Benefits of Attending a Survivor Family Retreat

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Objectives

- Identify reasons families attended the weekend family retreat
- Recognize how attending the retreat changed families’ thinking about the future
- Discuss how attending the retreat changed life priorities
- Review how family relationships changed since attending the retreat
Background

- Cancer = loneliness, depression, only one
  - Wellisch et al., 2009

- Cancer-focused camps provide respite from daily life as a patient
  - Hancock, 2011; Laing & Moules, 2014

- Retreats/Camps vary in length
Theoretical Framework

- **Therapeutic Landscapes**
  - Fresh air
  - Breathtaking Scenery
  - Being with nature

- **Nature**
  - Healing
  - Restorative
  - Removes isolation

Gesler, 1992
Review of the Literature

- Enhanced sense of normalcy
  Beckwitt, 2014

- Increased emotional and social support
  Conrad & Altmaier (2009)

- Enhanced relationships with peers, family
  Laing & Moules, 2014

- Increased mood, less depressive symptoms
  Wellisch et al. (2009)
ROL continued

- Martiniuk, Amylon, Briery et al. (2014)
  Review of Literature

- Camps for children with cancer offer skills in:
  - Friendship
  - Family belonging
  - Teamwork
  - Responsibility
  - Self-Concept
Gaps

- Limited understanding of how a Therapeutic Landscape influences the camp experience

- The therapeutic environment or the components of the experience

Martiniuk, Silva, Amylon et al. (2014)
Current Project

- IRB approval

- Exploratory Study
  - Demographic information about families & survivors/siblings
  - Interview question guide
  - Three (3) audio-taped focus groups
  - Qualitative Descriptive design & analysis
Inclusion Criteria

- Had to have attended the retreat at least once
- Attended the retreat over 12 months prior or not in the most recent retreat

Exclusion Criteria

- Attended the retreat in the past 12 months or most recent retreat
- Children < than 13 years of age at the time of the study
Sample

- Participant Families: 7
- Caucasian: 7
- Total Participants: 23
- Age of survivors: 16-22 yrs
- Age of survivors/sibs (retreat): 12.7-13.9 yrs
- Attendance at Retreat - Once: 3/7 (43%)
Themes

- Reconnecting (with family) (with others)
- Putting life in perspective (priorities)
- Change in outlook on life
Reconnecting

- To the place their child(ren) spent a week during the summer
  - No distractions
  - Bricks

- With other families
  - “You think you’re the only one”
  - “You’re allowed to be numb” “others get it”
Reconnecting

- With their own families
  - “we spent time together”
  - “my husband and I handled it [cancer] differently”…”now we are closer”

Survivors’ Comments/Reflections
“you’re forced with parents…they’re kinda cool”
Relaxed and engaging (when talking about parents)
Change in Perspective

- Not sweating the small stuff
- Reacting differently to crises
Young Adult Childhood Cancer Survivors

Panel

- Briefly tell their story
- Address their challenges
- Overcoming their challenges
- Engage in dialogue with parents and adolescents (who choose to attend)
- Families (parents) dialogue with each other
“more laid back” …”I take each day as it comes”

Mom, when her son broke his leg
“is he bleeding out” “then he will be fine”

Mom, talking about her daughter
“grateful for every day those kids have so many more problems”
- Valued their own child’s health

- Cancer provided the lens from which these parents especially, but older children viewed their lives now.
  - Comparison of events now to then and put into perspective
Changed Outlook on Life

- Volunteering - giving back
- Empowerment
Empowerment

- Advocating for child (ren) at school
  
  “will advocate for my child at school (education support)”

- Motivating survivors
  
  “push her …she can do anything”
  
  (The ropes)
Giving Back

- Volunteerism
  “never given a wish”

- Counseling
  “wanting to give back to the community, the hospital”

- Mentors
Summary

- Spending time in a therapeutic environment either once or over time has given these families:
  - interrupted time with each other
  - meaning in their own lives
  - empowerment to help others
  - empowerment by others
Camps and retreats offer opportunities for targeted interventions to

- Improve psychological wellbeing
- Enhance social support and connectedness with others
- Finding meaning in their own lives and having a childhood cancer survivor
Limitations

- Single institution
- Small sample
- Consider ongoing evaluation of the retreat using prospective, longitudinal approach over time
Implications for Practice

- Offer opportunities for families to connect with others in non-acute, non-threatening environment.

- Use institutional or national childhood oncology camps or young adult retreats as opportunities to educate, empower, and promote psychosocial wellbeing.
References


