

# Can Do Project:

Bush counselling program for drug and alcohol clients in rehabilitation



Project Hahn



A joint project between Project Hahn & the Salvation Army Bridge Centre

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<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Submission.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Project Design.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Why use the bush as a counselling medium?.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Project Hahn Program.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Salvation Army Bridge Program.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>History of the Bridge Centre and Project Hahn partnership.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Can Do Concept.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Timeframe.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Project Intervention Strategies.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Individual goal setting.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Non-directive leadership.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Edgework and Disequilibrium.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Blindfolds and silence.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Opportunities for task mastery.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Meditation.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Project Implementation.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Introductory Day.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Can Do Project: Day One.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Can Do Project: Day Two.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Can Do Project: Day Three.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Can do project: Day Four.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5. Project Evaluation.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Rationale.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6. Findings.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Determining the nature of goals.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Expectations and outcomes.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Changes in beliefs about oneself.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Resources reached for when things got tough.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Quality of self-talk.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Determining the nature of fear.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Lifestyle changes required beyond the end of Can Do.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Support required to institute the changes.....</b>	<b>24</b>



# 1. Introduction

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This report provides an overview of the implementation of the Can Do Project. A joint venture between Project Hahn and the Salvation Army, this pilot program is designed specifically for people with substance use disorders. Through the use of risk recreation activities and bush counselling approaches, the program seeks to act as a catalyst for change in the lives of those involved. The author acknowledges the perceived lack of information regarding this genre of counselling and attempts to provide the reader with brief philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that are the cornerstones of this approach.

## **SUBMISSION.**

**Aim:** To design, implement and evaluate a bush counselling project for present and past clients of a drug, and alcohol treatment program whose physical limitations prevent their participation in able-bodied programs.

**Method:** A Project Officer from Project Hahn will work in consultation with staff from the Salvation Army Bridge Centre to implement a four-day bush counselling project. The following issues are consistent with substance use disorders and will be monitored by the Project Officer during the program: goal setting; belief systems; identifying resources; expectations; self-talk; fear; identifying change; and support mechanisms. The project is designed to impact on these issues for the individuals involved and provide ample learning opportunities in which new strategies can be tested out. A professional member of staff from the Bridge Centre will be invited to attend the project.

**Content:** The four-day program will utilise goal setting principles to facilitate increased clarity within the individual about their issues. Established social norms will govern group behaviour giving participants an opportunity to experiment with new behaviours in a secure environment. Daily group discussions will provide participants and group facilitators the chance to reflect on and monitor progress toward goal realisation. The program will provide a maximum of eight places for participants and operate from a residential base.

**Personnel:** Allan Adams (Project Hahn) has the dual role of Project Officer and facilitator. Donna Woods-Witek (Project Hahn) has the role of facilitator during the period of project implementation. The Project Hahn operations team that include Michael Gonzalez, Denise Miller, Heather Harris and Sally Mann will provide support for program logistics. Sally will also provide assistance with theme selection as part of the evaluation process. The Program Manager of Project Hahn Rob Sveen, will provide professional supervision for the project. Rob Chapman of the Bridge Centre will assume the role of liaison officer between the two organisations, identify potential participants and oversee post-program follow-up for attendees.

**Evaluation:** To measure the immediate impact of the project on the target group, data will be collected through the medium of participant journals. Themes will be analysed from this data and trends will be noted between the initial and latter parts of the project. Direct observation by facilitators during the program will be used to write individual reports to each of the participants.

## 2. Project Design

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### WHY USE THE BUSH AS A COUNSELLING MEDIUM?

Contact with the natural world invites each of us to reflect inwardly as we retreat from the constraints of the man-made environment. Time out from this hectic "grand prix" that we call our lives is often the last item on our agenda, yet strangely after spending a day walking in the bush, a sense of peace returns and clarity develops about the things that are really important to us. Ansell Adams, (in Turnage & Stillman, 1992) puts it succinctly;

As the fisherman depends on the rivers, lakes and seas, and the farmer upon the land for his existence, so too does mankind in general depend upon the beauty of the world about him for his spiritual and emotional existence.

Ansell and writers of his era placed incredible emphasis on the beauty of the natural world, yet it was Kurt Hahn (Richards, 1981) who began to consider outdoor experiences as valuable education tools.

Regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity; an undefeatable spirit; tenacity in pursuit; readiness for sensible self denial and above all, compassion.

Hahn continued to develop a range of educational programs that were underpinned by this philosophy. One of these was the Outward Bound model of wilderness education (Richards, 1981) that endeavoured to provide young adults with the resources to discover and activate their internal strengths. In recent times the work of Outward Bound and similar independent organisations has evolved beyond programs for normative populations to targeting diverse populations such as substance users, offenders and victims of trauma (Gass, 1993, Catherine Freer, 2001).

### PROJECT HAHN PROGRAM.

Project Hahn was founded on Hahn's primary belief that specific experiences could broker pro-social gains within the individual. What has developed as a result of this Tasmanian initiative is a range of programs customised to meet the cultural parameters of this island state of Australia. With our abundant natural spaces it is hardly surprising that innovative bush counselling techniques have become a key strategy in the advancement of health and well-being initiatives within our community.

The Project Hahn model is unique to Tasmania in a number of ways. A strong financial commitment, provided by state government allows Project Hahn to target populations across the socio-economic spectrum without alienation of those least able to afford attendance fees. It fits within the social justice policies of the Tasmanian Government and is funded directly through the Office of Sport and Recreation. The program has been in existence since 1983, and has directly impacted on the lives of over 2700 people who have participated in the program.

Project Hahn's mission states, that through participation in wilderness activities the project encourages young people to develop social skills and personal qualities required for living and working as mature citizens in an increasingly complex society. The benefits of the program are measured by how well each participant is able to integrate the learnings gained from the bush experience into their lives post-program.

Project Hahn's Standard program is six days in duration and utilises outdoor activities that are progressively sequenced to encourage participants to persevere and ultimately master the challenges presented. Specific issues are addressed which may include communication, empathy, decision making, emotional awareness and self-esteem. The outdoor activities themselves are the means for working toward change within each individual's self-concept, and the environment provides the

elements of uncertainty that challenge the thoughts, feelings and behavioural patterns of the participants.

Two qualified facilitators attend each program and all possess a high level of competency in a range of outdoor disciplines, first aid, program planning, bush counselling skills and communication skills (Project Hahn, 2001). Refinements to the program during the 1995 – 1999 period were based on the research recommendations of a Masters thesis that was completed in 1995. Further research findings in 2001 have augmented the previous study with valuable longitudinal data.

During 2001 Project Hahn has continued to diversify much of its service and has implemented programs in partnership with welfare organisations. Follow-up support is seen as critical in ensuring participants maintain their gains post-course. Therefore partnerships between Project Hahn and welfare organisations are actively sought, on the basis that follow-up and outreach support can be guaranteed for clients, well beyond the end of each bush counselling program.

