

Exploring Perceptions of Necessity, Accessibility and Use of Social Support for
Wilderness Therapy Field Instructors

by

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Abstract

Organizations offering therapeutic wilderness programming have a responsibility to ensure the well-being of their front line employees. A system of social support that is formed through communication with others, either personally or professionally, can assist field instructors in effectively managing the demands arising from their work.

Phenomenological analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts from seven participants provided insight on perceptions of necessity, accessibility and use of social support. Fourteen main themes and thirteen subthemes emerged from the data. Findings are presented using the six components of Parsons' (1980) staff development model and strongly suggest program managers consider and apply specific measures aimed at increasing the social support for front line field instructors in a wilderness therapy work context.

Keywords: social support; wilderness therapy; field instructors; phenomenology; turnover

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In many ways field instructors are no different than their clients who participate in therapeutic wilderness treatment programs. Field instructors eat the same foods and use the same minimalist camping gear while exploring remote areas in all seasons of the year. Duties of field instructors include “leading the expedition of up to twelve people in a variety of wilderness environments, communicating with the base camp and managing day-to-day living” (Russell & Hendee, 2000, p. 11). The intensity of both personal and professional demands on leaders assuming this role is therefore substantial and requires close examination to gain a better understanding of the difficulty organizations face in retaining these individuals over the long term.

Unstable job security for the current working generation means it is not uncommon for young employees to change jobs every three or four years (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000). The rate at which an employee quits or otherwise voluntarily leaves a job (Baron, 1985), known as turnover, is ordinarily even higher for employees within the human services field. For example, the average annual turnover rate for certified nursing assistants (CNAs) offering direct patient care in nursing homes was estimated at 93% (Wagner, 1998). Another study identified annual turnover rates for nurse aides, licensed practical nurses and registered nurses working in nursing home facilities as 119%, 89%, and 87% respectively (Castle, 2006). Finally, a sizeable number of child welfare case workers leave during the first two years (Strolin-Goltzman, 2008) with annual staff turnover rates for these employees estimated to be between 23% and 60% (Drake & Yadama, 1996).

The field of wilderness therapy is no exception to this trend of high turnover within the front line workers; although “the unique job related challenges experienced by field instructors” make it difficult to compare wilderness therapy work to more traditional human services fields like nursing (Marchand, Russell, & Cross, 2009, p. 371). Field instructors may frequently be perceived by their employers as unlikely to demonstrate long-term commitment to their jobs since they are often young, transient, relatively unconcerned about financial security or building a career and also tend to perceive a high availability of jobs in the field (Kirby, 2006). Not surprisingly, these individuals frequently leave front line field instructor positions to pursue a different career in human services or exit the discipline completely (Kirby, 2006).

Recent research has found field instructors, on average, remain employed full time with a wilderness therapy organization for less than one calendar year (11.85 months) (Marchand et al., 2009). Almost half (45%) of those surveyed by Marchand et al. (2009) had been working as a field instructor for less than five months. Replacing 100% of front line employees every two years was found to be “common and even expected” in wilderness therapy programs, making six consecutive months of employment from these individuals seem “great” (Kirby, 2006, p. 3).

Kirby (2006) stated, “It would likely be alarming to the directors and owners of wilderness therapy programs to find out that nearly 20% of their workforce intended to quit” (p. 73). All seven wilderness therapy program directors that participated in Kirby’s (2006) study were “attempting to address the problem of field staff turnover,” yet little information exists regarding the details of effective methods to reduce front line employee turnover in this unique industry (p. 3). Additional research is needed to provide

new knowledge that would assist field staff managers of wilderness therapy programs to effectively reduce the undesirable consequences incurred when an organization loses high performing employees and the benefits they contribute (Kirby, 2006). Those individuals acting as field staff managers may have front line wilderness experience at that particular organization, but this experience is not commonly required. The managers are generally less familiar than the current field instructors with the up-to-date issues related to client care or programming due to their geographic segregation from the wilderness program environment since they must rely on reports from their front line staff, therapists and occasional in-person one-day visits to the field in order to have a comprehensive sense of what's happening "out there."

Statement of the Problem

High rates of staff turnover in wilderness therapy programs incur both direct costs from continuous selection, hiring, and training of new employees as well as indirect costs such as lost knowledge, disruption of workflow and uncertainty for those that remain (Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009). Within the workplace, impacts of high turnover also include reduced staff morale, negative impact on staff culture and compromised quality of care provided to clients and families (Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009). One of the persistent problems noted by program directors and field supervisors in wilderness therapy programs is the amount of turnover within their field instructors, which can negatively impact treatment delivery and can cost programs significant investment of resources into continual training and recruitment (Russell et al., 2008).

Although field instructors do perceive several work-related benefits, the frequent choice to voluntarily terminate one's full time employment in this role needs further exploration. Almost all (92%) wilderness therapy field instructors reported personal

growth as a benefit of the job (Marchand et al., 2009). Similarly, a large number of field instructors are passionate about their work and (82%) report “making a difference for students” and “living in the wilderness” as “always” or “often” positively valued (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 368). However, perceptions of compromise while in the wilderness context could play a central role in a field instructor’s decision to leave. Influencing factors could include insufficient pay, repetitive food choices, physical toll on one’s body, long shifts in remote areas with limited outside communication or the constant emotional drain of dealing with challenging client behaviour (Bunce, 1998; Marchand et al., 2009). Similar factors prompting one’s intention to turnover may also arise outside the work context. These factors could include strain on one’s intimate relationships, difficulty creating new relationships with non-coworkers, or a feeling of being “disconnected” from or “missing out” on time spent with friends and family (Bunce, 1998; Marchand et al., 2009, p. 368). There is currently no clear understanding of which factors most strongly contribute to wilderness therapy field instructors’ longevity at a single organization.

The remaining sections of this chapter will further delineate the value of this research study. An outline of the study’s purpose, scope and significance as well as the main research question guiding the study will be presented. Areas of potential researcher bias as well will be acknowledged, as well as several underlying assumptions regarding both the study participants and their employers.

Purpose of the Study

The impact of supportive relationships within one’s social network has yet to be considered in previous research involving field instructors who work in wilderness therapy programs. One’s social network consists of the people with whom one interacts

regularly (Schabracq, Winnubst, & Cooper, 2003). The people within these networks can offer consultation, whereby they may act as a sounding board or help to mediate problems (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000). According to Knapp and Vangelisti (2000), “having a network of social ties” can provide a beneficial outcome to both men and women by offering feedback, advice, and emotional caring, commonly termed social support (p. 76).

Social support can be seen as the degree to which individuals have access to relationships on which they can rely for augmenting their resources (Johnson & Sarason, 1979). Research suggests people who spend a large amount of time highly focused on supporting others tend to experience psychological distress and poor physical health (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). However, feelings of social support are commonly connected to beneficial effects such as stress prevention, recovery from stress-related complaints and effective reintegration after a traumatic event or a period of sick leave (Schabracq et al., 2003). Knapp and Vangelisti (2000) consider feelings of support from an intimate partner to be vital for coping successfully with mental and physical illness, crises, transitions and various other sorts of life stress.

In the case of wilderness therapy field instructors, little is known about whether the constant presence of individuals within the work setting offers effective or adequate social support. Attention must also be turned to discovering what opportunities are available for effective social support during time spent outside the work context. After one’s work shift is over, research shows “a large portion of time is often spent physically and mentally recuperating,” potentially alone, resulting in little time available “for meaningful interactions with other people” (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 371).

Since companies typically underestimate the cost of turnover (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000), the purpose of this research study is to contribute knowledge in this area. By broadening the current understanding of inadequate social support as a potential cause for turnover, organizations will be better informed and subsequently, more capable of implementing effective strategies to support their front line workers. Organizations may find that prioritization of social support strategies acts as a key protective factor against premature turnover within their front line employees.

Research Question

How do the perceptions of necessity, accessibility and use of personal and professional social support systems affect the intention to turnover for wilderness therapy field instructors?

Scope of the Study

This research study will examine the necessity, accessibility and use of social support, as perceived by seven individuals with front line experience working in a wilderness therapy program. This qualitative research study is guided by Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology in the analysis of seven retrospective, first-hand perspectives regarding social support. The goal of this qualitative study is to provide rich description so that a complex, detailed understanding of the participants' perceptions of social support in this specific context is possible (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Suggested implementable practices aimed at increasing field instructor retention through the use of social support networks are provided based on the findings of this study.

Significance of the Study

New insights gained from this study can have implications for future research as well as practical applications for industries such as wilderness therapy. First, this study

fills a gap in the literature acknowledged by Marchand et al. (2009) who identified that a need exists “to better understand the lived experience of field instructors in and out of the field” (p. 372). After exploring the psychological adjustment process of field instructors upon return to their home environment, “the need for more carefully tailored services to support and assist staff during this period” is highlighted by Lawrence-Wood and Raymond (2011) alongside an analogous need to better understand “this neglected research area” (p. 335). Second, positive changes in the lives of front line practitioners of wilderness therapy will undoubtedly arise from a more in-depth understanding of the root causes leading to premature turnover. Implementing effective solutions to the challenges facing front line employees “is ostensibly critical given the role instructors play in facilitating the day-to-day living of clients in treatment” (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 360) and could serve to increase both an employee’s organizational longevity and quality of work. The findings derived from this research study will inform future individual, organization, or industry decisions aimed at effectively addressing the social support needs of front line wilderness therapy workers.

Disclosure of Bias

Qualitative data analysis techniques of reduction and interpretation rely heavily on the experience of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Therefore, given my role as the sole researcher in this study, it is important that my biases are clearly outlined. I am undertaking this research study as a white, middle class, educated female. I have a professional background that has involved working on the front line in a wide variety of expeditionary wilderness programs, both therapeutic and not. My interest in this research came about from informal conversations with peers in the profession regarding feelings

of inadequate support, frustration with management and uncertainty regarding the concept of a “sustainable” career in this field.

I long considered the potential of a link existing between two ideas that are commonly associated with the wilderness therapy work setting. First, newly hired field instructors are likely to turnover within two years. Second, field instructors may not receive adequate social support to deal with the intense physical and emotional challenges accompanying this role. The aim of this study is to explore any links between these two ideas and not to evaluate a specific wilderness therapy program or develop a plan to “fix” the issues currently distressing employees in this field. Solutions to current problems may be found in the future, but in order for these solutions to be as effective as possible, the process must begin by acknowledging and describing the existing concerns for front line employees. A stronger understanding of these concerns will emerge only by describing their characteristics from the perspective of the front line field instructors. I aim to echo the voices of the study’s participants so interested parties can hear what they have to say. Based on the findings of this research study, it is my hope that effective social support strategies are implemented by wilderness therapy program managers to prioritize retention of high quality front line employees who desire to work in this role for longer than one year.

