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To whom it may concern,

I recently collaborated with several researchers across Kutztown and Millersville Universities of Pennsylvania to conduct a study examining the impact of ReTribe, an 8-year old, retreat-style program dedicated to the self-actualization of children and youth. We used an online, concept-mapping procedure to gather over 600 statements from the participants of summer 2016 and distilled these down to 125 distinct sentiments, then, using a grounded theory approach, coded each sentiment to see what themes emerged.

The findings are compelling.

The data suggest that the ReTribe experience has a meaningful positive impact on youths' self-concept, self-awareness, esteem, affect, and social networks. Our findings also seem to indicate that the impact may be derived from the program's deep emphasis on acceptance, non-judgement, authentic communication, intimacy, and belongingness.

The way I see it, if after one week teens can proudly proclaim, "[If] I can make it seven hours in the woods alone...I discovered my power," we know ReTribe is doing something right. Through its after-school and summer camp programs, ReTribe builds a culture of radical self-acceptance, cultivates character and community values, and promotes unity with the earth.

The Rites of Passage program that was the subject of the study invites teens to build a temporary collective at a retreat center, where they are separated from their parents and friends and enter into a new, intentional community. The program launches with a Bear Ceremony, which uses ritual, song, and story to introduce teens to the journey they will embark upon. Community-building techniques include the deliberate selection of social norms, cooperative play, trust exercises, and music-making. Deep-sharing circles allow teens to reveal their authentic selves to peers and mentors, and get in touch with past traumas that may be in need of healing. The program then uses breathwork, trance dance, solo ventures into the wilderness, and Adventure Game Theater to facilitate the development of an altered state of consciousness, an integral component of indigenous rites of passages worldwide, which opens them up to the possibility of personal transformation.

ReTribe mentors continue to offer guidance to teens beyond the week-long sessions. Additionally, the ReTribe community stays connected throughout the year, through offseason community gatherings for local teens as well as online communication networks for out of state participants.

Although further research is necessary to determine the magnitude of the effects and precise mechanism of action underlying the transformation of the youth, we were nevertheless excited to discover a nature-based program that offers such a profound experience. Should you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to reach me at [pia.housealallport@millersville.edu](mailto:pia.housealallport@millersville.edu).

Kind regards,



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