For the past 5 years I've been studying transpersonal psychology, and in particular, the stages a person goes through on the psycho-spiritual path of consciousness growth. There is a stage which, according to one study, stymies 96% of people. They never get past it. Psychologists call it "disidentification." In his book, Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment, Rudolf Steiner calls it "The Meeting with the Guardian of the Lower Threshold." It is at this stage that a person begins his intentional inner growth, in Steiner's words "picking up the stuff of transformation." Carl Jung also noticed the difficulties people have in negotiating this transition.

"This is what happens very frequently about the midday of life, and in this wise our miraculous human nature enforces the transition that leads from the first half of life to the second. It is a metamorphosis from a state in which man is only a tool of instinctive nature, to another in which he is no longer a tool, but himself; a transformation of nature into culture, of instinct into spirit...But the transition takes a long time, and the great majority of people get stuck in the first stages."

Carl Jung, The Portable Jung

Steiner believed that a necessary precursor to this consciousness change is what he called the “Split of the Personality.” This means that you begin to realize that you are not your body, your feelings, or your thoughts. You stop identifying with your body, feelings, and thoughts, and begin to identify with something more permanent. Namely, you begin to identify with that “something,” that awareness, which is experiencing your body, feelings and thoughts. You find yourself, in the Lower Threshold, looking at your own personality (body/feelings/thoughts) as something separate from you. It is only at that point of disidentification that you can begin the inner spiritual work of transforming your own personality.

So what does this have to do with Adventure Game Theatre? The task of the teen years, according to eminent child psychologist, Erik Erickson, is to find one’s identity. “Who am I anyway?” is the question teens ask themselves. So what an enlightening experience it is for them then, to take a day or two, and explore this question from a totally new vantage point!

Imagine a girl walks into the costume room. She puts her normal clothes on the shelf and dons a monster costume. But she also must leave her normal personality (body, or actions/feelings/thoughts) on that shelf. For those few days, she no longer thinks the same kind of thoughts. Instead of “Oh, I hope that girl likes me,” she is now thinking, “How am I going to kill that nauseatingly sweet Princess?” She no longer feels the same feelings. Instead of feeling her normal embarrassment and timidity, she allows aggressive energy and power to fill her body as she roars through the woods. Instead of her usual timid actions, she is behaving in a totally different (albeit barbaric) way. And then at the end of the day, she takes her old clothes and her old personality off the shelf and puts them back on again.

But from this experience she can see, that she is NOT that personality which she is putting back on! She has experienced being behind a different mask, and who WAS that girl behind that other mask? The personalities have changed, but the aware being – that immortal soul which is only the wearer of that personality/mask is still the same. The question of “Who am I?” moves from “Am I a jock, or a geek?” to something with a whole lot more depth!

And what an incredible gift to her to be able to see that she is no victim to her personality. If she can become a monster, then couldn’t she become any personality she chooses? Maybe at the end of the day, when she is taking her normal clothes off that shelf, she might decide to leave some of her “normal” personality on that shelf! It’s her free choice and she’s had a practical experience of it. No amount of parental explaining, “But dear, you don’t HAVE to be so shy, really, you can choose to behave differently....” could accomplish this deep experiential learning of the reality of inner personal freedom.

In my clinical practice, I have found that more than half of my adult clients have not passed the Lower Threshold. They are still identified with their personalities. The question for me then is how the 96% of people who have never crossed the Lower

Threshold can be supported to pass it? How can they get that deep experiential understanding that they are something other than their own feelings, thoughts, or actions? So I see this Adventure Game Theatre experience for our teens as much more than “the most awesome thing ever”; I see it as an opportunity for them to gain the experiences that later will serve to allow them to join that 4% of people who pass the Lower Threshold, and can go on to do spiritual work. I see it as an opportunity for them to have a practical experience of who they really are.

Jane Martin, for the Parent Council

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