### **SALVATION ARMY BRIDGE PROGRAM**

This Hobart based program is modelled after Bridge Programs operated by the Salvation Army in other states in Australia. The Hobart Bridge Program is a 16-week course for people with drug, alcohol or gambling addictions. The majority of participants choose to attend as residents and live on site as part of a small community. Each participant is assigned a counsellor/case worker who oversees a variety of practical issues affecting the client. This includes liaison with other health professionals and referral to other community agencies where required. Program content is based on abstinence whilst in residence with clients attending structured groupwork sessions. The centre offers an outreach service to past-clients of the Bridge program where the staff approach involves delivering harm minimisation strategies to clients.

Clients are not permitted to use drugs, alcohol or gamble while in residence and contravening this requirement results in dismissal from the program. This policy is policed through regular drug and breathalyser analysis at the Centre. Admission to the program requires the participant to enter an assessment process. Clients are not accepted into the program under duress of family members or court-based referrals.

### **HISTORY OF THE BRIDGE CENTRE AND PROJECT HAHN PARTNERSHIP**

Midway through 1999, Bridge Centre staff made contact with Project Hahn with the view of developing an avenue for Bridge residents to attend the Standard Project Hahn program. The first two Bridge residents attended a Standard program at the end of May and the trip report of this program articulated the following (Project Hahn, 1999):

The group dynamic of having some older participants (Bridge participants) with fuller life experience and personal insight had a definite stabilising and motivational impact on the group development process and the level at which the course was able to operate.

An expansion of Project Hahn services occurred in August 1999 coinciding with a marked increase in the number of Bridge participants attending the Standard program. This eventuated in the Bridge Centre being given greater priority in the development of a customised program for residents.

Traditionally Project Hahn works with young Tasmanians between 15 and 25 years of age. Many of the Bridge participants while still keen, did not fit this age bracket and subsequently missed out on attending the program. In a series of meetings held with staff and residents considerable interest was shown for developing a course that catered for 'older youth'.

As a result a 4-day program entitled the Bridge Special Project in Bush Counselling was implemented in March 2000. The findings from it were positive and were the subject of an evaluation report (Adams, 2000).

In adjunctive terms the findings suggest that both programs (Bridge and Project Hahn) met and integrated effortlessly allowing for a smooth cross-exchange of clients. During the project, individual goal realisation occurred through discovery and mobilisation of previously untapped internal resources. Life changing discoveries occurred as participants discarded old beliefs about themselves and their capabilities. A diversity of background, gender and age ensured a heterogeneous balance was maintained within the group. In spite of this group dynamic, a significant number of discoveries centred on similar control issues. For these participants it became a tussle between striving for perfection and granting themselves permission to make mistakes.

## **CAN DO CONCEPT**

The idea for the Can Do project emerged as result of certain short-comings with the Bridge Special Project. An issue highlighted after the project was completed, revealed that for some Bridge residents there were still barriers that precluded participation. Despite a high level of enthusiasm, their level of physical capacity meant they were unable to meet the rigours of the program. The Project Officer made a commitment to look at customising a program and in the latter half of 2000 lodged a funding submission with the Community Support Levy Grants Program to realise this goal. The submission was successful and resulted in the development of the “Can Do” project, a 4-day program designed to utilise residential-based activities in lieu of a mobile based program.

The design centred on working on issues consistent with drug-dependent populations. It endeavoured to address the health and well-being needs of the group through opportunities that developed for learning about themselves and their capabilities. The basic premise underpinning the program was that promotion of stronger and more resilient individuals would be beneficial to maintaining goals of abstinence and reducing the severity of relapses into substance use. Participants aged between 20 and 70 years of age and currently attending or past residents of the Bridge Program were targeted for the project. This experience working with physically challenged individuals whilst not severe was seen as valuable for Project Hahn in its future work with disabled populations.

A course plan was designed that included activities that provided a real challenge, yet were achievable in terms of the physical capacity of group members. Flexibility in the project design was achieved to ensure that fine tuning could occur whilst the course was in progress. Meetings with Bridge Centre personnel finalised a date for the project implementation and tasks were allocated to meet the timeline.

The accommodation facility was booked, an introductory day was organised for participants to meet staff prior to the program and strategies for targeting participants were identified by Bridge Centre staff. Preparation for packing equipment and food was undertaken in the week leading up to the program and clarification was sought on participant medical details.

## **TIMEFRAME**

January 2001:	Meet with Bridge Program Staff to discuss the project in further depth.
Feb/March:	Prepare and market the project in consultation with the Bridge administration and management.
April/May:	Meet with the critical reference group and ascertain needs and answer queries. Include their suggestions in project design.
July:	Finalise course design, determine areas of evaluation, organise staffing and administration requirements.
August 9 <sup>th</sup> :	Introductory Day walk
August 21 <sup>st</sup> – 24 <sup>th</sup> :	Implement project and collect data
October-November:	Follow-up clients, report writing and project write-up.

# 3. Project Intervention Strategies

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A range of interventionist strategies are possible in the course of a day's journey through the bush and there is no limit to what one's imagination can come up with to create a learning opportunity for both individual and group. Techniques from various schools of counselling are used as part of group and individual sessions with facilitators (Adams & Sveen, 2000). Listed below are some specialist techniques adopted by staff on Project Hahn programs.

## **INDIVIDUAL GOAL SETTING**

Personal goal setting is central to the bush counselling approach and right from the initial contact with this group they will be encouraged to consider what they want to achieve from their involvement with the project. To assist participants in formulating their goals our staff members set the scene by formulating their own goals relevance. There is a strong emphasis on the value of SMART goals:

- Specific goals
- Measurable outcomes
- Achievable
- Relevant and within a
- Time frame

## **NON-DIRECTIVE LEADERSHIP.**

Non-directive facilitation is a style of leadership that encourages independence and gives permission to both the participant and group to make mistakes. This non-directive intervention gives back the ownership of finding solutions to problems back to the group (Handley, 1999).

## **EDGEWORK AND DISEQUILIBRATION**

The Piagetian concept of disequilibrium describes the conflict experienced when an individual is forced into a process of adaptation (Crisp & O'Donnell, 1999; Sveen, 1994). Activities that involve a high level of perceived risk allow the individual to experience heightened awareness of the disequilibrating process, encountered prior to successful completion. The terminology for this process is called 'edgework' and by relating to events in their daily living, we can use the activity as a metaphor (Nadler & Luckner, 1992). The feeling of stuckness or uncertainty that an individual encounters on the edge of an abseil is rich in metaphor. At the edge, self-defeating internal dialogue builds up and gets louder, changed physical characteristics become obvious and emotionally the individual is often intensely fearful. Questions asked at this point may assist self-awareness in the individual and help associate what is going on with the outside world. Examples include "What's happening for you at the moment?" and "Can you remember a time recently when you felt/thought like this?" Bush Counselling programs involve a healthy alternative to challenge and risk, which for many 'substance users' are important parts of their life (Price & DeBever, 1999).