Based on the small size of the professional community of field instructors in Ontario, Canada and my previous experience working for one wilderness therapy organization, I was professionally acquainted with several of the potential interviewees prior to the interviews. Consequently, I made a constant effort to remain neutral and aware of my own biases by using a reflexive journal throughout the process of data

collection and analysis. I also tried to ensure all data collected during this study was treated equally. As well, care was taken to ensure the identity of each participant was not disclosed and any defining details of his or her experience remained confidential.

Assumptions

The following underlying assumptions were made about the interviewees (each of whom is hereafter referred to as “the participant”) agreeing to take part in the study:

1. The participant voluntarily agreed to work full time as a wilderness therapy field instructor for at least one calendar year with an Ontario-based organization prior to September 2010.
2. The participant undertook the position of field instructor with the intention of fulfilling the conditions of the contract and/or remaining in this job position for at least one calendar year.
3. The participant voluntarily terminated the employment contract with the organization after a time period between one and three years of full time work had passed.
4. At the time of the initial interview (September/October 2011), the participant had not been employed full time by this organization for at least one calendar year since his or her departure.

The following underlying assumptions have been made regarding the Ontario-based organizations (each of which is hereafter referred to as “the employer”) that employed the study participants as full time wilderness therapy field instructors:

1. During recruitment, the employer provided information to each participant regarding specific requirements and expectations of the job before he or she began working full time in the field.

2. An orientation period consisting of one or two weeks spent job shadowing was allotted for each field instructor to become comfortable in the role before he or she was officially titled as a full time employee.
3. Initial and ongoing skills training opportunities were made available by the employer.
4. Support services, such as individual or group counseling, were recommended or made available to the participant by the employer.
5. Ongoing communication and evaluation procedures were implemented in accordance with an individualized plan of staff support and skill development.
6. Each field instructor hired by the employer was expected to continue in this role for at least one calendar year at the time of hiring and a written contract was signed indicating this commitment.

Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussion of the background, purpose, scope and significance of the study, including outlines of researcher bias and assumptions, has set the stage for the following chapter. Results of a comprehensive review of relevant literature are presented to provide a substantial background from which to further explore the research question. Following this, additional chapters in this manuscript will describe first, the methods used for data collection and analysis, second, the themes that emerged as research findings and finally, a concluding chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the study results, including implications of the findings, recommendations for future research and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In outdoor and adventure program research, the traditional focus has been to examine the impacts of wilderness-based programs on participants, not on field instructors. Several meta-analyses, reflecting the trends of hundreds of empirical pre-post studies, have focused solely on broadening the current understanding of impacts from participation in wilderness programs on the participants (e.g., Bunting & Donley, 2002; Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hans, 2000; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Marsh, 1999; Neill, 2002; Neill & Richards, 1998). In terms of wilderness therapy programs specifically, research has concentrated on defining common practices (e.g., Russell, 2001; Russell & Hendee, 2000), examining the therapeutic process in a wilderness context (e.g., Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Russell & Hendee, 2000; Russell, Hendee & Phillips-Miller, 2000), inventorying operating programs in North America (e.g., Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994a; Russell, Gillis, & Lewis, 2008; Russell & Hendee, 2000) and exploring anticipated and actual program outcomes for participants (e.g., Russell & Hendee, 2000; Russell et al., 2008).

Very few studies have focused on understanding the perspectives or characteristics of the field instructors who are employed to facilitate wilderness-based expeditionary programs (e.g., Birmingham, 1989; Hutson & Bailey, 2008; Kirby, 2006; Marchand, 2010; Marchand, et al., 2009; Thomas, 2003; Wilson, 2009). Although some interest does exist in examining contributing factors to voluntary turnover in field instructors employed by wilderness programs (e.g., Bailey, Kuiper, & Kang, 2011; Birmingham, 1989; Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009; Ross, 1989; Thomas, 2001;

Thomas, 2003), the “specific instructional staff turnover rates for different programs are not widely known or reported” in the literature (Birmingham, 1989, p. 4).

Quantitative research methods have been commonly used when researchers seek to broaden the current understanding of the challenges field instructors encounter in this unique career (e.g., Birmingham, 1989; Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009). However, survey data alone does not always provide enough detail to effectively inform current practice. According to Marchand et al. (2009), quantitative survey responses are a good starting point, but one-on-one, in-depth interviews with field instructors would be an ideal approach from which to fulfill recommendations to thoroughly examine topics such as intimate relationships, social support or client care.

At present, research studies conducted qualitatively in search of perspectives on the lived experience of field instructors are particularly limited (e.g., Allin, 2004; Hutson & Bailey, 2008). Qualitative approaches to examining field instructor issues could more thoroughly answer questions raised by quantitative studies (e.g., Birmingham, 1989; Berman & Davis-Berman, 1994; Marchand, 2010; Marchand et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2008) and contribute to an emerging body of knowledge aimed at better understanding the challenges experienced by these individuals, both within and outside the workplace. More comprehensive research should be conducted to further evaluate how various instructor styles, behaviors and attitudes are influencing program effectiveness (McKenzie, 2000).

To date, little academic research using qualitative methods has been conducted to directly explore the lived experiences or perceptions of wilderness therapy field instructors. The goal of this literature review is to provide a theoretical background for

the ensuing discussion of the study's findings. This chapter will begin with an introduction to wilderness therapy as well as to the field instructors that facilitate these programs. Several of the challenges facing field instructors will then be highlighted within the following three sections: work-life balance, interpersonal relationships and social support. This chapter concludes by building a theoretical framework. To this end, employee turnover literature from several related fields will be situated within Parsons' (1980) model of staff development.

Wilderness Therapy

Historical development. A distinctly therapeutic approach to camping in a wilderness environment has evolved over the last century into what we currently call wilderness therapy. Although short-lived and poorly documented, by 1901 the revolutionary "tent therapy" movement generated anecdotal reports of beneficial effects from applying "fresh air environments" to the treatment of institutionalized psychiatric patients (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994, p. 43). In the following decades, therapeutic camping applications were extended to include disabled children as well as those with an array of mental health difficulties, including troubled and/or adjudicated teens (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Kimball & Bacon, 1993). Established in 1942, Outward Bound's early wilderness challenge programs followed founder Kurt Hahn's approach to education based on the premise that "certain experiences could spontaneously call forth prosocial values" (Kimball & Bacon, 1993, p. 13). In the mid-1900s, more sophisticated camping therapy programs began using trained professionals, such as counselors, psychiatrists and social workers, in programs specifically geared toward working with troubled youth in wilderness environments (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994).

Therapeutic wilderness programs emphasizing the intensity of the camping experience

and the centrality of the group were created distinctly around the use of a remote wilderness environment as an innovative therapeutic approach to facilitate change and growth in program participants (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Russell, 2001). A remote wilderness environment, where therapeutic program participants spend a majority of time, is classified as any geographical location more than one hour from definitive medical care (Backer et al., 2008).

Situating Wilderness Therapy. Wilderness therapy programs are often classified under a larger industry category known as outdoor behavioural therapy (OBH). The OBH industry encompasses outdoor-based therapeutic programs that are purely expeditionary as well as those that are mainly residential. This therapeutic branch of the outdoor programming industry has been recently documented as experiencing growth in North America (Russell et al., 2008). By 2006, the 43 operating OBH programs identified five years earlier had increased to 65, three of which were found in Canada (Russell et al., 2008). Over 100 programs are currently operating within the US and Canada (Marchand & Russell, 2012).

Although OBH programs are known to be expensive to operate, it remains unclear whether these programs are becoming more or less accessible to adolescents in need. On one hand, it once seemed as though increasing financial assistance from medical insurance companies or government-assisted health care was making wilderness therapy more accessible for families with limited incomes (Russell et al., 2000). Conversely, trends observed more recently showed “the average cost of treatment has increased since 2001 and the percentage of costs covered by third party payment has declined, thus often placing the burden of treatment costs on parents and consumers” (Russell et al., 2008, p.

64). Regardless of cost, if demand for adolescent-specific treatment programs continues to remain high, wilderness therapy programs will likely continue to expand across North America in future years.

Current approaches to wilderness therapy have been developed from the long-standing philosophy that a wilderness experience could have a curative effect on health and enact meaningful behavioural and cognitive change, particularly in youth.

Expeditionary wilderness therapy programs are distinguished from residential programs by their application of a clinical treatment model that is supervised by licensed mental health professionals and primarily uses wilderness expeditions as a therapeutic milieu (Russell et al., 2008). Davis-Berman and Berman (1994) further delineated wilderness therapy as a treatment model that often uses elements of heightened arousal and perceived risk as a critical part of the experience. Russell (2001) described wilderness therapy as “hands-on learning of personal and social responsibility, with modeling and practice of appropriate social skills and cooperative behaviours, all reinforced by logical and natural consequences from the wilderness conditions” (p. 75). Russell (2001) reported the common use of primitive skills and reflection activities in modern wilderness therapy approaches to enhance personal and interpersonal growth (Russell, 2001).

For the purposes of this study, use of the term wilderness therapy will hereafter refer to a field-based, continuous flow, private placement program. In this type of program, all adolescent clients have been voluntarily placed in treatment, either by parents, custodial authorities, or themselves (Russell & Hendee, 2000). Led by a team of at least two field instructors, greater than 90% of treatment time is spent on expedition,

using seasonally-appropriate methods to travel through remote wilderness environments (Russell & Hendee, 2000; Russell et al., 2008).

The continuous flow program model is usually run in eight day rotations where each adolescent client will remain for six to eight continuous weeks. One day each week, known as changeover day, is when the field instructor team is replaced, new supplies and incoming adolescent clients arrive, and visits from a clinical therapist and/or medical professional occur (Russell, 2001). A common schedule for the continuous flow program model follows two week rotational periods, of which field instructors are working for eight days in a row and then are off duty for the six consecutive days following (Russell & Hendee, 2000). Interestingly, the state-licensed mental health practitioners (known as the clinical team) who interact directly with the clients only one day per week appear not to incur the same high rates of turnover as the front line field instructors, since many can still be found in a similar role several years after initially becoming employed by the organization (Kirby, 2006).

