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**THE NATIONAL INDIAN YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECT'S ZUNI SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM
PROGRAM: COMBINING CHALLENGE/ADVENTURE WITH MEANINGFUL SERVICE**

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Abstract

In the Spring of 1992 the National Indian Youth Leadership Project developed a Basic Wilderness Search and Rescue Skills Training Program, trained a group of high school volunteers in wilderness SAR skills, and founded a search and rescue team in Zuni, New Mexico that is officially recognized by the state.

This program was developed out of the NIYLP's pro-active approach to substance abuse programming, and the idea of service leadership. Based on the process of habilitation, the program addresses the need for youth to interact with viable role models, to see themselves as a part of something larger, and to see themselves as capable individuals.

In the spring of 1992 the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP), under a grant from the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP), began sponsorship of an ambitious project; the Zuni Search and Rescue (SAR) Team.

Zuni is an ancient Pueblo Indian community of approximately nine thousand persons in the desert mesa country of Western New Mexico. Zuni has the distinction of being possibly the first community within the borders of the present day United States to be "discovered" by Europeans (Green, 1979). The Spanish invaded the Southwest and came into contact with the Zunis in 1539. Once consisting of multi-storied adobe apartments, the current central village of Zuni is constructed of old stone buildings put up in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Surrounding this old village is an "urban sprawl" of cinder block homes, mobile homes, and "trading posts" where tourists can buy Zuni jewelry (Zuni silversmiths are renowned for their intricate inlay jewelry designs). Zuni has two elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. The Zuni people speak their own language, as well as English, and hold to their ancient spiritual traditions. Despite these cultural strengths Zuni youth face high unemployment, a high rate of teen pregnancy, and high rates of drug and alcohol abuse.

In order to help meet the needs of Zuni youth The Zuni SAR Team project is successfully combining service leadership with challenge/adventure programming. This dual programming approach was developed by McClellan Hall, M.Ed., Founder and Director of the NIYLP.

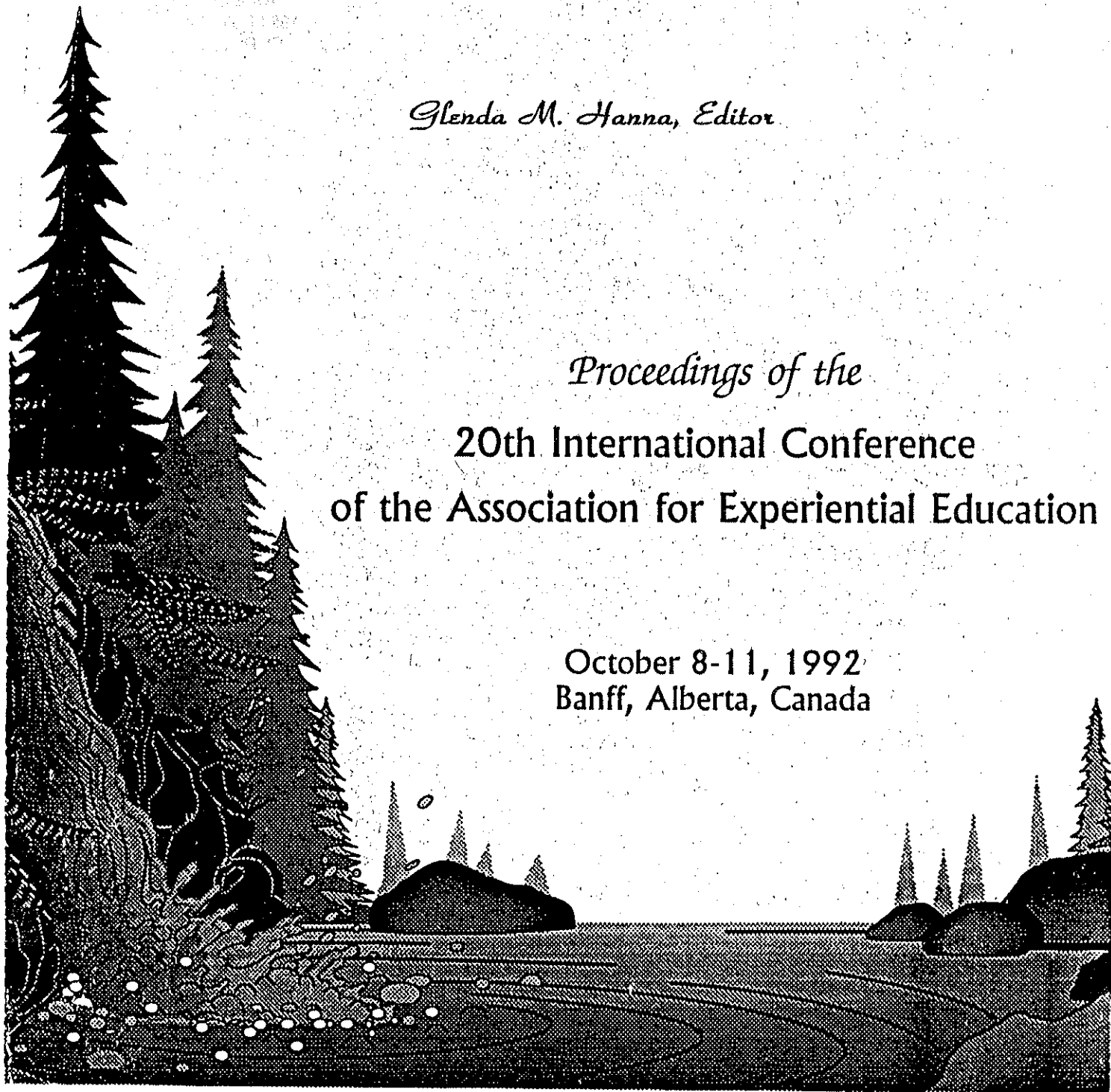
The National Indian Youth Leadership model was created in response to the need to develop specific skills in Indian youth, who