## **BLINDFOLDS AND SILENCE**

The learning process is hastened immeasurably through the introduction of artificial handicaps. This method of intervention limits the ability of the participant to use their natural strengths and invites the participant to experiment with other less certain strategies to achieve their goals (Nadler & Luckner, 1997). These uncertainties bring with them a disequilibrating tendency to which the participant responds by attempting to find ways to adapt to the new environment. The range of learnings that stem from this process can be expected to better equip the individual with an increased repertoire of coping mechanisms that can be integrated into their lives post-course (Sveen, 1994).

Two examples of handicaps that staff might employ during the Can Do Special Project are the use of blindfolds and silence. With a participant who has an issue of placing trust in others, use of a blindfold is likely to heighten her sense of vulnerability during a group activity. To help regain her equilibrium one option that presents itself is asking other group members for support. Another

possible intervention is the use of silence thereby encouraging the participant to find alternative methods of communication. This handicap is helpful too in focussing the individual on their internal state. The strategy can act akin to a meditation for participants when they spend a few hours undertaking a silent activity within a group setting.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR TASK MASTERY**

The idea of mastery of tasks and the development of positive self-efficacy is discussed in social learning theory (Bandura, 1969). Bush counselling programs use activities such as abseiling and bushwalking that promote task mastery. Peer modelling can also play a part in this process, yet success can also be achieved with a supportive peer environment that encourages the individual to attempt the task because the consequences of failing are significantly diminished (Sveen, 1994). Another strategy that greatly aids task mastery is through progressive sequencing of the activity (Crisp & O'Donnell, 1999; Sveen, 1994). Developing an activity that steadily increases in difficulty improves the likelihood of success and mirrors the strategy for dealing with other difficulties they face in life through breaking them down into bite size pieces. For the person overcoming substance dependency repeated failure to fulfil obligations in their life only serves to reinforce the cycle of dependency (Nadler & Luckner, 1997). A successful abseiling experience on the other hand challenges the participant to repeat the actions that enabled them to risk uncertainty and push beyond the edge (Adams et al, 1999).

### **MEDITATION**

Meditation in the outdoors has a positive effect for the participant facing uncertainty. The effort required to measure up to each challenge can be exhausting work both physically and emotionally. A chance to be still can provide the participant an opportunity to focus on the moment and calm the physical anxieties that are pressing. A guided meditation is planned prior to both the abseil and rockclimbing activities.

# 4. Project Implementation

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## INTRODUCTORY DAY

To assist in identifying participants for the program, an introductory day was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> August. It was seen as an important opportunity for participants and facilitators to meet prior to the project and discuss any issues of concern.

To ensure that the day set the scene for the forthcoming project the staff chose a short walk along the Pipeline bush-track on Mt Wellington. The day was cool and rain was threatening, yet well equipped with food and appropriate clothing the group set off at a gentle pace for Silver Falls. It quickly became apparent that the demands of the walk fitted the physical capacity of the group and this comfortable situation soon proved conducive for instigating conversation and laughter.

At the lunch break, Project Hahn staff introduced key elements of the project to the group. There were a number of questions raised and significant discussion resulted once people accepted that their suggestions would be responded to seriously. It was evident that a number of participants were not able to commit to the program and there was concern that post-program follow-up would not be as effective without a staff member attending from the Bridge Centre. To be fair to staff though, it was a big ask of them to commit to being away from work and home for four straight days. It was apparent by the day's end that we had two very enthusiastic starters and a few people waivering on the fringes.

It was a hectic and stressful two-week period between the introductory walk and the start of the project. Primarily it was the issue of participant numbers that most concerned Project Hahn staff. Twenty four hours prior to the program it seemed inevitable that cancellation would occur, yet through some swift and tricky interventions on the part of key Bridge staff, we started the program with 5 participants.

## CAN DO PROJECT: DAY ONE

On Tuesday morning Project Hahn facilitators, Donna and Al collected the participants from the Bridge Centre at 9:30. The group enthusiastically boarded the Land Cruiser and we embarked on our journey. We travelled to Kingston Beach and commandeered a park bench adjacent to the beach for our preliminary discussion. The group brainstormed a set of social norms for the program that best fitted the group's needs. The group was receptive and responded positively to the values brought up and there was significant emphasis placed on confidentiality and group support.

Al handed out the evaluation journals and reinforced the importance they would play in measuring the outcomes of the program. It was time to liberate the food "eskis" from the confines of the trailer and the group eagerly embraced lunch preparations in the shelter of the nearby yacht club.

The large swell and offshore wind conditions on Kingston beach proper curtailed its use as a kayaking venue. Immediately around the corner on Brown's rivulet, conditions were a good deal tamer, though the air temperature was cool. The group geared up nearby for the activity. Some participants noted their nervousness as Donna and Al took the group through the instructional and safety brief. Al was quite excited by the prospect of launching the recently acquired Project Hahn sit-on double kayaks and both staff noted their increased stability and navigability in comparison to the older watercraft. Donna opted to pair up with a participant to take account of the odd number of people. Perhaps the only downside to the new boats was the instant wet backside that resulted once the person takes up their position in the craft.

In pairs the group paddled upstream against a current that was initially tough going as group members worked to hone their paddle technique. It was strong enough to require continual paddling so as not to lose headway. Participants were all coming to grips with the task and there was an air of mastery in

their actions and words. Support for each other was evident in the way partners communicated to each other. Near a small bridge, Al handed out blindfolds to the group and set the group a more ambitious target of navigating upstream with only one partner paddling while blindfolded. The group successfully achieved this task though not without considerable amusement as the sighted non-paddling partners found it difficult to determine what was left and what was right! The measure of frustration inherent in this activity endeavours to impart the importance of clear and concise communication and the need to listen carefully. The removal of the visual sense focused the participants intensely on their remaining senses and some noted how much easier it was to feel what was happening within their bodies and with their co-ordination.

The return trip back down the river was full of relaxed charm and direct symbolism. The group rafted up and while having a light hearted conversation floated down the stream “going with the flow of nature.” It seemed an appropriate moment to stop resisting and let go. This time out provided space to reflect about our good fortune to have experienced such bliss on what was otherwise a cold and blustery winter’s day.

After re-packing the trailer we departed for the Storm Hut at the Lea Camp. The team was in excellent spirits and there was a strong sense of successful achievement within the group. The housekeeping issues of our humble abode were quickly dealt with and we were soon seated for dinner around a comforting fire. Group members spoke honestly and bravely about their personal issues that evening. Those people on the listening end, proved to be respectful and attentive. It was apparent to Donna and Al that this group was comfortable with talking about issues of emotional depth. The level of trust that was beginning to assert itself in the group discussion bode well for the work ahead.