Hesitant Acceptance. An “epidemic” of widespread emotional disorders in American adolescents has encouraged parents to seek out a variety of available treatment approaches that claim to be specifically “suited for adolescents’ unique needs” (Russell et al., 2000, p. 207). Since the first wilderness therapy programs began in locations like Utah and Arizona in the late 1980s, wilderness therapy programming has been touted as “an emerging treatment intervention in mental health practice to help adolescents overcome emotional, adjustment, addiction, and psychological problems” (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Russell et al., 2000, p. 207). Despite growing interest in developing similar programs in Canada and worldwide, without an overarching regulatory body,

wilderness therapy programs are still often viewed with trepidation from the traditional segment of the mental health profession. According to Ferguson (1999):

A lot of the good that goes on in a program like this seems due less to the application of an existing theory than to a mixed bag of tactics and intuitive strategies, hand-delivered by a slightly freaky bunch of mentors, in a place a thousand miles beyond the frenzy of the culture at large. (p. 91)

Hesitation to embrace the field of wilderness therapy stems from loosely defined treatment approaches, limited and inconsistent research (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Russell, 2001), as well as several cases of mistreatment leading to death of adolescent clients that were widely and negatively portrayed in the media (e.g., Krakauer, 1995). Following these cases, a report and testimony before Congress put forth by the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that “little is known about this industry, as there is no one entity that provides information or oversight, be it allegations of abuse and neglect, or the number and types of programs operating” (Russell et al., 2008, p. 58). In the GAO report (GAO-08-146T) entitled *Residential Treatment Programs: Concerns Regarding Abuse and Death in Certain Programs for Troubled Youth*, Kutz and O’Connell (2007) examined ten closed cases where an adolescent had died while enrolled in a private residential treatment program. Three program characteristics were identified within this report as requiring further attention from the industry as a whole: untrained staff, lack of adequate nourishment and reckless or negligent operating practices (Kutz & O’Connell, 2007).

Additional topics have since been placed under scrutiny with regard to current program practices of organizations within the OBH industry by client families and

researchers alike. Questions have been raised regarding the hiring and training practices that involve front line workers, especially concerning the level of on-the-job field instructor competence (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994). Although some basic knowledge of standardized training and certification requirements of field instructors exists, limited research literature means little is currently known about the motivations, experience and educational backgrounds that field instructors bring to their jobs (Russell et al., 2008).

Field Instructors

Demographics. Also known as “wilderness leaders,” “guides,” “outdoor instructors,” or “field staff,” teams of field instructors are responsible for providing direct care to participants, teaching wilderness living skills and ensuring the safety of the group, while continuously experiencing the “pressure of making split second decisions” on multi-day remote wilderness expeditions (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 360; Russell & Hendee, 2000). Kirby (2006) asserted “field instructors tend to be young, educated, single, and Caucasian and, as a result, have far fewer employment and financial limitations” than other groups of people (p. 79). Kirby (2006) also suggested that “only a limited range of individuals would consider work as a field staff fulfilling and enjoyable,” and attempting to find individuals from outside this demographic with similar sentiments would be difficult (p. 68). Perhaps due to a desire to share their love of the outdoors with others, many field instructors report altruistic reasons as among the most important for choosing this job (Marchand, 2009) and hold a strong belief “in the wilderness therapy paradigm and in their own ability and desire to help others change for the better” (Kirby, 2006, p. 75). Many individuals who apply for this work are in their twenties, generally

“talented and passionate and eager to feel they’re doing something worthwhile, few with any clear sense of what they’re getting into” (Ferguson, 1999, p. 11).

Shifting field instructor demographics within the areas of age, gender, and education show noticeable trends over time within this distinct workforce. For example, field instructors employed in the 1980s were commonly in their late 20s and early 30s, older than today’s average age of 22 to 27 (Birmingham, 1989; Kirby, 2006; Marchand & Russell, 2012; Riggins, 1985; Wilson, 2009). Work in the outdoors began from a “historically male-dominated culture and philosophy,” apparent through values commonly associated with the military and with physical competence and the common presence of male leaders (Allin & Humberstone, 2006, p. 136). Men and women today are now equally represented in field instructor roles (Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009; Wilson, 2009) and in some cases, women even outnumber men (Marchand, 2010). However, when examining longevity, male respondents in a survey by Marchand et al. (2009) had reportedly worked as a field instructor for an average of six months longer than females.

The overall increase in education level of field instructors over time is noticeable when current statistics, indicating approximately 60% to 70% of field instructors have a baccalaureate degree (Marchand et al., 2009; Marchand & Russell, 2012; Wilson, 2009), are compared to statistics from the early 1980s when those with undergraduate degrees numbered less than 40% (Birmingham, 1989; Riggins, 1985). Although the most common post-secondary degrees are related to adventure education, recreation or social sciences (Marchand et al., 2009), the literature still paints an unclear picture of whether currently employed field instructors are adequately qualified and trained to handle some

of the potentially dangerous or traumatic psychiatric and medical emergency situations encountered when working in isolated wilderness environments (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Galloway, 2007; Russell, et al., 2008). Field instructors are “on the front line of treatment delivery, running daily or twice daily groups, counseling on an individual basis, and doing extensive conflict mediation” (Kirby, 2006, p. 10-11), whether or not they have an extensive educational background in these areas.

Questions Regarding Competence. Adolescent clients participating in OBH programs will spend the majority of their treatment time in direct contact with field instructor teams, living and travelling with them in remote wilderness environments for several weeks at a time (Russell et al., 2008). A critical, yet unanswered question remains whether the currently used screening, hiring and training practices ensures field instructors are adequately qualified to handle psychiatric or medical emergency situations that inevitably arise in this work (Russell et al., 2008). This issue was first discussed by Davis- Berman and Berman (1994a) in their national survey of programs where the question arose, “Is it ethical for programs serving ‘high-risk’ youth to deliver their services using less than professionally trained and credentialed staff?” (p. 130). Russell et al. (2008) summarized common industry concerns in the following quote:

The degree to which the state standards are sufficient in preparing these young people to work with serious emotional and behavioural disorders is a critical question and one that warrants continued attention. How does one teach and how do staff learn counseling, teaching and supervisory skills, and leadership and judgment skills, in addition to other more technical skills, over a 2-week

period? The answer to this question requires serious thought and empirical study, and should include a survey of OBH program training protocols and the development of a “Standards of Best Practice for Training” of field instructors.

(p. 71)

Russell et al. (2008) advise that specific academic training relevant to work in OBH programs should be required in closely related disciplines such as psychology, social work, outdoor education, outdoor recreation, or education to “ensure that field staff have a core set of knowledge prior to employment and that programs are then responsible for training more technical and tangible skills related to wilderness expeditionary leading and emergency evacuation procedures” (p. 71). Further research on field instructors’ experiences, training, job tenure, and academic qualifications is warranted (Russell et al., 2008) in order to determine if a detrimental gap exists between one’s classroom experience and its application in an on-the-job setting.

Various groups have made attempts to standardize the hiring and/or training qualifications for wilderness therapy field instructors in order to begin to address the aforementioned issues. The Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children Therapeutic Wilderness Task Force has recommended that wilderness therapy programs be led by a person with the following qualifications:

At least three years progressively responsible experience in an outdoor education program for at-risk or troubled youth; demonstrated technical competence and safety skills, problem-solving and leadership skills, sound judgment, and capabilities in interpersonal communication and group facilitation; and skills in

the use of outdoor and camping experiences for therapeutic purposes (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994, p. 141).

Requirements enacted for the state of Utah set a precedent for standardizing the experience and training of field instructors in wilderness therapy programs. These standards ensure that field instructors: (a) are a minimum of 20 years of age; (b) have a high school diploma or equivalency; (c) have forty-eight field days of outdoor youth program experience; (d) exhibit leadership skill; (e) are annually trained and certified in CPR and certified in standard first aid; and (f) have completed an initial staff training (Utah Division of Administrative Rules R501-8-6, 2011). Utah state training standards require field instructors to be trained in twelve “technical” items, including emergency procedures, first aid, and navigation skills as well as two “interpersonal skill” sets of: (a) counseling, teaching, and supervisory skills and (b) leadership and judgment (Utah Division of Administrative Rules R501-8-8, 2011).

Using Utah’s comprehensive standards as a guide, states like Oregon, Idaho, and Montana have developed similar standards so that almost 90% of all OBH programs in operation report implementing hiring and training standards for field instructors that are similar to those of Utah (Russell et al., 2008). However, without an overarching body overseeing the operation of each wilderness therapy program in operation, these standards are difficult to enforce or acknowledge as the minimum level of acceptance. Further examination of all aspects of the identities, qualifications and responsibilities of field instructors will be critical to improving the overall public perception of OBH programs.

Work-Related Challenges

The seasonal nature of wilderness therapy work, when combined with an atypical work schedule consisting of several consecutive days away from one's family, friends, spouse/partner and the comforts of home, results in uniquely demanding employment circumstances. Ferguson (1999) describes working in wilderness therapy programs as "an emotional rollercoaster" in his book *Shouting at the Sky*, written after time spent as a participant-observer in one of Utah's best known eight-week wilderness therapy programs (p. 22). According to Bunce (1998), stress and burnout are likely to be common among field instructors, as are negative cognitions associated with self-efficacy, self-confidence and perceptions of success.

Each employee must negotiate the challenges of managing work requiring long hours and intense physical and emotional investment in his or her own way. However, if managers were to play a significant role in helping individual employees address the work-related problems they perceive, field instructors may be prevented from leaving the profession earlier than desired (Thomas, 2003). Work-related challenges impacting field instructors were reviewed in the literature in relation to the following three areas: work-life balance, interpersonal relationships and social support.

Work-life Balance. Decisions regarding any career, particularly a field-based career in the outdoors, will be undoubtedly based on the seemingly contradictory demands of work and managing a family (Allin, 2004; Goldin, 2004; Lotz, 2010). Employed individuals must juggle multiple obligations and responsibilities to various others, both in their work domain (e.g., their employer, superior, colleagues) and in their non-work domain (e.g., spouses, children, relatives and friends) (Schabracq et al., 2003). One contemporary viewpoint is that the domains of work and non-work have become

highly interrelated of late and a high proportion of workers, particularly employed parents, encounter serious difficulty when attempting to balance their obligations between the work and non-work domains (Schabracq et al., 2003). Motivational characteristics, or resources, such as spouse or other social support, have been found to diminish negative interaction between work and non-work domains and to evoke a so-called positive interaction between both domains (Schabracq et al., 2003).

