



November 30, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter of support is a testimonial to the experiences that I have witnessed as a participant to the *Adventure In Adventure Out* Programs over the past fifteen years. As an educator, psychologist, former high school principal, and currently a supervisor of special education with over thirty years working with alternative students, I have seen the power of these experiences. The nature of the outdoors along with carefully laid out experiential group activities have had the power to transform individuals, groups, and even schools.

In many of our schools, students have developed easy manners to escape situations when they face hardships or failures. They have learned that they can easily avoid any unpleasant feelings by either walking out or finding a manner to get thrown out. Suspension data across the country support this epidemic. I have seen how *Adventure In Adventure Out* helps to counter this with one of our students who was previously expelled to us for a knife possession. It was the third day of a four day program and we were in the middle of a long hike on a very hot and humid day. Joya took off her bag and said, "I'm going back home". One of the staff masterfully challenged her that going back would be longer than trudging ahead. He then generalized this habit to future challenges as the student had a desire to attend college the next year. Joya completed the trip and years later still points out that the experience gave her the courage to face many of the challenges that she faced dealing with a severe learning disability while graduating from college with a nursing degree.

A few years ago, our school developed a Bridge Program to help at-risk middle school students' transition to high school. As part of a summer program, we offered them remedial math, remedial English and a wilderness experience. This experience became the central force that helped them develop a bond with each other, with staff, and with the school. Three years later, 80% have gained the appropriate academic credits to be Seniors while one student moved away from the town and one unfortunately dropped out of school. In comparison to a group that was recommended for the trip but did not attend, only 40% have met required credits to be Seniors. The group still talks about the fire side discussions, midnight pranks, and the overall experience of coming together as a group that helped them change their focus in life.

I would be remised by not finding a proper manner to point out how the right sequence of events can build to a life changing experience. One example was a group that went on a trip last year with *Adventure In Adventure Out*. After some games and activities to get to know each other, we put on our backpacks for a long hike. We then set up our tents, developed our norms for the week, and



prepared and ate dinner. As a culminating experience that night, we went on a night time spelunking experience. Our facilitator frontloaded the experience with wonderfully rich stories about the power of caves. He then asked each of us to develop and share life goals. Our caving experience brought laughter, tears, fear, and a truly bonding experience that kept progressing through the rest of the trip.

Day Two, brought out some challenges as the group started to face some adversity and at times develop some cliques. The facilitators developed a trust within individual members and the group as a whole. By the end of the day, the group had the confidence that they could move mountains. That confidence led to a courageous fire-side discussion in which each individual brought up profound issues from their life and found support and guidance from the group. The next night we found the group hungry for more as they not only went back to those courageous discussions but brought out new ways that they would look for support as they returned home.

Finishing the trip while canoeing down a river there was a true connection between group members. How very appropriate that as we approached an island that was filled with muddy shores that we did partake in a mud bath followed by a mud war. The pictures of all of us covered from head to toe in mud, hugging each other, and laughing hysterically is priceless.

In summary, I have had a long, rich history with *Adventure In Adventure Out* that spans over fifteen years. As I have pointed out, I have seen numerous individuals, groups, and school transform from their experiences that the outdoors along with a masterful staff can provide. As a telling fact of my experiences with *Adventure In Adventure Out*: Although one of the agencies that I contract with each year for an adventure experience requires a bidding process of at least three other agencies, I have let the director know that I will not attend if *Adventure In Adventure Out* does not receive the bid.

Sincerely,

John F. Karzar