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will eventually assume citizenship and leadership roles in the community... The underlying theme for our leadership development model is service leadership.

The uniqueness and appeal of the NIYLP model is that it not only instills leadership skills through hands-on learning opportunities but also challenges youth to apply their newly acquired skills through projects they must design and implement in their communities (Hall, 1991, p. 7).

Under the OSAP grant the NIYLP provides pro-active substance abuse programming to Indian communities in New Mexico. This pro-active approach exposes at-risk youth who show positive leadership-abilities to various types of challenge/adventure and community service activities. The object is to habilitate youth (as apposed to rehabilitate). In "...*something shining, like gold-but better.*" an NIYLP manual for program leaders, McClellan Hall outlines the habilitation process:

The process of habilitation...is effected through the understanding that there are specific perceptions and skills that need to be developed. These include the ability to identify with viable role models... The ability to see oneself as a part of something larger... The ability to see oneself as capable (Hall, 1991, p. 18).

The idea here is to expose youth to basic life skills that they don't get in their daily life environments (home, school, tribal). They cannot be re-habilitated if they have never been habilitated in the first place. The Zuni SAR program addresses all these issues and more.

The SAR Program

The formation of a high school youth based SAR team was written into the original OSAP proposal as it was believed that the formation, training, and operation of a SAR team would help facilitate the habilitation process of the participants. The project began by researching the role of volunteer search and rescue units in New Mexico, and the need for search and rescue resources in western New Mexico. The research showed that New Mexico has a very large network of volunteer search and rescue teams sanctioned by the State of New Mexico Department of Public Safety, and that there was a need for another team in the search and rescue district that Zuni falls within. Both of the two existing teams in the area, and the State Search and Rescue Resource Officer, encouraged the NIYLP to develop a team in Zuni.

The second step was to determine if the students in the two high schools in Zuni were interested in the program. When the State Search and Rescue Resource Officer came to Zuni to do a presentation on Search and Rescue in New Mexico almost thirty students showed up. This was an excellent turnout for Zuni where most NIYLP programs usually draw small numbers of students.

After determining that there was indeed interest in a search and rescue program, the author (the NIYLP Wilderness Specialist) developed a 100 hour experientially based training program, and put together a team of instructors who were experienced both in teaching wilderness and search and rescue skills and working with Indian youth.

The instructional team included the author; Kevin McCourt, an instructor for the Santa Fe Mountain Center who contracts frequently with the NIYLP; Randy Carr and Craig Birrell, faculty

of Zuni Twin buttes High School; students and faculty of the Armand Hammer United World College's Search and Rescue Team (Montezuma, New Mexico); and John Stokes and Dave Martine of The Tracking Project (Corrales, New Mexico).

In an attempt to maintain interest and motivation on the part of the students, the NIYLP petitioned the school board to award credit for the training. A course outline and proposal for school credit was drawn up and presented to the Zuni school board and principals of the two high schools. Although the program was completely extracurricular, the school board agreed to award one full elective credit to students completing the training.

The training was divided into seven sessions and focused not only on skill building but on group building and communication skills. The first three sessions were after school sessions and consisted of a physical fitness class, rappelling instruction and practice, and basic map reading skills. The next session was an orientation to a five day wilderness trip. By this time, it was obvious that the students were truly interested in the program. Thirteen students (seven male and six female) had attended all four sessions up to this point which was an incredible success for programming in Zuni. All thirteen students arrived on time for the five day expedition, sacrificing their Spring break to do so.

The five day expedition operated in the backcountry of the Zuni Indian reservation and focused on wilderness living/survival skills, group building, wilderness first aid, land navigation, and tracking. All thirteen students successfully completed the expedition.