From a conservation of resources perspective, work-to-family conflict occurs when additional demands placed on the family domain by the work domain are evaluated as a threat to family-based resources or when too few resources are perceived in the family domain to deal effectively with the additional work demands (Matthews, Barnes-Farrell, & Bulger, 2010). To avoid this mismatched scenario, some field instructors may choose to remain single in order to devote the necessary time and energy to avoid feelings of being overwhelmed by simultaneous feelings of pressure in both one's career and family life (Allin, 2004; Gehring, 2002; Marchand et al., 2009).

The most recent cohort of women studied by Goldin (2004) was made up of women who graduated college in the 1980s. Her results showed that this cohort was the first group to have goals unlike any other cohort of college educated females from the past century, whereby they aimed to have both a career and family at the same time (Goldin, 2004). Goldin (2004) explained that for this group of women, "It would not be one *or* the other. Nor would it be one *then* the other. It would be *both*" (p. 21). Recognition of the particularly large demands on today's women attempting to combine both career and family responsibilities is not a new concept, but can be amplified even further for those women working in roles such as coaches or field instructors.

Each of the university-level athletic coaches who participated in Gehring's (2002) study reported that they "struggled with maintaining a balance in their own lives" (p. 209). Noting a lack of employer support for starting and having a family in her informants' lives and their frequent "conscious decisions not to have children," Gehring (2002) asked if it is widely perceived as necessary to relinquish non-work priorities in order to be effective in one's work (p. 205). This question is particularly difficult for women to answer since motherhood provides additional challenges to maintaining the exhausting schedule created by work in an already demanding career where one's body is often centrally linked to one's success (Allin, 2004).

Combining a career in the outdoors with the family responsibilities of motherhood was termed "particularly problematic" by female outdoor instructors in a study by Allin (2004, p. 64). Identified issues included dilemmas between one's career identity and one's identity as a mother, a lack of recognition from one's employer regarding the physical consequences of motherhood, changing relationships with work colleagues, and difficulty maintaining or updating one's professional outdoor qualifications (Allin, 2004). For women specifically, the difficulty arising from long and irregularly scheduled work commitments congruent with traditional notions of a field-based career in the outdoors may be even more pronounced than the difficulty experienced by men, since these extended time commitments tend to clash so intensely with common social constructions of women's identities as partners, wives and/or mothers (Allin, 2004).

When accepting a job as a wilderness therapy field instructor, one must be willing to tolerate an atypical and demanding work schedule and must find harmony with the resulting lifestyle impacts. According to one program therapist, if field instructors can't

get in touch with their own needs, “if they deny them or repress them, think they are here only for the kids, not for themselves, they’re screwed” (Ferguson, 1999, p. 95). Marchand and Russell (2012) found that those wilderness field instructors who had underestimated the amount of stress they would feel from the demands of the job would frequently encounter reduced job satisfaction after working for one year.

Interpersonal relationships. In Kirby’s (2006) research, the most common complaint made by wilderness therapy field instructors was reported by their program directors to be the difficulty posed by the work schedule. In Thomas’ (2001, 2003) research on outdoor educators, common contributors to work related stress were identified most frequently as long work hours and time away from home, at 61% and 60% respectively. Factors such as these that have been identified as contributing to a perceived lack of stability or permanence in one’s relationships were experienced by large proportions of survey respondents and warrant further attention.

Employees experiencing difficulties with the lack of time available to spend with significant others, likened their experience living away from family and friends to “living overseas” (Thomas, 2003, p. 57). From the perspective of one outdoor education program director in Thomas’ (2003) study:

Because they are not spending quality time with the person they want to be with, we say to them when they start, “Look there is a nearly 100% failure rate if you have got a relationship...because you are not going to be able to have regular contact with them”...it is very difficult. (p. 57)

In the study by Marchand et al. (2009), survey results focusing on job related difficulties were collected and analyzed from a sample of 129 field instructors employed at three

state-licensed outdoor behavioral healthcare programs in the United States. Several of the statements that were seen as highly challenging by study participants were related to their relationships with people from outside their work environment. Over one third of respondents perceived themselves as struggling to “create relationships with others not associated with work when outside the work setting” (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 368). Over half the participants indicated feeling “disconnected from home” and “missing out on time with friends and family” as always or often challenging (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 368). Experiences of a “lack of friendship stability” and a “lack of relationship with extended family” were also seen as highly challenging (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 368).

Marchand et al. (2009) identified several of the items perceived by field instructors as highly challenging to be occurring in non-work related areas, particularly in sustaining romantic personal relationships. Marchand et al. (2009) stated, “When field instructors do return from long extended stays in backcountry environments, they are then challenged in managing their days off with other obligations, including finding time to tend to personal matters and maintaining intimate relationships” (p. 371).

Approximately one third of respondents in Marchand et al.’s (2009) study report they see their “spouse or partner affected” by their work and/or their work has a “negative effect” on their most intimate relationship (p. 368).

Although more than half the respondents in Marchand et al.’s (2009) study were over age 25, 48% of field instructors surveyed were single, only 9% were married, and 22% reported that their work had contributed to a break up with an intimate partner. Similar statistics were found in a very recent study where a majority of participants were single (63%), while 12% were married and 25% in a relationship (Marchand & Russell,

2012). Field instructors who identified themselves as married or in a committed, long-term relationship reportedly felt more challenged with time and schedule constraints associated with their job than single individuals (Marchand et al., 2009). Ferguson (1999) shared the perspectives of two field instructors:

Steve and Shawn are discussing relationships, how tough it is in this job to have any kind of significant other. “Man,” Shawn says, “I can’t even see myself ever getting into it with someone until I quit this. After eight days out there I’m so spent I can’t imagine dealing with the emotional stuff that’s part of a relationship. Honestly. I’d go nuts.” Steve agrees. “Maybe if you got with somebody else who worked here. Sometimes that seems okay. At least they’d understand your exhaustion.” (p. 122)

In related research, both men and women indicated a need for increased time with family and friends as the most important reason for leaving the elite coaching profession, where frequent weekend and evening work commitments are the norm (Pastore, 1991). The disconcerting findings from the research literature in this area indicate a compelling need for additional research that explores the difficulties for those that work in expeditionary wilderness programs in terms of their interpersonal relationships. It would be unlikely for program managers to see or know much detail regarding the realities of employees’ private interpersonal relationships with individuals from outside their work context, but research indicates that this is an important area for managers to address when attempting to overhaul program policies in areas like social support or employee retention.

Social support. Although there is a large body of social support literature, agreement on one consistent measure of social support is lacking. However, the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) has been widely used in recent decades (Bell, 2006). This measure of social support is based on the premise that people need certain provisions from relationships that include reassurance of worth/competence, reliable alliance/tangible support and guidance (Bell, 2006). First, reassurance of worth/competence, also known as “recognized competence,” involves a person being appreciated for his or her skills (Bell, 2006, p. 149). Research by Garske (2000) reported rehabilitation counselors to be dissatisfied with “recognition received” and “perceived advancement opportunities” (p. 12). Similarly, for front line nursing assistants, “lack of acknowledgement or reward for good work” was seen as an organizational characteristic commonly contributing to turnover in front line workers (Bowers, Esmond, & Jacobson, 2003, p. 38). Second, the provision of reliable alliance/tangible support measures “the perception a person has that his or her social support network will provide tangible support,” through formal or informal agreements (Bell, 2006, p. 149). Finally, guidance is a third provision required for social support as outlined in the SPS model. This provision is met through presence of “a person or people to whom an individual can turn for advice and discussion of important decisions or problems” (Bell, 2006, p. 149). In a wilderness therapy context, the provision of guidance would most suitably come from one’s immediate supervisor, such as the field staff manager, employed within the same organization.

A social network can be defined as “the set of people with whom one maintains contact and has some form of social bond” (Bowling, Farquhar, & Browne, 1991, p. 549).

Social networks provide individuals with benefits such as emotional (e.g., understanding, sharing feelings) or social (e.g., doing things with other people, having a sense of belonging) support (Kerstetter, Yarnal, Son, Yen, & Baker, 2008). One's social network can consist of friends whose friendship and support may be considered critical to one's well-being (Kerstetter et al., 2008). For field instructors who work in remote wilderness locations, their social network may be largely comprised of young adults who work for the same or another nearby therapeutic wilderness program (Ferguson, 1999). Kirby (2006) suggested that the strong emotional bonds that develop between field instructors may be due to "the rather narrow demographic that characterizes this group of workers" (p. 78). Kirby (2006) stated:

While it is certainly not the case that field staff are the only group of workers who form strong positive relationships with co-workers, there is something unique about the experience of doing emotionally charged work with like-minded people 24 hours a day. (p. 78)

There's often a custom that incoming field instructors leave bags of goodies in the car for those who have just completed their shift (Ferguson, 1999). In addition, "It is typical on the ride out for staff to give each other feedback, process whatever was going on so there's a better chance of everyone not obsessing about it during their six days off" (Ferguson, 1999, p. 117). Other actions that demonstrate a positive connection between field instructors, allow the building of a sense of perceived togetherness, thereby potentially fostering positive and supportive relationships with others at work (Blatt & Camden, 2007). Group cohesion with one's coworkers, considered conceptually similar

to social support, has been shown to be an important factor in burnout prevention for summer camp staff (Bailey, Kuiper, & Kang, 2011).

Developing one's social network beyond the realm of coworkers or others who have an understanding of the unique demands of wilderness therapy work is often difficult due to the communication constraints inherent to the nature of the job and the desire by some staff for aloneness when not at work (Birmingham, 1989). Open communication with people from outside one's immediate work context allows field instructors the opportunity to "disconnect from what goes on" (Ferguson, 1999, p. 123) at work. Emotional exhaustion, centering around feelings of depression, helplessness, hopelessness and entrapment (Baron, 1985), may prompt some wilderness therapy field instructors to arrange for regular professional counseling sessions with therapists in surrounding towns during days off from work (Ferguson, 1999). Known to suffer higher anxiety levels associated with their job, female field instructors may attribute a sense of relief to communication with one's peers, mentors, or via professional counseling (Marchand et al., 2009).

