



# YOU BELONG

## IGNITING A COMMUNITY OF EVERYDAY HEROES



Adolescence is a time of critical self-development; students contend with a host of pressures, risks and choices all while attempting to navigate who they are, what they value and the want to express themselves in the world. Concerns over “fitting in,” combined with the judgments and assumptions of others can have acute consequences. Important aspirations, feelings and fears are often kept hidden, yet lie just below the surface of what people allow to be seen and talked about. Students crave real belonging in authentic communities that will honor who they are, no matter their appearance, where they live or who they are attracted to.

At Adventure In Adventure Out we believe that acknowledging societal pressures and the real life experience of students is key to allowing these feelings and thoughts to be brought to the surface. It is when these things stay hidden that potentially destructive behaviors emerge and healthy action is perceived as too risky. Thus, our approach is to create space where students can acknowledge each other’s true experiences, and clarify the positive values and behaviors that will create a school culture that they wish to be a part of.

“**You Belong**” is a bold and transformative program that engages students and teachers in the creation of a physically and emotionally safe environment where courageous action is encouraged, and the true expression of each person is welcomed and celebrated. Through large group interactive exercises, small group dialogues, sharing of stories and anecdotes, video clips, music and poetry, students will look beyond and challenge initial assumptions. Students will explore real life experiences and risks that they face and will have the opportunity to discover the everyday hero that resides inside of them. You Belong combines fun, courage, vulnerability, strength and compassion to inspire a culture of everyday heroic action – a culture where authentic kindness and respect offers every student the opportunity to thrive.

The **You Belong** Program:

- Breaks down social and culture barriers.
- Reduces teasing, stereotyping and bullying.
- Increases peer advocacy.
- Increases sense of belonging, value and self-esteem.
- Increases ability to communicate honestly about difficult and challenging issues.
- Increases healthy emotional expression.

A community of belonging can be inspired by the action of just a few, how much more when it is an entire class of everyday heroes?

## Program Description

**Participants:** 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students

**AIAO Facilitators:** 3

**Teachers/Staff/Volunteers:** 10-15

**School Counselors:** 2-4

**Time:** 1 day per 65 students

**Cost:** \$2750 for first day \$2450 for each additional day

All processes will be facilitated by 3 Adventure In Adventure Out staff members before all 65 students. Some exercises will require students to break up into pre-assigned small groups that will include one teacher/staff in each group.

The day will begin with a progression of fast-paced, highly interactive and fun group activities, icebreakers and initiatives that serve to welcome participants and build rapport and trust amongst students, staff and facilitators in this particular environment.



From here the program will transition to framing parameters and norms that will create a physically and emotionally safe environment for the remainder of the day. This will include confidentiality, mandatory reporting, and the concept of challenge by choice. Support staff and from the school will also be introduced.

The remainder of the day leads participants through a progression of powerful hands-on activities, group dialogues, reflections and sharing. This process will support the safe self-disclosure of individuals as they share from their experiences and see their hopes, desires, struggles and fears normalized amongst their peers. The progression of activities will allow students to have an experiential encounter with key concepts, and will offer opportunities for these concepts to be practiced in a hands-on way.

Through this process, students will explore themes of expectations, assumptions, self-disclosure and compassion, and how these elements influence the way we perceive others and ourselves. Students will examine their choices within the context of real-life feelings, social pressures, anxieties, doubts, hopes and successes. Students will also identify how they can use “everyday heroism” to shape the culture of their school create a place where everyone feels they belong.

During this time, students will move back and forth from the larger group to an assigned core group of 6-8 students. This group will serve as the setting for all small group discussions and sharing. This group will be pre-assigned by school staff and teachers. There will be one teacher/staff in each small group that will have the dual role of active participant and a modeling presence within the group.

The day ends with an opportunity for appreciation, gratitude and sharing within the entire class. Due to all that has been built up to this point, this can be by far the richest part of the day. The final component is a commitment ceremony allowing students to identify ways in which they will carry forward the spirit of what took place during this program.

**Challenge by Choice:** This program implements the philosophy of challenge by choice. We are most interested in encouraging participants to explore their true and authentic selves amidst their peers. We find that this happens best when participants engage in activities that allow them to step from the world of the known and familiar to that of new experiences and abilities. It is important for participants to recognize that this experience involves exploring personal boundaries and understanding how to identify where it is healthy to stretch one's boundaries, as well as where it is important to hold fast to those boundaries for one's physical and emotional safety. We recognize that these boundaries will be different for each person and are ultimately for that individual to define. Our facilitators will always encourage participants to step outside their comfort-zone into the realm of the unknown where new learning and personal growth occurs. However, it is of vital importance that participants have the opportunity at any point to adjust their involvement in activity in such a way that they can still contribute to the process while maintaining their physical and emotional well-being.



**Role of Teachers and Staff:**

The design will require that there be one teacher/staff member assigned for each of the small groups. These individuals will be coached by AIAO staff, prior to the program, on how to maximize student participation and ownership of the process. These individuals will also model participation and the four elements of “everyday heroism” by participating in all activities, including the small group sharing. Along with these 10 individuals, there will be at least 3 other staff members, including school counselors, that will be unattached to a group. These individuals will be available if a student wishes to opt out of an activity or would like to have a 1-1 conversation during the group dialogues.

**Adventure In Adventure Out:**

Adventure In Adventure Out is an independent professional organization specializing in programs and outdoor trips that foster deeper connections with oneself, one's community and the natural world. We strongly believe that the experience of crossing thresholds into new and unknown territory holds incredible potential and power for individuals. We seek to offer experiences that support participants in unlocking and wielding with greater skill their own unique strengths, vision and mission as they step across these thresholds. We also seek to support the development of purposeful and inclusive culture within the communities that participants operate by empowering their ownership in this process. We do this through outdoor adventures, teambuilding, leadership development workshops, and mentoring programs. We have operated for eighteen years providing transformative programs to public and private schools, colleges, universities, community organizations, camps and businesses.



**How to Book a Program:**

Belonging begins with you! Call us at (413) 253-4910 to book a program!