The next session was a weekend training held at the Armand Hammer United World College of the American West in North Central New Mexico. This session focused on search and evacuation skills. The workshops and classes were conducted by students of the College's Search and Rescue Program under the direction of Tom Lamberth, the program's director.

This was one of the most exciting parts of the program as it facilitated dynamic interaction between the international students of the UWC, and students from Zuni. Unfortunately, four of the students had tribal religious obligations and could not make it to the training, one other student lived outside of the Zuni community and also did not attend. Despite the offer to schedule a make-up training all five of these students dropped out of the program (three of these students later began coming to the on-going training sessions and hope to complete the initial training in the Fall of 1992). Future plans include sending Zuni Search and Rescue Team members to the UWC to teach search tracking, a skill the UWC team is unfamiliar with.

The final session was an overnight mock search in conjunction with the two established SAR teams in Zuni's SAR district. It rained heavily all day and night. The eight students who attended received a real confidence boost when it became obvious that they were adequately trained and equipped to deal with the elements. The Team spent the night under tarps in an unrelenting rainstorm and woke up warm and dry in the morning, ready to continue the exercise. The trainees' enthusiasm, competence, and readiness gained them the admiration of the other SAR teams.

The last function of the training program was an elegant award dinner for the students and their families where the students received a certificate of completion and custom designed Zuni Search and Rescue patches.

The eight students who finished the program were awarded one full elective credit through the Zuni Public Schools. All but one of them earned American Red Cross standard first aid certification.

The team also earned recognition by the State of New Mexico as a sanctioned SAR team.

A few months after completing their initial training, members of the Zuni SAR Team put their skills to the test when the state police called the team out to help search for an eight year old boy. The boy had wandered away from his family's camp and had been missing for 12 hours. The Zuni SAR Team was on search for about 30 hours and were asked to investigate a set of tracks that had been found by a group of untrained volunteers. *As a result of their training the Zuni SAR team members were able to determine that the tracks were that of the missing boy.* The search coordinator began to shift search resources into the sector where the tracks had been found, eventually finding the boy alive and well after having been missing for close to 48 hours.

The SAR Program and the Habilitation Process

The Zuni SAR team project directly addresses the three major elements of the habilitation process.

- 1) **Ability to identify with viable role models:** The Zuni SAR program provides a multi leveled group of role models. First and foremost are the NIYLP staff and high school faculty who are involved in the SAR program. These persons work frequently and closely with the SAR students in an on going program of skills development and maintenance. An important focus of the program is to develop the leadership and teaching skills of the students so that they become role models and instructors for new volunteers coming into the program. Another goal of the program is to take the SAR Team members into the grade schools to teach children basic survival skills and what to do if they get lost. The Zuni SAR Team members also work frequently with tribal and state law enforcement officials and search team members from communities all over the state. In this way, the SAR team members are exposed to positive role models in the community; from their schools, and from community emergency services providers. They are exposed to role models from outside of their community; from state police and other state recognized SAR teams. In addition they themselves become role models for new volunteers coming into the program, and for the children in the elementary schools.
- 2) **Ability to see oneself as a part of something larger:** Members of the Zuni SAR Team have the opportunity to see very graphically that they are involved in something that is larger than themselves. Trust and team building are important elements of the training activities, but first students learn that in order to perform SAR functions they need to be strong both mentally and physically, they need to understand the basic principals of wilderness living/survival, and that they must always have adequate gear. This is self-sufficiency at a fundamental level. The students learn that in order to rely on each other as a team, and in order to be able to find, treat, and evacuate a person in need, they must first take care of themselves. Once this is understood the team members can begin to build trust in each other. While on search the team members understand that there is a very acute need. Through thorough and intensive training the team members understand they can fulfill that need. By the same token, as members of a larger effort, team members understand that it is not important which team finds the subject, only that through the efforts of everybody that the subject be found. If the subject is not found the team members need to know that they did everything they could, to the best of their ability according to their training and experience, to find the missing subject.

This self-sufficiency and team trust manifests as professionalism in the SAR function, which

gains the trust of the official agencies such as the police and Emergency Medical Service personnel.

The Zuni SAR Team has been able to gain trust and support from the Zuni community, the Zuni Tribal Police, the Zuni Fish and Wildlife Department, and the Zuni Department of Emergency Medical Services. The team has gained the respect of the other teams in the local SAR district, and it has gained the approval of the state SAR authorities through official state sanction. In this way the team members gain recognition not only within their own community, but also within the larger regional community on up to the state level.