### **CAN DO PROJECT: DAY TWO.**

Wednesday was scheduled for the rock climbing activity. The rain and sleet that had commenced overnight and continued throughout the morning did not provide much hope for running this activity. Of all the activities planned, it is rock climbing that least requires wet weather. Aware that there was still enough time for a clearance we opted to spend the morning in discussion. Some notable emotional breakthroughs were made during this session, as the impetus from the previous evening discussion spilled into the new day. There were some members who found it difficult to divorce themselves entirely from the outside world and some made calls home on the mobile phone. In these cases the news from family was positive and subsequently it resolved their concerns.

By late morning the rain had failed to abate so Donna and Al decided on a silent bushwalk as an alternative activity. The purpose of the activity was to give the group the chance to reflect during the walk without interruption by spoken communication. Non-verbal communication where needed was permitted and the group was asked to rotate the leadership every twenty minutes to allow everyone the opportunity to break trail. The weather outside was cold and turning to sleet.

Once the organisation of essential clothing, food and equipment was complete, the group took on the vow of silence and headed out into the elements. For the next two hours we walked together through the bush. On some occasions we followed fire trails and at other times the person leading would guide us off into untracked bush. A very strong connection developed within the group as people used mime as a substitute to talk. Perhaps it was the need to observe each other closely in order to communicate effectively that initiated the bond that resulted. The silence allowed the bush to exert its influence and individuals were often found peering intently at a bush in flower or unusual shaped stone. The effect of the silence inspired one participant to comment later that putting your arm around a person had more meaning than a whole lot of words. On our way back to the Storm Hut we participated in a blindfolded walk. This activity required a sighted participant to lead a blindfolded peer over obstacles through the bush. It was a calculated risk asking participants to trust one another, but this was heavily outweighed by the metaphors it promoted. One group member commented that you can’t side-step all the mud in life, somehow though you need to decide where to tread and where not to when things are unstable.

Back at Storm Hut the group reflected on the day. The walk had provided further clarity for some group members about their issues and the evening session continued long after dinner had finished.

### **CAN DO PROJECT: DAY THREE:**

It was apparent on Thursday morning that the group required some direction from Al and Donna over time management issues and the formulation of personal goals. Al asked each individual to name up the personal goals they wanted to achieve in the time remaining in the program.

Setting goals on the first day of the course has been a long-held tradition of Project Hahn programs, yet in recent times staff have noticed participants struggle with the pressure to set personal goals in such short timeframes. In the past, some goals formulated were either dreamed up just to placate the Project Hahn facilitator or were not particularly relevant for the individual. This has now led to a much less demanding situation where goal setting sessions are delayed a day to allow increased clarity to develop for the group member. The group agreed that the goal setting process seemed a little overdue. Each group member was keen to talk and the goals that each person set were powerful, relevant and succinct. It was evidence that the delay had served only to sharpen the awareness of the group and our goals tumbled out from each of us with apparent ease. We also agreed to co-ordinate our cigarette breaks in an effort to use the remaining time more effectively.

The weather was much improved and we chose to run the rockclimbing activity. We packed up the Landcruiser and set off for "Rocky Tom", a climbing venue on Hobart's Eastern shore. The poor state of the fire trail and the rain of the preceding 24 hours made it impossible to drive the vehicle right up to the venue. We abandoned it where it got bogged halfway up the hill and struggled up with several packs of heavy climbing gear to the crag. This unplanned activity threw a new challenge to the group and the strenuous nature of it made a few people question their ability to make it. The physical limitations of the group were very apparent at this point and it refreshed for Donna and Al the difficulty often faced by Alcohol and Drug clients due to their poor physical condition.

Al rigged up the climbs while Donna prepared for a guided meditation as an introduction to the rockclimbing. This failed to eventuate due to an unexpected emergence of intense emotion in one participant, which seem to be triggered by associations with our drive to the venue. Donna responded effectively and with the aid of the group worked her way through to the source of the participant's pain. Al left what he was doing with rigging the climbing ropes, to support Donna in this impromptu counselling session at the top of the crag. Maintaining a flexible approach is an important consideration when working in these settings with groups that harbour so much pain and grief. At any moment, strong emotional responses can be triggered in participants by associations with seemingly innocuous events. Abandoning the technical and risk management considerations of rigging and adroitly switching into a counselling mode is an essential pre-requisite in this field of work. The mental gymnastics demanded of the facilitator can be very draining. Donna's approach involved the use of symbolic role-play, which stabilised the emotional intensity and provided the participant with some new strategies to deal with the situation. In particular her intimate knowledge of a section of the public hospital brought an intense realism to the role-play.

There was significant apprehension about the rockclimbing activity, however the degree of difficulty was such that everyone found something that they could master in spite of their concerns. Every person present took a risk that day and their efforts paid off. One participant generalised his discovery about taking risks. By taking a risk with climbing the cliff he felt that he had to start taking risks in life in order to get somewhere. He could see that this might even require opening himself to vulnerability.

We walked tiredly back to the Landcruiser and carefully drove it down the muddy trail back to the road. We returned to Storm Hut and spent a productive evening revealing the extent of the learnings from the day. One participant made the observation that the tranquillity of the day was a result of his discovery that a link existed between physical activity and his emotional equilibrium.

## **CAN DO PROJECT: DAY FOUR.**

We planned an early start to our final day to ensure we had ample time to fit in the activity and make it back to the Bridge Centre safely on time. We cleaned up Storm Hut after breakfast, packed all our gear in the trailer then travelled to Blackmans Bay Blowhole for the abseil activity. While Donna ran a guided meditation, Al rigged the abseil.

The group re-formed and all participated in the warm-up abseil. This process allows the participant to test-drive the equipment by abseiling horizontally or down a gentle-angled slope, which breaks down the process into incremental steps (a great metaphor for task mastery). We launched into the abseil activity with the intention of using “edgework” as an intervention strategy. Donna dealt with the belaying of each participant while Al tied himself off in a position near the edge and kept a pen and notebook handy to note down their comments. Al stopped each person just as they went over the edge and asked them to describe their feelings, their fear intensity, their self-talk and previous times they have felt similar to this. After each participant had gone over the edge and descended 3 metres he again stopped them to check on their feelings. Participants responses varied significantly with one person showing a definite u-turn in the quality of her self-talk and another linking pre-activity anticipation with a marked increase in fear.

One participant experienced overwhelming fear while situated 10 metres back from the edge. This was a timely reminder for Al and Donna that the activity on its own is largely meaningless and that the real benefit comes from how it stimulates not only the emotional responses but begins triggering the unconscious. In this individual’s case completing the abseil was not the priority but rather being there to witness an intense emotional release that accompanied the emergence of a previously buried ordeal. More mental gymnastics were required by Donna and Al and for the second day running, role-play was a useful strategy. The practicalities of running a session while still attached to the belay system meant that there was a distance of 6 metres between both facilitators and the participant. This clearly challenged the counsellor’s attending skills! Clear communication was tough going yet overall the physical distance between people had little impact on the outcome. The extent of the ordeal emerged with full emotional intensity and the role-play that followed allowed the participant to confront her past from a stronger place.