The necessity of social support as "an important mechanism" for successful transitioning into the role of field instructor could be just as important as the literature suggests it is for assisting students in the positive transition to college (Bell, 2006, p. 147). The literature suggests developing productive social support systems in a new environment can provide an important buffering effect to the stress of such transitions (Bell, 2006; Pratt et al., 2000). Social supports are seen as required by all students in some form to make a "healthy" transition from high school to college or university (Bell, 2006, p. 147).

In wilderness therapy programs, adolescent clients typically receive ongoing letters or email printouts sharing words of positive support from parents or other family members (Russell & Hendee, 2000). The program participants are encouraged to respond, making letter writing an important tool that is often used to begin healing families which have been torn apart by the adolescent's past behaviours (Russell & Hendee, 2000). However, no known academic studies have yet measured whether field instructors in remote wilderness environments are able to gain feelings of positive social support in the form of letters or other written communication that is read while working in a remote wilderness environment. With the assumption of gaining associated benefits from perceived social support, field instructors could be encouraged to write letters while on shift to people in their lives with whom they may want to communicate, but due to the constraints of their wilderness work context, otherwise temporarily cannot. Letters could potentially be used to motivate field instructors by providing a tangible, readable reminder of one's sustaining, healthy, trustworthy relationships and supportive friends.

When examining career longevity, Gehring (2002) discovered that each female, college-level coach who had spent over fifteen years in the job reported receiving substantial personal and professional support, the majority of which came from friends, mentors and intimate partners who were outside the workplace. One of her participants stated, "If you are not supported on a personal level, you can't be yourself. Eventually it wears you down." (Gehring, 2002, p. 202). Gehring's (2002) study highlights the importance of exploring multiple support systems, covering both social and emotional dimensions, when assessing contributing factors to their career longevity. She recommends looking beyond individual and institutional factors to examine the

interaction of one's personal and professional life when attempting to gain an understanding of why certain individuals choose to stay in challenging careers (Gehring, 2002).

Mitchell and Irvine (2008) highlighted the value of intentionally building some kind of outlet for the researchers' personal emotions and reflections into the methodology of any research study where specific processing of the experience might be helpful. After researching sensitive topics where much of what is shared by participants may be potentially traumatic and distressing, these researchers disclosed that they "experienced feelings of being overcome by the harrowing experiences of others and the need to unload these" (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008, p. 36). Acknowledging the difficulty of preemptively anticipating the "emotional impact of research encounters," Mitchell and Irvine (2008) had not considered the need for a "specific emotional support system" when conducting interviews with high needs participants (p. 36). For other researchers hearing stories of trauma or otherwise difficult topics from their participants, Mitchell and Irvine (2008) recommend intentional inclusion of opportunities for debriefing the research experience within a study's methodology could be beneficial.

In related literature, debriefing activities were shown to positively contribute to developing a psychological sense of community within groups of college students, while not enough debriefing was a detracting factor (Breunig, O'Connell, Todd, Anderson, & Young, 2010). Other researchers noted that the merit of sharing their fieldwork experiences to work through their personal emotions and responses became increasingly apparent (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). They reported the use of the processes of analyzing, writing and disseminating the study results as well as engaging in "informal opportunities

to discuss fieldwork experiences with research team colleagues” as valuable techniques to assist in dealing with the challenges of their work (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008, p. 36).

Even though field instructors may aim to include debriefing with teenage program participants as a way to encourage reflection on their experiences and facilitation of specific personal changes in their lives (Knapp, 1993), there may be a pressing need for the instructors themselves to receive debriefing from their supervisors within the organization. The primary purpose of debriefing is to “allow participants to integrate their learning, thus gaining a sense of closure or completeness to their experience” (Hammel, 1993, p. 231). Hammel (1993) sums up the importance of debriefing by saying:

Experience itself does not guarantee growth. Growth occurs when people recognize, articulate, and reflect on the feelings that are a result of experience. A good debriefing can pull together all the wildly flowing feelings so they make sense. It can crystallize those feelings into kernels of knowledge. (p. 238)

In the field of wilderness therapy, future research may illuminate the perception of “value in the verbal exchange of feelings, reactions, and awareness stimulated by the experiences completed” (Smith, 1993, p. 283). Generally verbal in format, debriefing can also take non-verbal forms such as journal writing, drawing or taking time to be alone (Gass, 1993).

Each of the provisions deemed necessary for development of one’s feelings of social support by the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) would need to be attended to and evaluated separately by managers trying to offer adequate social support to front line workers. An individualized approach to social support would allow field instructors to combine sources of social support that work best for each person. Using self-directed

methods, support from co-workers, communication with those outside the work context such as friends, family and intimate partners or counseling with a mental health professional are all options that could benefit field instructors as well as front line employees in similarly demanding careers. The barriers that field instructors commonly encounter when trying to access these opportunities for social support are important considerations when examining causal factors in one's intention to turnover.

Parsons' Model of Staff Development. Staff development has been defined as "an organization's efforts to promote employee growth" (Teschner & Wolter, 1984, p. 18). Development is aimed specifically at "helping staff move beyond present competencies toward perceived ideals" and may be regarded as essential to program success (Teschner & Wolter, 1984, p. 18). Michael H. Parsons published extensively in the 1980s and 1990s, offering myriad suggestions for dealing with the challenges facing instructors at community colleges. Parsons' (1980) staff development model is "comprehensive enough to be flexible and adaptable to many situations" as well as "logical and progressive, initially addressing the needs of staff as they join the organization, followed by systematically attending to their involvement and improvement as they mature" (Stehno, 1988, p. 34).

Parsons' (1980) staff development model, created initially for use in a community college environment, has "proved equally effective in a wilderness program setting" (Stehno, 1988, p. 33) and acts as an organizational framework from which to situate this research study. The six components of Parsons' (1980) model are outlined below. Within each category, workplace literature research from other fields has been included to offer the reader an overview of employee turnover within the framework of staff development.

Recruitment. The first category of Parsons' model, recruitment, deals with locating and hiring high-quality instructional staff. Ideally, this would be completed as a shared endeavor between all full-time staff employed by the organization (Stehno, 1988). To encourage field instructor retention, organizations offering expeditionary wilderness programs can take steps to ensure that newly hired employees are offered a composite picture of what to expect in terms of the realities of the job (Cranny et al., 1992; Marchand & Russell, 2012). Most field instructors "understand the challenging nature of continued employment in the profession," yet it is commonly unknown how long each intends to remain in this type of work when they begin (Thomas, 2003, p. 54). First impressions made during the recruitment phase may be important factors in one's longevity as a field instructor.

Orientation. The second category of Parsons' model, orientation, involves quickly and thoroughly familiarizing newly hired employees with program personnel and procedures by use of mentoring, handbooks, workshops or informal communication (Stehno, 1988). Providing new employees with a clear and complete understanding of what lies within their job responsibilities, as well as establishing an early familiarity with members of the community with whom they will work, could reduce rates of burnout and turnover in recently hired employees (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Marchand & Russell, 2012; Stehno, 1988). New employees must feel they are a part of the organization in order for them to influence its mission and they will undoubtedly need assistance to this end, such as mentoring opportunities (Parsons, 1992). According to Parsons (1992), "the cost of establishing and maintaining a mentorship program is insignificant" when compared to the low productivity of alienated new employees and the

cost of recruiting replacements (p. 8). Mentoring is a large part of a successful orientation period, but use of instructional workshops and informal communication practices showing new employees what they need to know are other important factors and will be discussed in the following sections.

Instructional Clinics. The third category in Parsons' model, instructional clinics, provides workshops and training opportunities to keep staff competently informed and proficient in their areas of expertise (Stehno, 1988). Opportunities for professional development and training outside the immediate work context are considered important to maximizing an employee's longevity (Thomas, 2003). As part of one's accumulation of skills and experience, high quality career planning can provide added benefits like lower rates of front line turnover (Thomas, 2003). Thomas (2003) suggested the outdoor industry "needs to recognize the potential of career planning to meet both individual and organizational needs by improving employee motivation and creating a pool of promotable talent for the organization" (p. 61). Instructional clinics can be used individually on an ongoing basis to upgrade one's skills and knowledge, and address any issues, such as stagnation, that may be stemming from a lack of person-environment fit or initial underestimation of one's job demand stressors.

Communication. Especially important when staff are working diverse and varied schedules, the fourth category of Parsons' model, communication, involves keeping staff informed. An effective, open practice of communication can increase an employee's sense of identity and involvement within the organization (Stehno, 1988). More than just the nature of the work itself, Parsons (1992)

suggested other significant variables such as relationships with colleagues and one's sense of influence will affect one's sense of job satisfaction. The "potential gaps between rhetoric and organizational policy" were identified as factors leading to high turnover of certified nursing assistants (CNAs) working in long term care (Bowers et al., 2003, p. 43). CNAs revealed that breaking the cycle of frequent front line employee turnover would require increased perceptions of respect and fairness, interpreted by actions such as implementation of unbiased organizational policies and positive interpersonal interactions with their supervisors (Bowers et al., 2003).

Support Services. As evidence of the organization's commitment to both employees and program participants, Parsons' fifth category, termed support services, covers what managers of organizations must do to provide the necessary equipment and resources for the delivery of high-quality programs (Stehno, 1988). It is imperative that the voices of front line employees are heard. When issues are brought up, managers must take action to adequately address the needs of front line workers.

Based on research with CNAs, developing a culture of respect, where the work done by front line workers is understood and valued at all levels of the organization, could address an employee's feelings of being unappreciated and undervalued and reduce one's tendency to turnover (Bowers et al., 2003). Finally, from related research on burnout in summer camp staff, group cohesion and work environment were the most pertinent of the factors examined in promoting employee well-being and client satisfaction. Front line summer camp staff who reported that they felt like a valued member of the team also reported greater group cohesion, resulting in greater investment

into their work (Bailey et al., 2011). Establishing appropriate expectations, providing adequate time off and providing intentional staff support, were recommendations provided by Bailey et al. (2011) for preventing burnout in summer camp staff. Especially when front line employees are working with demanding clients in a multi-day expeditionary setting, the importance of offering positive feedback and individual recognition should not be overlooked by managers (Thomas, 2003).