This extension into the larger community helps the rural students make connections with the world outside their own pueblo and gives them a sense of responsibility that extends beyond their own community. At the same time, working closely with tribal entities gives the community a sense of pride and ownership of the SAR team and provides these adolescents with much-needed recognition from significant adults. (Pilz, 1992, pp 11)

- 3) **Ability to see oneself as capable:** The SAR training program gives the students many opportunities to see themselves as capable. For most of the students, the skills involved in the program are new. The program has been consciously designed to give the participants the opportunity to go well beyond simple exposure to wilderness SAR skills. Indeed, there is the expectation that they will gain a high level of competency and ability to use the skills in a professional manner.

This aspect of habilitation really hit home when the SAR students bivouaced in the pouring rain and woke up dry the next morning. It was illustrated again when they were able to make a positive identification of the tracks left by the lost boy. First aid skills, the ability to track a person, the ability to navigate with map and compass, the ability to feel at home in the wilderness regardless of the weather, the ability to package an injured person in a litter and evacuate them to safety, all these things give the students opportunities to see themselves as capable.

Evaluation and Conclusions

Under the OSAP grant the NIYLP program is required to hire an independent firm to evaluate the program. Fieldworks Inc. used two evaluation instruments to collect data on the effectiveness of the program. The first instrument, the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory, is given as a pre and post test to all NIYLP participants. The second instrument was a test of SAR skills and knowledge developed specifically for the Zuni SAR program by Arie Pilz of Fieldworks Inc. and the author. Dr. Pilz points out that because of the small number of participants completing both the pre and post tests (8) the results cannot be considered statistically significant, but they do offer insights into the success of the program in achieving its goals.

In their year end evaluation report, Fieldworks Inc. states that "The SAR project appears to be an unqualified success for the youth who completed the training. This is borne out by the outcome data." The report goes on to say that, "On the pretest, the participant mean score out of a possible 100 points was 52. On the posttest, the participant mean score out of a possible 100 points was 74.

This represents a gain of 22 points over the course of training" (Pilz, 1992, p. 12). One of the most interesting results of the test is described as follows in the Fieldworks report;

It appears [according to the test scores] that the SAR experience may have confirmed a self-perception of wilderness skills for the boys, while the girls learned that they could do more than they thought! This empowering change for the girls has been seen before at NIYLP camps (Pilz, 1992, p. 12).

The author feels it is important to note that the test was developed largely out of his SAR experience in the Pacific Northwest, and that some of the techniques and terminology that the Zuni SAR team learned from the United World College and other local SAR teams was different and therefore not accurately represented on the test. It is the author's belief that if the test had more accurately represented local techniques and terminology the posttest scores would have been significantly higher. This will be verified by refining the test instrument and administering it to the next group of trainees. "The evaluation team will continue to work with the [NIYLP] to refine the instrument before the next cycle of training begins" (Pilz, 1992, p. 12).

Some interesting insights also came out of the Self-Esteem Inventories.

The SEI gives an overall self-esteem score and 4 subscale scores (General self-esteem, Social/peer related self-esteem, Academic/school-related self-esteem, and parents/home-related self-esteem). In addition there is a "lie scale" built in to measure the defensiveness of the respondents (Pilz, 1992, p. 6).

In the Overall scale the test scores went from 18.57 - intermediate, to 22.71 - high to very high. The general score went from 6.2 - intermediate, to 8.4 - high. The social score went from 2.5 - low, to 3.5 - intermediate. The academic score went from 3.5 - intermediate, to 4.5 high. And the parents score went from 3.7 - intermediate, to 4.0 - high. The report points out that "The sample size is too small to permit inferential statistical analysis, however, the data is very encouraging. Participation in the SAR training program appears to have a real impact on self esteem" (Pilz, 1992, p. 13).

The Future of the SAR Program

Because of relative infrequency of SAR missions in Western New Mexico it is important to keep the team busy with meaningful service in between missions. This is accomplished partly through monthly training sessions that allow the team members to keep their skills sharp, and to develop new skills and explore new SAR areas such as technical rescue.

Training alone is not enough to keep the participants interested and involved in the program. As mentioned earlier, the SAR team members will soon be getting involved in training other SAR groups, and in doing preventative SAR education in the grade schools and possibly doing hunter education in conjunction with the Fish and Wildlife Department.

SAR volunteers must always be prepared to offer first aid while in the field, but in reality rarely get the opportunity to do so. In order to give the SAR team members hands-on patient treatment experience, the NIYLP is exploring the possibility of offering a first responder program in conjunction with the Zuni Department of Emergency Medical Services. Those students completing

the course would then have the opportunity to ride As a third attendant on the Zuni ambulances.

It is the hope of the NIYLP that the Zuni community will take over full responsibility for the SAR program before the OSAP grant runs out in 1995. In this way the many benefits of the program, both to the team members and to the subjects of searches, would remain in the community for years to come. With the amount of interest and support that the program has received from the schools and emergency service providers in Zuni this hope has a good chance of becoming reality.

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