The time had come to pack up and head home, a final group session near the abseil venue revealed that each group member felt they achieved what they had set themselves to do during the program. There was sadness that our time together was nearly over and for most there was a reluctance to leave. It was not easy to say farewell to each other. Tears flowed and people found words did not adequately express their thoughts and feelings. The project ended where it had started out, back at the Bridge Centre.

# 5. Project Evaluation

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## RATIONALE

Outdoor activities are an integral therapeutic tool in the Project Hahn bush counselling program. In contrast to more traditional approaches to the treatment of alcohol and drug clients, the bush counselling approach dwells on the fringe of clinical practice. To bring Project Hahn's work in this area into the limelight, requires that regular outcome studies are undertaken and the findings distributed across the spectrum of health service providers.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was chosen to evaluate the Can Do project. Thematic analysis was used to measure responses to questions asked at daily intervals throughout the program. The first set of responses (day 1 and day 2) was used as a baseline measure to track changes in the themes presented throughout the remainder of the program (day 3 and day 4). Issues addressed in each of the 8 questions participants answered, were identified through consultation with staff and peers at the Bridge Centre. Direct observations recorded by facilitators during the program, were used to write a personal report for each participant. The feedback contained in these reports is subject to client-counsellor confidentiality and the contents as such can not be revealed in this document.

These are the questions asked to participants.

- Write down your personal goal and ask yourself what you did today in terms of working towards this goal? (*Determining the nature of goals*)
- What were your expectations before today's journey and how did it compare with what actually happened? (*Expectations and outcomes*)
- What beliefs about yourself no longer hold true in light of today's experiences? (*Changes in beliefs about oneself*)
- What did you reach for today when things got tough? Were those resources available to you in the past? (*Resources reached for when things got tough*)
- During those times when it was tough what sort of things were you saying to yourself? (*Quality of self-talk*)
- Describe the times you experienced any fear during the day and record the moments when the fear was at its most intense? (*Determining the nature of fear*)
- As a result of what you have learned today, what changes do you need to make in your life? (*Life changes required beyond the end of the project*)
- What assistance will you need to help you achieve these changes? (*Support required to institute the changes*)

The participants recorded their responses in their journals on a daily basis with alternatives being provided for those experiencing literacy difficulties. The Project Officer, with support from an operations team member at Project Hahn, reviewed and grouped responses into themes. Headings were created for each theme and the data entered into a statistical analysis program (Stat View) that provided the results presented in this document. For clarity the results are presented in both pie chart and table form. The return rate of journals for the evaluation achieved 80%.

As you look at the diagrams you will note that Day 1 & 2 responses are represented separately to day 3 & 4 responses in order to clearly view variation in responses. The rationale of combining day 1 with day 2 and day 3 with day 4 responses needs clarification. Evaluating the responses in this way provides a larger sample of responses for grouping purposes and is likely to present less dramatic variations than comparing for example, day 1 with day 4.

# 6. Findings

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Can Do Project was designed as a bush counselling program for people with substance use disorders and implemented during August 2001. This program was a joint venture between Project Hahn and the Salvation Army and was the second such venture between the two organisations. Those invited to attend were either present or past clients of the Bridge program, a residential drug and alcohol treatment program run by the Salvation Army. A prerequisite for entry required that the participant's physical capability precluded participation in other bush counselling programs. A major shift in program design occurred with the switch from tent-based accommodation to a residential base chosen for its close proximity to the activity venues. The Can Do project functioned effectively in adjunctive terms by ensuring that participants gained full access to outreach services and counselling follow-up in the post-program environment.

Eight salient issues were identified in pre-program consultation by the project officer and a questionnaire was formulated addressing the issues. Data was collected during the Can Do project by participant's written responses to the questionnaire. The research method chosen to evaluate the project, looked at comparisons between participant responses on day 1 and 2 with those from day 3 and 4 of the program.

The findings suggest that the confronting nature of the activities saw a increase in the frequency of participants naming up their need to overcome fear as a personal goal. As the project progressed, participants became much less concerned about the outcome of the activities and more inclined to use a positive mindset that transposed itself into successful completion of the activities. Early in the program participants recorded that their changes in beliefs focused largely on the theme of feeling worthwhile. This theme declined during the last two days of the program and was substituted with an increasing belief in their ability to master anything. Significant trends were noted in the type of resources participants reached for when things got tough. Despite showing a consistent trend to rely on the group for support, participants increasingly placed trust in internal resources to combat the tough times during the final two days of the program.

Highly significant growth occurred in the quality of participants' self-talk. At the beginning of the program there was no self-talk recorded under the theme "I can do this." However by day 3 and 4 of the program responses to this theme showed a sharp increase. Findings suggest that by the end of the program growth occurred in participants ability to identify, monitor and confront their fears associated with the cliff-based activities. Under the heading of 'lifestyle changes required beyond the end of the program', a highly significant result demonstrated that participants were increasingly prepared to take a risk and try something new. Under the category of 'support now required in order to achieve post-program changes' a consistent trend appeared throughout the program under the theme of support through friendship and encouragement from others. A change in support structures was registered however, with participants placing increasing emphasis on having faith in and thinking positively about themselves.

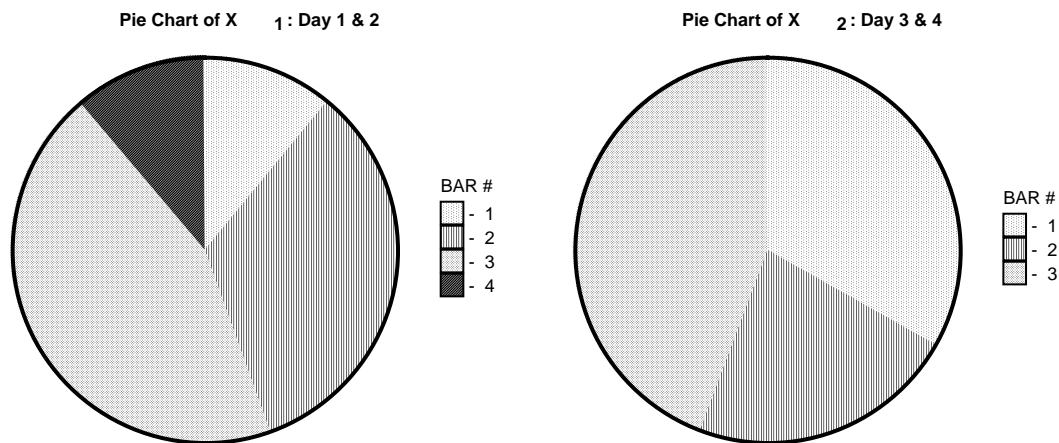
## RECOMMENDATIONS

Future evaluations of bush counselling programs might consider using methodology that includes measuring post-course responses from participants. In this report the question has been raised as to how long the changes noted in the findings are sustained after the program finishes. The evaluation of the longer term benefits of the program is required if we anticipate gaining referrals for future programs of this genre from mainstream health professionals.

