ADOLESCENT PARTICIPANTS IN A WILDERNESS-BASED CHALLENGE:
AN EVALUATION OF A
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PREVENTION PROGRAM

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
Master of Education Degree

University of Tasmania
December, 1994

awarded 1996
Declaration

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Robert L. Steen
Abstract

A theoretical eclectic model adopting a preventive approach to address adolescents at-risk of offending was created. Salient features were then utilised to assess a primary and secondary prevention program in practice.

The sample (N = 62) consisted of 44 male and 18 female voluntary adolescents between 15 and 25 years of age, from all geographical areas within Tasmania, Australia. Conducted between September 1992 and October 1994, the study utilised a quasi-experimental recurrent institutional, non-parametric (pre-post-follow-up) design as a control measure, to gauge maturational changes over a 12 month period of 11 groups of participants.

Program effect was established through significant post minus pre participant general self-esteem and self-actualisation gain scores. Subsequent gender analysis found that female participants attained greater initial short-term gains in areas of social self-esteem (new peer relationships) and self-actualisation (personal insights). Conversely, longitudinal gains (pre to follow) were evidenced in the male sample in areas of general and personal self-esteem. Cross-sectional age-maturational analysis found significant personal self-esteem (happiness) gains achieved longitudinally by the early (i.e. 13-15) and in the short-term by the late (i.e. 19-21) adolescent groups of both genders.

On the basis of these results, it is posited that the gender neutral physical demands of this wilderness-based program assisted female adolescent participants in gaining a more accurate and positive understanding of their social and personal attributes and abilities. Adolescent males appear to begin the program with an overestimation of their physical selves. Post activity loss of bravado occurs amongst male peers, potentially signalling a less competitive atmosphere and possible opportunity for development of self.

The effect of this program as a catalyst preventing primary participants initial contact with court proceedings and reducing secondary prevention
participants further involvement over a twelve month period was substantiated. The program provides the stimulus to assist with the actualisation of potential, manifesting most significantly within the community in educational and employment outcomes by 68% of the participants within this sample. It is surmised that this process works as an ‘anti-depressant inoculation’ particularly for the more mature, in that psychological strength is attained positively influencing post behavioural patterns. Perhaps an alternative perspective is that post course euphoria leaves a lingering positive effect.

Recommendations for future research are included.
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Acknowledgements

The last three years of academia would not have been possible without the encouragement and assistance of my wife Leanne, who at Christmas last year discovered that with our third child was about to commence its journey into life. This work is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you, and love for always.

Callum’s arrival in September added an extra dimension to an already overtaxed family scenario (as far as time management for a thesis was concerned). Bonnie and Ben’s favourite question has been for as long as I can remember, “When are you going to finish the thesis dad?” Well, I hope to make up to you some of the time lost over your remaining formative years.

An initial thank you to every Project Hahn participant who volunteered to be a part of this study. I would also like to thank the Leaders of Project Hahn since 1992 for their willingness and strength to be vulnerable to intrusion by an eager sleuth, who may have seemed more interested in what was best for the participants from the safe haven of objectivity. This in particular includes past and present full-time staff of Jeff Watson, Dave Fleming, Janine Hopkins, Linton Kerber, and part-time casuals of Steve Willing, Mike Edwards, Stuart Scott, Hans Mollar, Paul Stein, and Nigel Pinkus. Further, assistance was gained through the support of research assistant Kay Grist and staff within the Tasmanian Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.

The Tasmanian Department of Justice has provided assisted study and I would like to acknowledge the time and support made available to achieve this final product. To my colleagues Liz Moore, Denise Olsen, Steve Osbourne, Bob Pearson, Micheal Cordwell, Frank Scanlon, Jillian Spriggs, Geoff Storr and Trish Wilson. Thanks for your inspiration. I hope it offers an insight into a positive future direction.

Dr. Carey Denholm, thank you for your door of experiential opportunity, and your major influence on guidance and direction of the process. Dr. Wayne Ransley on methodological insight, Stan Tomaszycki for video-8 transference and technical expertise, and a special thanks to Annie Abegg and Sheila Alison at Youth Studies Australia.

I would not have undertaken this project without the long-term nurturing of my parents, Arnold and Evelyn Sveen, and brother Ron and sisters Cathy and Lauree. This thesis is dedicated to you and to the memory of my grandparents T.W. and Lois Roberts.