



Breaking down the stigma of mental illness through an adventure camp: A collaborative education initiative

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Abstract

In May 2001, 40 mental health consumers and 80 third year undergraduate nursing students participated in a two-day outdoor adventure camp entitled 'Inside Out: Adventures in Mental Health Nursing'. Based on the success of this program, the following year 200 third year undergraduate students along with 100 mental health consumers attended the camp. Together they explored issues of mental health and illness through experiential and perceived risk challenges. The program involved learning about and participating in action-based approaches to working with people. The following report describes this educational initiative that enabled nursing students to learn from mental health consumers and, at the same time, challenge negative views about mental illness. The evaluation data reveals a breakdown in the stigma of mental illness as consumers and students came to know, trust, and count on each other in order to succeed in the adventure challenges. Other benefits and outcomes for both students and consumers are outlined as well as shortcomings.

Keywords

stigma, collaborative education, adventure camp, action-based learning, mental health education, student nurses

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Citation:	Stuhlmiller, C.M., (2003). Breaking down the stigma of mental illness through an adventure camp: A collaborative education initiative. <i>Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health</i> 2(2) www.auseinet.com/journal/vol2iss2/stuhlmiller.pdf
Published by:	Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health (Auseinet) www.auseinet.com/journal
Note:	The term 'consumer' is used with respect for contemporary nomenclature. However, the author prefers the term 'person' over consumer to denote a reciprocal, rather than a one sided exchange that occurs in practice. Received 17 June 2003; Revised 14 July 2003; Accepted 21 July 2003.