In the process of bringing the impact of bush counselling programs into the limelight, it is critical that we allow a broad spectrum of health professionals working with substance use disorders to comment on this report. Professionals opting for alternative intervention strategies need avenues to be included in discussion over design, implementation and evaluation of future projects. Encouraging co-operative ventures between government and non-government agencies can only continue on the basis that each party involved, feels a true sense of ownership in the development of such programs.

## DETERMINING THE NATURE OF GOALS

As shown in figure 1 participants responses revealed an interesting trend in themes presented when comparing day 1 & 2 with day 3 & 4 of the project. A significant increase was noted under the theme of goals that focused on overcoming fear (11.1% increased to 33.3%). One hypothesis for this increase is the connection fear might have with the confronting activities of abseiling and rockclimbing that were presented on day 3 & 4 of the project. If the fearful nature of the activities has had an influence on participants' goals, then one might expect to find evidence of this connection elsewhere in the findings. Another possible angle on reasons for the increased readiness to deal with their fear may be linked to the triggering of unconscious processes caused by the intensity of the experience. This may be merely conjecture however incidents that occurred on day 3 and 4 of the program (pp. 11-12) suggest that experiences during activities played a part in providing associations with previously suppressed events in the lives of participants.



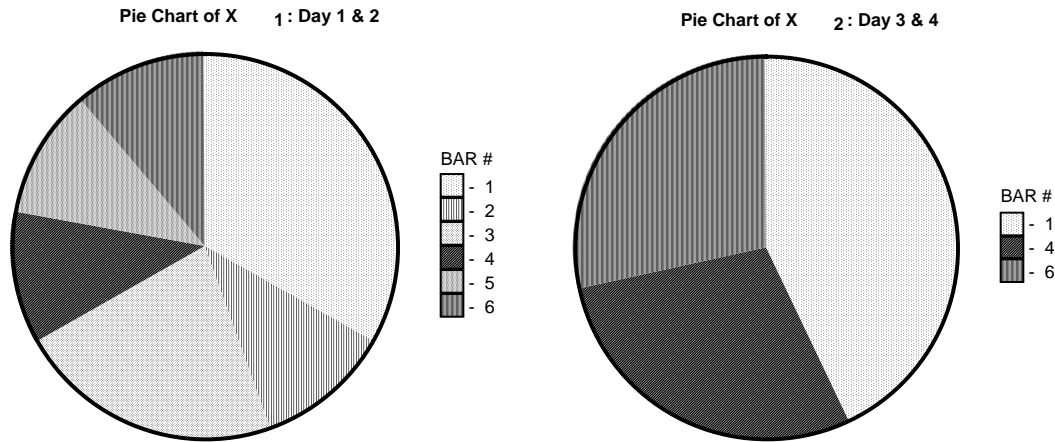
Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Overcoming fear	11.1	33.3
2. Personal self-esteem	33.3	22.2
3. Peer relationships	44.4	44.4
4. Mastering the physical challenges	11.1	0

Figure 1: Determining the nature of goals

## EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Moderate growth was noted in two themes presented when comparing expectations and outcomes on day 1 & 2 with those of day 3 & 4 (see figure 2). The first increase (11.1% to 28.6 %) was in theme 4, (open-minded expectation with no recorded outcome). One explanation for this growth may hinge on the lessening need by participants to exert control on outcome. As the program progressed (day 3 & 4) participants were more inclined to relax and go with the flow. Comments that typify this are, “ready for what lies ahead of me” and “just to try whatever came along.”

The second theme that registered moderate growth was theme 6 (11.1% to 28.6 %), under the heading of positive expectation leading to a positive outcome. Were participants ready to believe in a more positive experience on the basis that they adopted a positive attitude? This response would appear to support the yes answer. “I woke up ready to conquer anything in my way.... and I feel proud to have taken all the risks I have taken.”



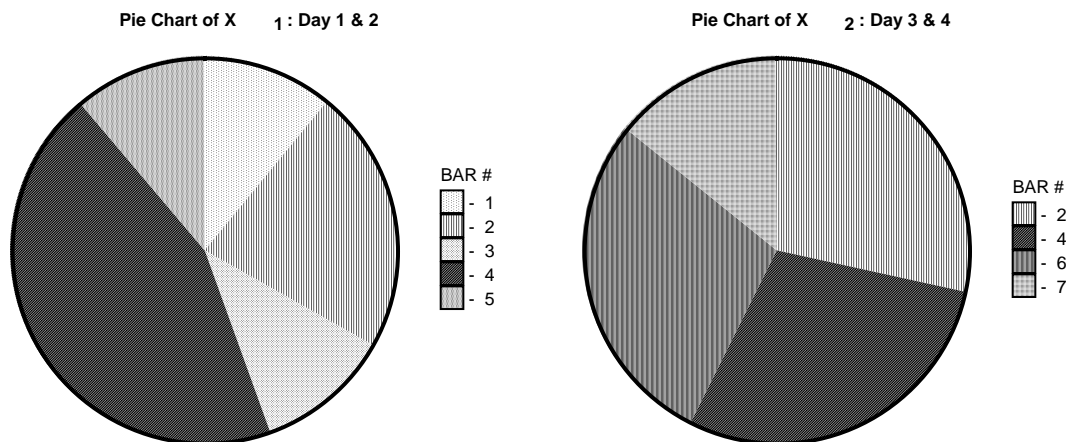
Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Uncertain expectation about the day leads to a positive outcome	33.1	42.9
2. Positive expectation with no recorded outcome	11.1	0
3. Open-minded expectation leads to a positive outcome	22.2	0
4. Open-minded expectation with no recorded outcome	11.1	28.6
5. Expectation is not met due to external determinants	11.1	0
6. Positive expectation leads to a positive outcome	11.1	28.6

Figure 2: Expectations and outcomes

## CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT ONESELF

Two significant findings were noted in this category about changes in beliefs about oneself. There was a moderate decline noted in Day 3 & 4 under the theme of I am worthwhile. One hypothesis is that the decline from 44.4% to 28.6% may be the function of normal group development. Once a group has advanced beyond the security and acceptance stages (Trotzer, 1972) participants tend to feel safe and sense that they belong within the group. Thus the participant focus on beliefs of self worth diminish naturally during the latter stages of the program (Day 3 & 4), because a change in their belief of their own worthiness has already occurred.

The other significant finding was that participants recorded growth in their belief that I can master anything. The increase in responses from 0% on day 1 & 2 to 28% on day 3 & 4 demonstrates a desire by participants to discard old beliefs about themselves and their capabilities. Comments from participants on day 3 & 4 include this response. "I never thought I could do something that scared the shit out of me. So now I feel I can do anything I put my mind to."