Evaluation. Intended to provide data and input that will be used toward positive growth, the sixth and final category of Parsons' model is evaluation (Stehno, 1988). The processes involved in this category include continuous assessment of the impact and effectiveness of all or any part of the staff development program (Stehno, 1988). For example, scheduling issues perceived to be threatening an employee's relationships outside of the workplace could be solved by adopting creative approaches such as varying one's work schedule, periodically spending paid time out of the field or diversifying one's work-related tasks (Marchand et al., 2009; Ross, 1989). As another example, recent research involving public park and recreation employees suggests organizations implementing "flexible work arrangements" have employees who are more committed and display higher levels of motivation than employees working in organizations without such programs (Mulvaney, 2011, p. 75). Individualized revision of employee work schedules would ensure one's time spent in the field is balanced by what one perceives as adequate time to maintain a healthy and sustainable living situation outside of work (Marchand et al., 2009). Regular evaluation of the five other categories of Parsons' model (recruitment, orientation, instructional clinics, communication and support services) will ensure all five areas are functioning in good form and any issues

affecting front line employees are routinely and efficiently being brought to the attention of management. The use of Parsons' staff development model to modify the current practices of an organization could provide favourable results such as increased longevity of front line employees.

Conclusion

The preceding review of literature has given an overview of wilderness therapy and the field instructors that work in this context. Challenges commonly confronting these individuals were outlined in this literature review in three main areas: work-life balance, interpersonal relationships and social support. Parsons' model of staff development was introduced as the theoretical framework, contextualizing the background of this research study within the employee turnover literature. After completing this review of literature, it is evident that there currently exists a gap in the available research literature. Many questions remain unanswered today regarding who field instructors are, what challenges they face and what solutions can most effectively reduce their commonly high rates of turnover. Continued research will allow for a more complete understanding of the variety of factors needed to effectively recruit, support and retain high performing employees. In the following chapter, the methodology used to explore the topic of social support for front line field instructors in this research study will be outlined.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Within the confines of available resources, the research project methodology outlined in this chapter has been designed to maximize opportunities and minimize limitations wherever possible. In this study, the researcher chose to phenomenologically analyze data collected from qualitative interviews with a sample of seven participants. Interview questions concentrating on perceptions of social support elicited rich descriptions of how these individuals “perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). This chapter provides a detailed overview of this study’s design. Use of a qualitative research paradigm and a transcendental phenomenological approach will be explained. Methodological considerations for the following procedures will be clearly outlined: sampling, data collection and data analysis. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion concerning the trustworthiness as well as a section regarding the ethical considerations of this study, including data management and informed consent.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research methods, growing in use since the 1980s, have become endemic in many disciplines and broadly accepted as valid methods of social research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The qualitative approach involves focusing on the “cultural, everyday, and situated aspects of human thinking, knowing, learning, acting and ways of understanding ourselves as persons” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 12). Much of the research that has contributed in fundamental ways to our current understanding of society has been based on qualitative interview studies, providing descriptions of phenomena that could be learned about in no other way (Weiss, 1994).

To demonstrate “openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness and responsiveness” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) on behalf of the researcher, emergent design flexibility and empathic neutrality were two factors highlighted in the study design. Their inclusion aimed to produce “high quality qualitative data that are credible, trustworthy, authentic, balanced about the phenomenon under study and fair to the people studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 51). First, emergent design flexibility gave the researcher the ability to be open, present and responsive to whatever salient themes emerged and adjust the research procedure accordingly (Patton, 2002). For example, use of a semi-structured interview approach permitted the interviewer to pursue topics that were not initially anticipated and increased the extent to which individual differences and circumstances could be queried (Patton, 2002). The semi-structured interview design was formulated specifically so that the researcher could be receptive to the unfolding nuances and complexities of the study topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Second, empathic neutrality was shown by undertaking this study based on the researcher’s genuine belief in the importance of contributing knowledge and a greater understanding of social support as it relates to reducing turnover for wilderness therapy field instructors. To this end, the researcher extended genuine feelings of caring and interest in participants’ willingness to share their knowledge, experiences, attitudes, feelings and other personal information. However, attempts were made to prioritize neutrality with regard to the content that was shared, so that the person being interviewed felt he or she could speak freely without engendering the favor or disfavor of the interviewer with regard to the content of his or her response (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological approach to this research study provided a deep understanding of social support as it was experienced by several individuals who had previously worked as a wilderness therapy field instructor. Examining the essence of individuals' perspectives was the aim of this research project, not verifying the truth of their accounts (Creswell, 2007), thus a phenomenological approach was an appropriate choice for this study. In accordance with recommendations made by Sammet (2010), this research study shifts the focus from a traditional investigation of wilderness therapy program outcomes to more specifically examining the experiences of field instructors and "the meanings they make of their experiences" (p. 154).

Van Manen (1990) proposed that research done from a phenomenological orientation involved "gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" and defining "that which makes a some-'thing' what it is – and without which it could not be what it is" (p. 10). Patton (2002) suggested that a phenomenological perspective offers "methods that capture people's experience of the world" (p. 107). The transcendental phenomenological model developed by Moustakas (1994) offers a technique for

interrelating subjective and objective factors and conditions, a way of utilizing description, reflection and imagination in arriving at an understanding of what is, in seeing the conditions through which it comes to be, and in utilizing a process that in its very application opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge and action. (p. 175)

The meaning, structure and essence of social support, found within the lived experience of wilderness therapy field instructors, emerged in this research study from a phenomenological analysis of their perceptions.

Sampling Procedures

Typical of purposefully selected samples, the participants for this research study were seven individuals who met the selection criteria, each able to provide an in depth description of their lived experiences as a wilderness therapy field instructor (Patton, 2002). This study did not collect interview data from individuals currently employed full time as wilderness therapy field instructors, with the exception of one participant that is now working for a different organization. This choice was made in agreement with research by Weiss (1994) who stated that “marginal” individuals within a system may be “more willing to describe the system’s failings than would someone central to the system and committed to it” and have often had time to reminisce on the experience (p. 20). Informants no longer working for the same organization or even in the same career field may feel a reduced personal affiliation with this type of work and therefore, may be willing to share more in-depth, candid details of their experiences during an interview.

In order to purposefully select information-rich individuals to participate in this research study, a letter of invitation (Appendix B) was distributed through the researcher’s professional contacts. The invitation to participate was sent only to individuals who fit the following criteria: employed for at least twelve months (without any extended breaks or leaves of absence) as a full time field instructor at an Ontario wilderness therapy program between June 2006 and September 2010. The letter of invitation (Appendix B) outlined important information such as the purpose of the study, the intended presentation of the results, as well as the potential risks and benefits from

participation in the study. If an individual chose to contact the researcher by email and accept the invitation to participate, email communication was then used in order to set up a mutually agreeable time for an initial interview.

The following underlying assumptions were made about each of the study participants:

1. The participant voluntarily agreed to work full time as a wilderness therapy field instructor for at least one calendar year with one Ontario-based organization prior to September 2009.
2. The participant undertook the position of field instructor with the intention of fulfilling the conditions of the contract and/or remaining in this job position for at least one calendar year.
3. The participant voluntarily terminated the employment contract with the organization by September 2010, after an uninterrupted period of between one and three years of full time work for the organization.
4. At the time of the initial interview (September/October 2011), the participant had not been employed full time by this organization for at least one calendar year since his or her departure.

Individuals who work as field instructors in a wilderness therapy program context on an occasional or part-time basis were considered by the researcher as less likely to have encountered a need for support to the same degree as the intended participants of this study. Therefore, only individuals who held the job of wilderness therapy field instructor in a full time position for at least twelve consecutive months were selected as study participants. Based on the use of retrospective recollection of experiences by other

research studies investigating wilderness programs (e.g., Hutson & Bailey, 2008; Marchand et al., 2009; Sammet, 2010), a sample of study participants who had been removed from the Ontario wilderness therapy context for at least one year were chosen as appropriate for fulfilling the aims of this study. Seven study participants had been contacted and subsequently confirmed their interest in contributing to this research project by September 2011.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews. The use of qualitative interviews can offer researchers “privileged access” to people’s experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 29). Seven semi-structured one-on-one interviews took place during this study to “understand the themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects’ own perspectives” (p. 27). A semi-structured interview protocol ensured each participant was asked questions on similar themes, but the interviewer remained flexible to clarify meanings, test interpretations, and pursue salient or emerging topics with probes and follow up questions (Patton, 2002). Each initial interview was expected to last approximately sixty to ninety minutes, yet two participants exceeded this time and their interviews lasted almost two hours.

For the three interviews conducted face-to-face, a quiet meeting location in the participant’s home was used in order to make the participants comfortable and keep the context similar between participants. This venue offered privacy and allowed for an informal atmosphere in a space where participants “feel comfortable and relaxed enough to tell the researcher ‘how it is’” (Dearnley, 2005, p. 26). If a face-to-face meeting was not possible, the interviewee was contacted at home by phone (two interviews) or by Skype (two interviews). All initial interviews were audio-recorded for verbatim transcription afterwards. The sound recording together with the transcripts and

researcher's journal notes constituted "the materials for the subsequent analysis of meaning" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27) and interpretation of the interview.

Interviews were conducted according to an interview guide (Appendix D) that outlined themes and included suggested questions for the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Certain questions used in the interview guide (Appendix D) related to employment duration were included based on suggestions for future research given by Marchand (2009) and Kirby (2006). Other questions used were added based on a preliminary review of literature. The questions posed to the interviewees were intended to be "easy to understand, short and devoid of academic language" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131). One pilot interview was completed by phone with a graduate student from Brock University who had extensive prior experience working with youth in a wilderness-based program. This step was completed in order to gather constructive feedback on the sequencing and clarity of the interview questions and consequently, allowed the researcher to ameliorate the interview guide before the first research interview was conducted. Effort was made to ensure questions did contain terms commonly used in wilderness therapy, gained from the researcher's personal experience working in the field and feedback from the pilot interview.

Use of open-ended questions allowed the researcher access to the perspective of those being interviewed, "to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of *their* individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348). The open nature of the questions was aimed at encouraging depth and vitality of answers and allowing new concepts to emerge (Dearnley, 2005). The utilization of probing questions from the researcher was determined largely by the initial responses of the participants

(Dearnley, 2005) and ensured the “disambiguation of interviewee’s statements” for ease of future analysis as well as communicating to the participant that the researcher was interested and actively listening (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 134).

