The aim of this study is to look at whether we can use outdoor activities as a way of improving self concept in young people with behavioural disorders.

Leith (1998) defines self concept as ‘a form of trust and belief in our own abilities’. This is where we can either believe that we are good enough to perform a task or we can believe that we aren’t good enough to perform a task. An example of this is when one person will believe they are capable of climbing a 5a route on a climbing wall and they will have high levels of self concept. Someone else may believe they aren’t able to climb a 5a route so they don’t try and this person would have low levels of self concept.

Young people with behavioural disorders are individuals who have learned to behave in an inappropriate way and are sometimes seen as being unhappy with themselves (Papathedorou, 2005). Their behaviour can often get them involved with alcohol, drugs, violence and then this can affect their life at home, at school and eventually get them in trouble with the police. After a while this lifestyle could make them unhappy and result in them having low levels of self concept because they start to believe they aren’t good enough to do anything apart from getting into trouble.

DISCUSSION

The results of two of the journals were that participation in adventurous activities could help enhance self concept in adolescents. In Larsons (2007) journal he found that after the five day adventure camp program, there were positive changes in self concept due to the participation in adventurous activities. This was the same outcome for the study that McDonald and Howe (1989) investigated. They also found that the use of challenge or initiative games had a positive effect on the self concept in abused children. However, in Orren and Werners (2007) study, they found that brief wilderness programs didn’t have an affect on the self concept in adolescents.

One of the reasons that may explain why those adolescents’ didn’t experience an affect on their self concept may be because of the length of the program. In their study, Orren and Werner (2005) state that the program length may impact the opportunity for some of the influential elements to happen within the experience. The difference between this study and the other two studies was that in Orren and Werners (2007) study, the program would only be one day or two nights whereas the other two were either a five day camping program or an hour long session everyday for 28 consecutive days. In a one day or two night program the participant wouldn’t be able to have the full experience of participating in outdoor activities and to have the ability to discover new skills and abilities for themselves. For example on a one day adventure program, the participant may only get to experience one activity whereas on a longer program, they may get to experience a wider variety of activities which could improve different aspects of their life like teamwork and decision making.

When using an adventure program which has a longer duration, it can give the young people a chance to build up positive relationships with the instructors. Cross (2004) talks about how a positive relationship between young people and an adult or peer can help achieve a positive outcome in life. She states that if the adult is positive about the young person and have faith in their abilities there may be some change in the young person. There is always a chance for the instructor to get to know the participant and build up a relationship with them so that they have the positive role model in their life because they often don’t have someone to look up too.

During my placement year I worked with a group of boys from a high school. These boys had behavioural disorders and a lot of them had very low levels of self concept. Figure 1 shows four boys that we worked with over the year where we took them out of school and took mountain biking, rock climbing, den building and we trained them to become trainee instructors. After a year of working along side them, we saw dramatic improvement in their self concept because they started to believe that they were capable of doing a lot more than they first thought they could do.

REFERENCES

Leith, L. (1998). Exercising your way to better mental health. Fitness Information Technology Inc. Morgantown, USA. Pg 10