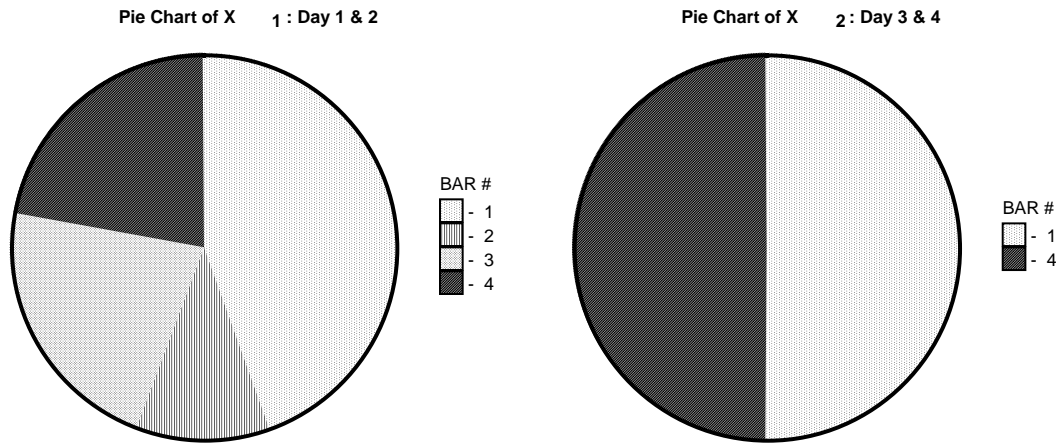


Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. I am more vulnerable than I previously thought	11.1	0
2. I have reaffirmed the need to believe in myself	22.2	28.6
3. I can trust others	11.1	0
4. I am worthwhile	44.4	28.6
5. I understand what love really involves	11.1	0
6. I can master anything	0	28.6
7. I can now see my problem clearly	0	14.3

Figure 3: Changes in beliefs about oneself.

## RESOURCES REACHED FOR WHEN THINGS GOT TOUGH

This category produced what would appear to be a significant finding (see figure 4). Growth in one theme under the heading of, I placed trust in internal resources, showed an increase from 22.2% on day 1 & 2 to 50% of all responses on day 3 & 4. Bearing in mind that climbing and abseiling were the activities offered on day 3 & 4, participants needed to find greater personal resources to confront their fear about what were essentially individual-based pursuits. “Courage and confidence” and “determination” were two examples of internal resources quoted by participants on day 3 & 4. This finding suggests that participants viewed climbing and abseiling as more confronting activities than the kayaking and bush walk activities run on day 1 & 2 of the program. This in turns supports the argument presented earlier (see p. 15), that fear played a significant part in influencing participants goals on day 3 & 4.

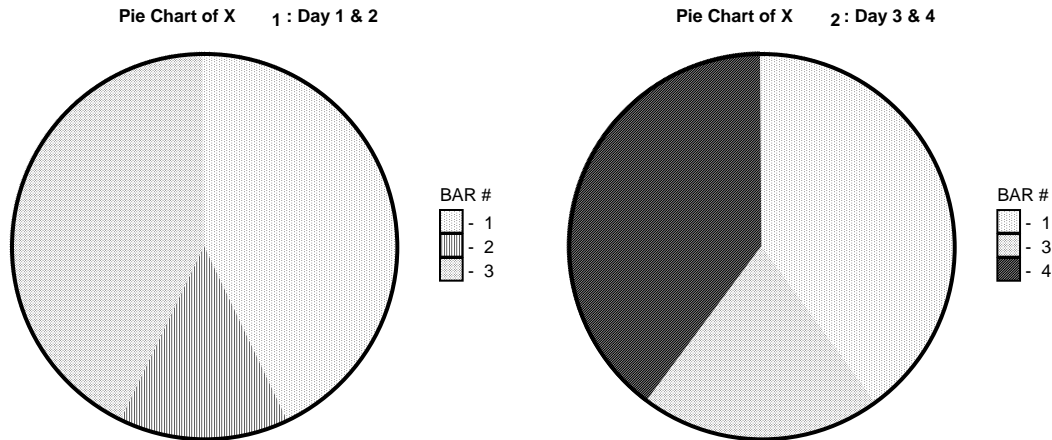


Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Support from the group	44.4	50
2. Took action to resolve concerns	11.1	0
3. Did not reach for anything	22.2	0
4. Placed trust in internal resources	22.2	50

Figure 4: Resources reached for when things got tough

## QUALITY OF SELF-TALK

The findings here are highly significant. Major growth in the quality of self talk under the heading entitled I can do this, occurred on day 3 & 4 of the program (see figure 5). This growth in positive self talk from 0% on day 1 & 2 to 40% on day 3 & 4 demonstrates that participants were willing to use positive self affirmations to meet the challenges presented by the cliff edge activities. An example of this occurring is in this participant’s self-talk. “You can do it, take your time.” The researcher feels this finding raises another question. If positive self-talk develops as a successful strategy used during the program, for how long after the program do participants make use of this strategy to meet life’s challenges? Further research looking at post-program studies would likely determine whether this change was sustained.

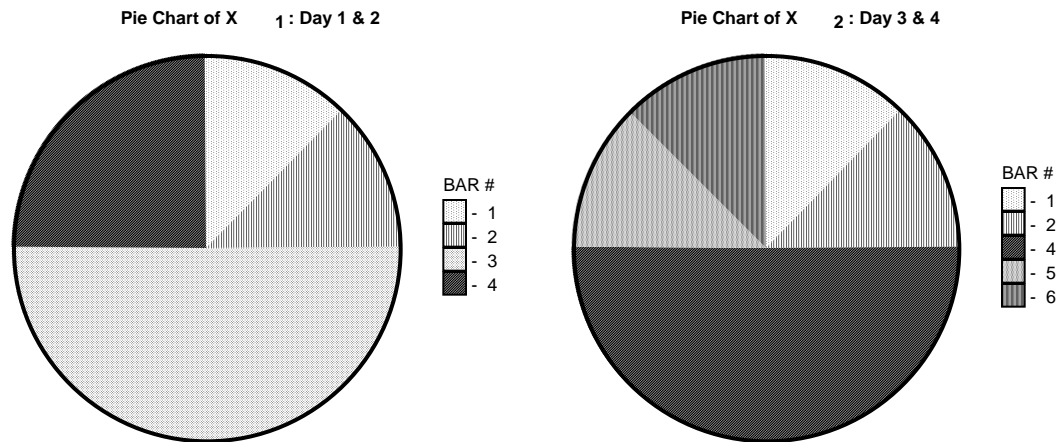


Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Critical self-talk	42.8	40
2. Go with the flow and hang in there	14.2	0
3. Switch critical self talk into positive affirmations	42.8	20
4. I can do this	0	40

Figure 5: Quality of self-talk

## DETERMINING THE NATURE OF FEAR

The findings as shown in figure 6, reinforce the supposition that the abseiling and climbing activities on day 3 & 4 confronted participants more than the previous activities. A significant increase (25% to 50%) in responses under the theme entitled fear of the activity indicates that participants were more conscious of their fear on day 3 & 4. A corresponding drop (50% to 0%) in the responses under the theme of no fear, reinforces this argument. What then does this say in research terms, other than participants tend to be more fearful while participating in cliff-based activities? One important value of the program is that participants have opportunities to identify, monitor and ultimately confront their fears. Avoidance is possible, yet the structure of the program and others like it (Adams & Sveen, 2000; Price & DeBever, 1999), makes this difficult and participants tend to confront their fears because few other options exist. For many substance users, avoiding their fears is typical behaviour, yet with programs such as Can Do, risk recreation cliff-based activities provide the impetus for participants to openly express and confront their fears.



Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Fear of everything	12.5	12.5
2. Fear of judgement by others	12.5	12.5
3. No fear experienced	50	0
4. Fear of facing the activity	25	50
5. Fear was present but reluctant to confront it	0	12.5
6. Fear of facing issues at the end of the program	0	12.5

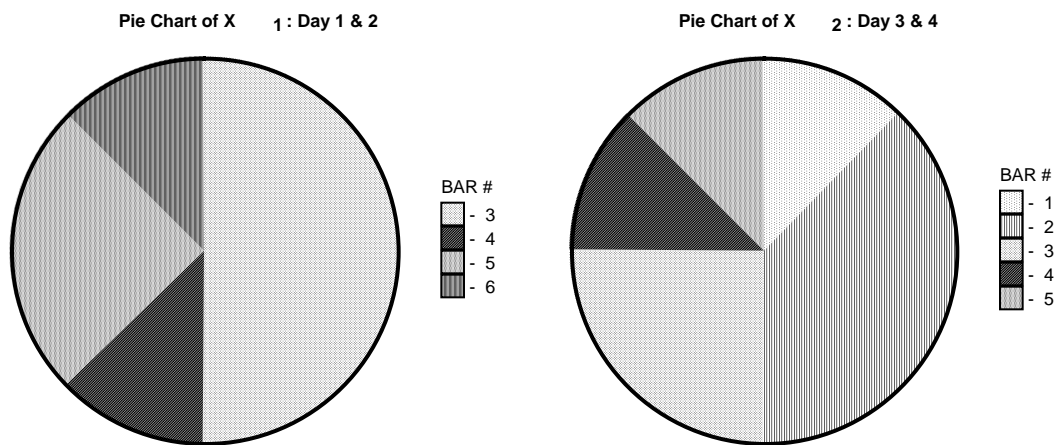
Figure 6: Determining the nature of fear

## LIFESTYLE CHANGES REQUIRED BEYOND THE END OF CAN DO

As seen in the table below (figure 7), significant life style changes planned for post-program focused on the need to risk trying something new. This resulted in growth from 0% on day 1 & 2 to 37.5% on day 3 & 4. The obvious hypothesis for this growth, is that participants are keen to repeat the experience of risk taking in the activities and generalise it into the rest of their lives.

Clear examples of this process in action are in these comments, “so it’s time to take many more risks and be prepared for whatever consequences it may create” and “take a risk because it doesn’t always turn out bad. It can turn out good and make you feel better about yourself.”

A significant decline occurred under the theme lifting their self respect post-program. The decline from went from 50% (day 1 & 2) to 25% (day 3 & 4). It is possible to argue that lifting one’s self respect had receded as a dominant post-program goal due to other more pressing changes that were required. There is no evidence for this, however it is worth analysing other themes that registered an increase on day 3 & 4 to see if in fact they involve a more detailed action statement such as, risk trying something new. For example, to focus more on others and less on myself, involves doing something far more concrete than lifting my self respect. It is not conclusive evidence that their goals are becoming more specific or action oriented, yet it provides a small hint that participants have greater clarity on what changes they need to make post-program.

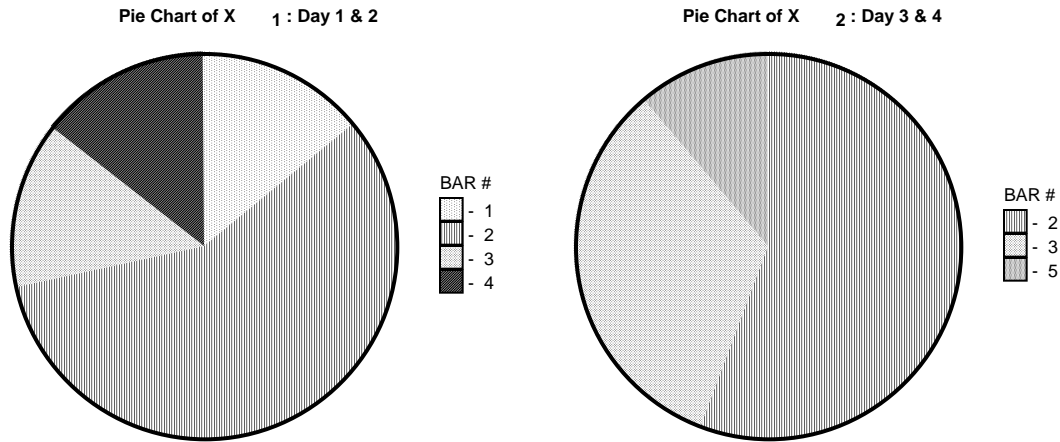


Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Focus more on others/less on myself	0	12.5
2. Risk trying something new	0	37.5
3. Lift my self-respect	50	25
4. Boost self-confidence	12.5	12.5
5. Improve communication and feedback skills	25	12.5
6. Get fit	12.5	0

Figure 7: Life changes required beyond the end of Can Do

## SUPPORT REQUIRED TO INSTITUTE THE CHANGES

In figure 8 the data demonstrates a consistency across all 4 days of the program (see theme 2), that participants value support through friendship and encouragement from others (57.1% and 55%). A number of hypotheses might be drawn from this consistency, yet it is the importance of supportive peer relationships that are being highlighted. Peer relationships for many substance users do not reside in the realm of either great friendship or encouragement. Perhaps this consistency in needing friendship and encouragement is representative of an ideal formed as a result of the group support experienced on the Can Do program. Through the development of supportive peer dynamics during the program, is it likely that participants have discovered the potential of what supportive friendships can offer? If the answer is yes, then perhaps this is the sort of peer relationship to which they aspire. Unmistakable references that support this view are in these comments by participants, “friendship is a profound catalyst to confidence” and “more self esteem and support from true friends and my family and don’t give up.”



Themes	Day 1/2 %	Day 3/4 %
1. Grab any support that I can	14.2	0
2. Friendship and encouragement from others	57.1	55.5
3. Faith and thinking positively of myself	14.2	33.3
4. Helping others will assist me	14.2	0
5. Further bush counselling programs	0	11.1

Figure 8: Support required to institute the changes

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