Quickly establishing a positive rapport with interviewees was important to acquire honest answers to questions about the personal lives of study participants. Establishing this rapport included practicing “attentive listening, with the interviewer showing interest, understanding and respect for what the subject says” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 128). To demonstrate her “ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment” (Patton, 2002, p. 366), the researcher attempted to set each participant at ease by briefing and debriefing the interviews. Before interview questions began, a briefing took place where the purpose of the interview was reiterated and each participant was asked if he or she had any questions. After the final interview question was asked, a short debriefing occurred, by asking if the interviewee had anything more to say and ensuring that the participant understood the processes of member checking and dissemination of findings.

Transcription. The researcher worked with the interviews of each of the seven individual study participants before the data was compiled for analysis as a whole. First, after the initial interview, each transcript was typed verbatim, including unfinished sentences and words like “um” or “ah.” Each transcript was then thoroughly revised to make a more comprehensible document that could be sent back to each participant for additional review. This process involved removing most words or phrases that did not add meaning to the sentence such as “um,” “ah,” “like,” “I guess,” or “I think.” Grammatical problems such as sentence fragments or long sentences were generally not adjusted from the original transcript. However, unfinished thoughts or tangents that were

not deemed by the principal investigator to add relevant content were removed from the revised version.

The aforementioned review process generated seven “readable” transcripts. Five of these transcripts had a total page count ranging from 10 to 17 pages and two transcripts were reduced from approximately 50 pages to 30 and 34 pages in total. This process was carried out with the intention of producing an easily comprehensible document of reasonable length that each participant would be asked to review as part of the member check process. The readable version of each transcript was returned to the participants on December 28th, 2011. Participants were asked if there was anything they noticed from the transcript that should be changed or added. One participant described the transcript as a “good snapshot of me at the time.” Two participants offered factual corrections, but only one participant offered the researcher any additional explanation of the content of the transcript.

Follow up Interviews.

In mid to late January, 2012, all participants took part in 20 to 30 minute follow up phone interviews. At this time, each participant was reminded of the final date to withdraw from the study and asked if he or she would like to receive an electronic copy of the final draft of the completed thesis. No participants indicated they would like to withdraw from the study prior to the deadline date and all participants indicated they would like to receive a copy of the final document. The two-part question asked of each participant was, “In what ways have your experiences working full time as a wilderness therapy field instructor impacted you in terms of, a) connections with other people, and b) how you manage challenges?” To conclude each follow up interview, participants were

asked if there was anything they would like to add. Several participants used this opportunity to speak openly and share their perspectives about related topics such as how they perceived the entire interview process or their experiences transitioning into their current work environment.

All follow up interviews were audio recorded, but they were not transcribed nor returned to the participants in any manner. These recordings were referenced by the researcher only to further clarify and describe each participant's ideas. Emergent perspectives from this set of interviews pertained mainly to the areas of communication and social support and have been included in the presentation of major themes.

Reflexive Journal. After concluding every interview the researcher allotted ten to twenty minutes to write reflective notes in a private journal. These entries contained remarks regarding non-verbal cues from participants, emerging concepts, and statements that stood out to the researcher from the interview (Dearnley, 2005). Through the use of a reflexive journal, the researcher attempted to remain open to new and unexpected phenomena, remain curious, sensitive to what is said, as well as to what is not said, and critical of her own presuppositions and hypotheses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By engaging in ongoing dialogue with oneself through journal writing, a researcher may better understand the views of participants in addition to elucidating his or her own biases, feelings, and thoughts, to better understand how these may be influencing the research (Dearnley, 2005; Watt, 2007).

Data Analysis

Data that underwent analysis in this study included: all interview transcriptions and the contents of the researcher's reflexive journal. Initial interviews with participants were the primary sources of data. The inductive design of this study allowed the

important dimensions for analysis to emerge from patterns found in the data without the researcher presupposing what they would be in advance (Patton, 2002). Data analysis was informed by the core processes of the transcendental phenomenological model: epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and finally, synthesis of texture and structure (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche. Epoche is an ongoing analytical process that epitomizes a data-based, evidential, empirical orientation where the researcher must continually look inside in order to eliminate, or at least gain clarity about, any preconceptions (Patton, 2002, p. 485). Epoche is a Greek word meaning “to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). In the epoche, “everyday understandings, judgments and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited freshly, naively” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). In an effort to present the findings in a non-biased manner, the researcher focused on understanding and depicting the phenomenon authentically while simultaneously remaining self-analytical and reflexive (Patton, 2002).

Acknowledging from the outset that setting aside personal thoughts and perceptions would be a difficult task for the researcher, she attempted to continually remain aware of the process of epoche by regular use of a reflexive journal and working largely with direct quotes from the study participants throughout the stages of data analysis. To focus on setting aside prejudgments and conducting the research interviews with an unbiased, receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994), the reflexive journal was used by the researcher as “a mirror” (p. 61), where she permitted herself to openly “define, question, and interact with content, concepts, ideas, values, beliefs, and feelings” (Hubbs

& Brand, 2005, p. 65). By optimizing the research process as an opportunity for deeper exploration, the ongoing process of reflection and awareness of epoche were “crucial as a means to continuously work on becoming a better researcher” (Watt, 2007, p. 84).

Regular use of a reflexive journal and varied methods of engagement with the words of the participants during data analysis provided a focal point for the process of epoche that the researcher could access at any time.

Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. In this stage, the researcher attempted to bracket out the larger world and any presuppositions in order to identify the data “in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusions” (Patton, 2002, p. 485). The initial interview transcript for each participant was first analyzed independently of all other participant transcripts. Each transcript was read through several times and important quotes underlined that seemed relevant to understanding or accurately representing that participant’s voice. This process continued until the researcher felt like all relevant ideas had been underlined and in subsequent readings of the transcript, no new ideas were found that would be designated in the same way. In this stage, all aspects of the selected statements from the raw data were horizontalized, a process where “every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question is regarded as having equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118).

Imaginative Variation. The invariant themes were enhanced or expanded by consideration of varying meanings and perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). At this stage, structural qualities were clustered into themes, which were first integrated into an individual structural description for each participant, followed by an integration of these into a composite group structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). For

each of the seven participants, one large piece of chart paper was used to represent their personalized set of relevant ideas along a standardized timeline. A line was drawn horizontally through the middle of each paper and the ideas were organized according to four categories from left to right: pre-wilderness therapy, start wilderness therapy, end wilderness therapy and current. Aside from the timeline, other standardized topics were placed on each chart to gather similar ideas together for a particular topic. These included: social support then, social support now, lack of support from management, turnover, isolation, and decision to leave wilderness therapy.

For each individual participant, several additional topic areas were created on his or her chart, based on what was mentioned within the interviews. Additional topic areas that arose for one or more participants included: primitive skills, time off, support from co-staff, potential program improvements, staff retention ideas, sat phone, challenge of the job, strain on relationships, journaling, toll on the body, work boundaries, uncertainty about job details, confidence in abilities, lack of community, need for hierarchy in the field, age, debriefing, perceptions of job demands on coworkers, in the field vs. outside the job, what would you do differently if you were to go back and what would it take for you to go back now. All statements believed by the researcher to be related to each of these particular topics were connected to the topic name (in a circle) by a line and written as a direct quote from the transcript. Every quote written on the paper included a page number to indicate where it could be found within the larger transcript in order to increase the accuracy of future referencing.

From the horizontalized statements, the meaning units were listed, and then clustered into common categories or themes, removing any overlapping or repetitive

statements (Moustakas, 1994). The clustered themes and meanings were then used to develop the individual textural descriptions of an experience that are finally combined into a composite textural description (Moustakas, 1994). Using each individual participant's chart paper as a map outlining where they spoke about each topic within the transcript of the initial interview, relevant statements from all participants were gathered in relation to a particular topic as a rough version of potential themes. When each statement was recopied by hand on separate pieces of paper, the contributing participant's initials and transcript page number followed each statement for ease of tracing these statements to the transcript when checking the context of each statement.

In this stage of textural description, all horizontalized statements were cut up with scissors and each was individually analyzed (Moustakas, 1994). The topics from Parsons' (1980) development model (recruitment, orientation, instructional clinics, communication, support services and evaluation) were each written out on large sheets of chart paper to assist in organizing statements and determining the main themes. Each of the participant statements from the initial interview transcripts were maneuvered by hand to fall under one of the categories from Parsons' model. Any statements that initially did not fit within these categories were placed in a separate pile, named "other" and these statements were later revisited and assigned to one of the themes when writing up the findings on the computer.

Synthesis. Once statements had been placed within a theme, under a particular category, the researcher then examined each category more thoroughly. Redundant statements were removed and theme titles were assigned and adjusted until the researcher felt that the number of themes within each category was sufficient to provide adequate

variation, yet each theme was distinct and all statements within that theme could be directly linked to it. Fourteen distinct themes were determined. Two subthemes were used to further divide six of the main themes, resulting in twelve subthemes outlined in total.

In the final stage, “an abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration,” is intuitively and reflectively integrated with the “bones” of the experience for the whole group of people studied, into a synthesis of the overall meanings and essences of the experience (Patton, 2002, p. 486; Moustakas, 1994). One by one, the researcher placed all hand written statements related to each theme on a large table and proceeded to compose the section describing this theme on the computer. Not every statement was included in the presentation of study results as a direct quote, but main ideas were expressed and the researcher ensured representative statements were shared from at least one or two participants. A statement using numbers frequently indicated how many study participants made a similar observation. Once all sections describing the study findings were completed, the write up was thoroughly revised by the researcher to eliminate redundancies. Finally, a second chapter was composed that further discussed these themes within the context of each other and the research literature, providing insight into the larger implications of these results.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation. To ensure the use of rigorous methods and the creation of an authentic presentation of the research findings, triangulation was used in several areas to enhance the credibility of this study. Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods or data to get more than one perspective (Patton, 2002). Seven individual profiles were formulated and eventually combined by the researcher to present the study’s findings. In the data collection phase of this study, triangulation was achieved by

asking interview questions from the following six categories: experience/behaviour, opinion/values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic (Patton, 2002). Peer review, member checking and the researcher's use of a reflexive journal were other sources of triangulation used in this research study.

Peer Review. Regular peer review was completed by the researcher's faculty advisor at Brock University. Since the study's inception, he was consulted at frequent intervals to advise the researcher on procedures, new ideas and for support. Two additional faculty members from the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University formed a committee that reviewed the written study proposal as well as several drafts of the final thesis. These three individuals were present to evaluate a preliminary oral defense of the proposal document. All three committee members plus an external examiner from outside of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University offered feedback on the final thesis document and were present for evaluation at the final thesis defense. These four university faculty members were irreplaceable sources of feedback and fresh perspectives, giving the researcher added triangulation.

