

David Scheinfeld, PhD — Counseling Psychologist

HEALING WITH OUTDOOR ADVENTURE THERAPY

Sunlight. Mountain hiking. Canoeing. For years, health care practitioners and researchers have believed in the healing power of therapeutic adventure (or ecotherapy). Among its benefits are easing stress and anxiety and helping individuals overcome depression.

It's a therapeutic intervention that David Scheinfeld, PhD, has taken far beyond his office walls. Through Outward Bound for Veterans, Scheinfeld is leading team-building outdoor adventures for military service members who have returned from deployment to help them rebuild confidence, boost their sense of purpose and readjust to life at home.

Scheinfeld, who received his doctorate in counseling psychology in summer 2014 from the University of Texas at Austin, discovered the connection between therapeutic adventure and veterans' mental health challenges while instructing a 2009 Outward Bound canoeing trip in northern Minnesota.

"I realized therapeutic adventure provided a unique opportunity for veterans to come together as a community again after their deployment," says Scheinfeld. "It helps them explore their interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges in a safe, supportive environment."

DUAL ROLES SUPPORT RETURNING VETERANS

While leading therapeutic adventures, Scheinfeld takes on multiple roles as practitioner and researcher.

"The first role as practitioner involves taking a group of up to 10 veterans into the wilderness environment where I integrate therapeutic facilitation with outdoor adventure to help support them in the reintegration process," says Scheinfeld. "We also provide an opportunity for camaraderie and fun that can be quite therapeutic for veterans who often live with high levels of stress in civilian life."

Scheinfeld then applies what he learns in the field to his research.

"My second role as a researcher is to examine the psychosocial outcomes of nature-based therapy for veterans," Scheinfeld adds. "In that capacity, we look at how these interventions impact veterans' mental health symptoms, their interpersonal relationships, their sense of social connectedness, sense of purpose in life, resilience and their level of self-confidence."

INFORMING THERAPEUTIC PROGRAMS

Scheinfeld is excited about blazing new trails for veterans — literally and figuratively.

"My dissertation study was the first large-scale longitudinal study to examine the psychosocial impact of Outward Bound for veterans," he continues.

Scheinfeld is applying outcomes research using experimental design and longitudinal research methods. He collects quantitative data using self-report measures and qualitative data capturing text responses to open-ended questions.

But most of all, Scheinfeld enjoys the satisfaction of working to help improve the lives of veterans.

"We're gaining more evidence that complementary and alternative interventions, such as therapeutic adventure, can help those veterans who may not always benefit from — or seek out — traditional forms of therapy," he says. "I think we'll be seeing the use of therapeutic adventure for veterans integrated alongside more traditional mental health treatment programs to help boost their effectiveness and reduce dropout rates from therapy."



"Therapeutic adventure can help veterans get the help they need to readjust to life at home."

COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

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