Wandering | Self reflection through action

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Wandering

- = an adventurous and therapeutic week in the Belgian Ardennes
  ~ “Adventure Therapy”
  - activities such as hiking, cooking, climbing, sleeping, ...
  - but also: reflecting, solo-time and group therapy
- walking and being outside helps students to interact with their inner selves
- nature and group act as a co-therapist

Adventure therapy

- uses outdoor activities involving (perceived) risk, physical and emotional challenge, supported by traditional therapy
- involves the use of experience and action within cooperative games, trust activities, problem solving initiatives, outdoor pursuits, and/or wilderness expeditions
- debriefing or processing helps participants to internalize the experience and relate it to their therapeutic goals
- stems from experiential learning (~ Kurt Hahn)
- challenge by choice = important factor
Program

- 5 days, at the beginning of July
  - departing from one train station on Monday; leaving from another on Friday
  - students bring their own backpack/tent, carry all their stuff
  - **day 1-2**: hiking + camping (10-15 kms); cooking on gas stoves and having a campfire
  - **day 3**: arrival at a cozy house, warmth and being taken care of
  - **day 4**: reflection exercises and Via ferrata/other activity
  - **day 5**: packing up – preparing to go home – goodbyes
- follow-up activity in October-November

Answers the need of

Prevention

Loneliness as a common student – theme

Students who otherwise would not be reached because
- there’s resistance for classical therapy
- some students are verbally not so strong
- a lot of young people don’t like to talk when sitting in a small cubicle
What words come to mind when you think about ‘Wandering’?

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code: 73 53 50

What words do participants use?
Procedure

- announcement starts 5 months before the program
  - posters, intranet, mouth to mouth
- intakes: from 3 months up to 3 weeks before the program
  (selection of students)
- medical questionnaire
- material list
- € 175 (excl. material + travel costs)
  We can make a personal agreement for students with
  financial difficulties (min cost= € 25) and help them with
  materials
Intakes

- questions about personal goals, expectations, expertise, (physical/group), doubts, medical issues, material
- contra-indications: pressing suicidal thoughts, complex trauma with severe forms of dissociation, psychosis problems, severe psychiatric diagnoses
- students who are not selected can still get individual (walk-and-talk) therapy at Stuvo
- participants can continue their process after Wandering in individual therapeutic sessions at Stuvo

Coaches/Therapists

- 2 coaches: 1 main coach + 1 co-coach
  - main coach
    - takes the lead
    - explains the exercises
    - individual + group coaching
  - co-coach
    - eye on the participants during exercises
    - eye on the time
    - individual coaching during the walks
    - mindfulness
- both consult on a regular basis
Expertise

- ‘soft skills’
  - at least one of the coaches is a certified psychotherapist
  - knowledge of experiential learning and Adventure Therapy
  - expertise in group dynamics
- ‘hard skills’
  - hiking, camping, map reading, outdoor cooking
  - we hire external expertise for the climbing activity (but make strong agreements about emotional safety and psychological processes)

How students describe wandering (1/2)

“A group of students who work on their difficulties by connecting with each other in a beautiful natural environment, which gives them the opportunity to push their boundaries together. Mentally and physically."

“A week of going 'back to basics', a retreat. A moment to let it all sink in and realize how you are really doing.”
How students describe wandering (2/2)

"To connect (again) with oneself and with others. By physical and mental challenges you encounter your boundaries and those of others and learn to respect them. All of this happens in a safe environment, amongst peers who have (because of their own path in life) a lot of empathy and respect for your struggles and choices."

Goals

- to improve self-confidence and resilience of students
- to therapeutically work on individual themes like anxiety, boundaries, assertiveness, social abilities or self-esteem
- to create a safe space, a peer group where sharing can take place
- to help students understand their behavioral patterns better
- to create a chance to experiment with new patterns of behavior so that corrective emotional experiences can take place
- to help students (re)discover their talents and strengths
Added value

- 5 days together creates the time and space to talk whenever you are ready
- physical activity stimulates the brain and vice versa
- going outside (movement) can help students to turn emotionally inside (allowing them to ‘be moved’)
- nature can lower thresholds for students to feel connected (with each other and with themselves)
- students support each other – creating a support system that lasts longer than only this particular week
- professional value as a therapist plus for the therapeutic relationship

Added value according to students (1/2)

"I learned to persevere and to still feel where my limits and boundaries are. I experienced how many positive qualities I have and developed new qualities in a very unique way that I can use for the rest of my studies, career, life."
Added value according to students (2/2)

"This concept helped creating a closely bonded group in no time. An experience that was not only warm and beautiful to be part of, but also gave me the confidence to work on my personal learning goals. The group experiences, support and openness of others really speeded up my ability to work on themes that I had been working on for ages."

Challenges

- distance and proximity as a therapist – boundaries
- indications and contra-indications
- tiredness and self-care as a therapist
- safety agreements
- transfer to daily life for students
- timing of the program
- professional relationship after the program has finished
Some case examples

Wandering Song by Seppe

It’s like our minds be in a maze,
but we all seem to be going through the same pains
throwing that backpack off with bad memories
oh just trying to elevate.
no we don’t need WiFi for a week we disconnected.
we need just a couple of days to go back to our own souls and feel reconnected.
finding our own purposes,
want to know where our goals are at.
discovering our true selves, finding the right paths
oh Wa-a-ndering
Testimony of Seppe

Questions?
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