Member Checking. Approximately one month following the initial interview, member checking occurred with each participant. This process entailed returning a readable copy of the initial interview transcript to each study participant and conducting a follow up phone interview lasting approximately thirty minutes. The goal of this process was to ensure that the participants' individual responses to the interview questions were accurately portrayed from their perspective.

Prior to the follow up interview, participants were given time to process the experience of the initial interview, reflect on what was said and review their individual

interview transcript. During the follow up interview, each participant was provided an opportunity to indicate preferred changes or additions to their interview transcript. This process was an effective measure to increase validity for this study because participants were given an opportunity to confirm that they meant what they said as well as to withdraw any statements they deemed inappropriate (Dearnley, 2005; Gehring, 2002).

Reflexive Journal. Reflexivity calls for “critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear, and understand” (Patton, 2002, p. 299). By documenting personal thoughts, emerging ideas and impressions in a written reflexivity journal, the researcher’s perspective was made accessible. This journal served to “provide the researcher with a frame for understanding and reflecting on the processes and changes in the knowledge production” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). Given the researcher’s personal affiliation with the topic and professional acquaintance with several of the interviewees, a reflexive journal was useful for triangulating the researcher’s perspective alongside the voices of the study participants.

Ethical Considerations

Since this research involved direct interaction with human participants, it was designed and carried out with a number of ethical considerations in mind. A detailed research proposal was approved by the Brock University Research Ethics Board immediately following an oral proposal defense before an advisory committee. Data collection did not begin until approval was received from the Research Ethics Board. All data collection and data management processes followed the guidelines outlined by the Research Ethics Board.

Directly quoted participant statements from a qualitative interview setting may appear in public reports. Therefore, precautions were taken to protect the privacy of all study participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). To ensure confidentiality, any data directly represented as findings of the study does not contain identifying names of people, organizations or locations. All verbatim quotes from interviews or documents used in the final report have been scrutinized by the researcher to ensure anonymity.

Data Management

Data for this study included audio recordings of interviews, written transcriptions of interviews, as well as the researcher's personal reflexive journal notes. All electronic research data was stored on a password protected computer and memory stick. All raw data was accessed only by the primary researcher or by her faculty supervisor. Any data containing the true identities of people or organizations, whether digital audio recordings, computer or paper files, was stored in a locked cabinet in the supervisor's office on Brock University's main campus and destroyed immediately after the final draft of the thesis manuscript was completed.

Informed Consent

Informed consent entailed "informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70). Once a potential interview participant agreed to participate in the study, he or she was sent a letter of informed consent (Appendix C). This document emphasized voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time as well as the confidential nature of the proposed research study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This document also outlined the fact that these interviews may be potentially emotional

experiences, but also offered potential benefits from participation such as “enabling them to talk through their feelings” (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008, p. 34). In addition, information was outlined here regarding who could access the raw data, the researcher’s right to publish parts of the interview and the member check process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This letter of informed consent (Appendix C) was signed by the participant in advance of conducting any initial interviews.

Prior to the start of each interview, interviewees were reminded that participation in the research study is voluntary and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If participants were to choose to withdraw from the study, they were assured that their interview transcript would be erased and no direct quotes from this transcript would be included in the final report. None of the seven research study participants chose to withdraw from the study.

Concluding Remarks

Each research project is unique. Ultimately, any decisions determining what will work best are up to the individual researcher to make (Watt, 2007). In this particular study, a methodology was intentionally developed by the researcher to gather detail-rich descriptions from purposefully selected informants, using qualitative data collection and analysis processes congruent with Moustakas’ (1994) ideas of transcendental phenomenology. This methodology has subsequently allowed the researcher to capture and authentically communicate participant perspectives and experiences of the world in their own words (Patton, 2002). The following chapter will provide a detailed overview of the research study findings.

Chapter 4: RESULTS

Participants in this research study totaled seven individuals, comprised of three females and four males. Some participants reported working in the role of full time field instructor for just over one year, while several others maintained this position for up to three years. All participants had voluntarily agreed to work full time as a wilderness therapy field instructor for at least one calendar year with an Ontario-based organization prior to September 2010. Each participant undertook the position of field instructor with the intention of fulfilling the conditions of the contract and/or remaining full time in this position for at least one calendar year. Each participant voluntarily terminated the employment contract with the organization, after one calendar year had passed. At the time of the initial interviews, participants had not been employed full time by this same organization for at least one calendar year.

Other demographic information describing the participants of this study is congruent with Kirby's (2006) observation that "field instructors tend to be young, educated, single, and Caucasian" (p. 79). Ages of study participants at the time of the interview ranged from 27 to 39 years of age, with gaps ranging from one to four years since each was last working full time as a field instructor in Ontario. All but one participant had completed an undergraduate university degree at the time of the interview. At the time of the initial interview, three of the seven participants were married and living with their partners while each of the other four participants reported that they were not in a relationship. None of the participants who are currently married were married when they began full time work as a field instructor. Although not asked directly in the interview, all participants are likely to identify as white. Although characteristically not diverse, the demographic characteristics of the seven study participants are likely

shared with many other individuals who have worked full time as wilderness therapy field instructors.

This chapter highlights the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Themes were derived from the following topic areas that arose during the interviews for one or more participants: primitive skills, time off, support from co-staff, potential program improvements, staff retention ideas, satellite phone, challenge of the job, strain on relationships, journaling, toll on the body, work boundaries, uncertainty about job details, confidence in abilities, lack of community, need for hierarchy in the field, age, debriefing, perceptions of job demands on coworkers, in the field vs. outside the job, what would you do differently if you were to go back and what would it take for you to go back now. Themes are organized and presented using the six components of Parsons' (1980) staff development model which are: recruitment, orientation, instructional clinics, communication, support services and evaluation. Detailed explanations of each theme will be presented sequentially in the remainder of this chapter.

Themes

Fourteen main themes and twelve subthemes emerged from the data analysis process.

Table I

Categorization of Emergent Themes and Subthemes

<i>Category</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>	
Recruitment	Initial appeal		
	Initial uncertainty of longevity	<i>Acceptance of high turnover</i>	<i>Impact of age on job perceptions</i>
Orientation	Entering the unknown		
	Mentorship		
	Setting boundaries		
	Need for clear guidelines		
Instructional clinics	Initial inadequacy		
	Stagnation		
Communication	Isolation	<i>Difficulty building community</i>	<i>Nobody else understands</i>
	Need for meaningful connection	<i>Value of debriefing</i>	<i>Added value of debriefing with coworkers</i>
Support Services	Maybe I'm not okay	<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>	<i>Intentions to turnover</i>
	Alienation	<i>Disconnection from management</i>	<i>Drifting apart</i>
	Frustration	<i>Feeling unheard</i>	<i>Feeling undervalued</i>
Evaluation	Need for meaningful feedback		

Themes within recruitment. Two themes that emerged within the category of recruitment are: *initial appeal* and *initial uncertainty of longevity*.

Initial appeal. Every participant saw the opportunity to work full time in a wilderness therapy program as initially appealing. However, the reasons attributed to this feeling were varied. One participant stated a strong belief in the importance and

meaningful nature of this work and felt “drawn to the type of people that seemed to be interested in that kind of work.” Several mentioned excitement around doing something “new,” “fun” or “different.” Two participants highlighted this job as the “perfect” combination of one’s areas of skill and passion. For several years prior, working as a wilderness therapy field instructor was seen as one participant’s “dream job.” Six of the seven participants explicitly mentioned their love of being “outside” in the wilderness environment and attributed feelings of initial appeal from the idea of sharing this desire with others through work as a guide on year-round expeditions.

This work was also initially perceived as a positive step forward professionally. One participant mentioned being “pretty floored” by the pay she would be given for her first salaried job and saw this work as “more serious” for that reason. Two participants mentioned being drawn to the challenge of this particular type of work. Not only were they “looking for a challenge,” but one also spoke of being “interested in seeing what [he] could learn.” This opportunity was also perceived as a chance to develop “soft” skills, work with a challenging clientele and experience professional growth. Two participants mentioned gravitating toward this opportunity as a way to initiate change in their lives at that time. One stated, “Prior to that I just kind of felt like a lost dog, just wandering.” The other said, “I had gone through some really tough relationship stuff the years before and I was really looking for some stability and something I could really throw myself into...that would support me in feeling better about what happened.” Alternatively, one participant mentioned he had worked with co-staff who viewed wilderness therapy work as “an escape from their regular life.”

Initial uncertainty of longevity. The second theme within the category of recruitment is *initial uncertainty regarding longevity*. Six of the seven participants indicated their original expectation of the length of time that they would remain in the job to be approximately one calendar year. At the start, they had either signed a written contract or made up their own minds to “try it” for one year before they would “reevaluate.” However, several participants described an ambiguous nature to this commitment and entered this timeline without “a projected time goal,” “a future sort of understanding,” or “a defined idea” of how long they would stay. When asked how long he thought he would remain in the job when he began, one respondent stated:

I didn't know. I knew I'd stick out the year for certain, but beyond that I was open to anything. If I really enjoyed it, then I was going to stick around and if I absolutely hated it, then I would find something else.

Several others agreed that they perceived the position as being “open-ended” or “month to month” after the first year.

This theme will now be further explored within the parameters of the following two subthemes: *acceptance of high turnover* and *impact of age on job perceptions*.

Acceptance of high turnover. One participant recalls once being told by her manager, “It's a dead end job. People who do your job, they do it for a little while and then they move on, nobody does that for very long. You're a dime a dozen.” It is evident from several comments made by study participants that this is commonly accepted thinking among management as well as many field instructors themselves. One participant saw the inherently transient nature of the “adventurers” who are most often attracted to this type of work to limit one's ability to experience longevity at this job. He

believed field instructors to be people “who want to go and do new things, so often it’s just in them that they can only make short term commitments.”

Four participants commented specifically on employee turnover trends and saw the rates as being “huge,” “quick,” “inevitable,” and “pretty fricking high.” One participant claimed, “every organization I’ve worked with has a high turnover rate” and he would consider working three years or more as “very rare.” Two participants viewed this job as unsustainable in the long term, one stating, “I wonder, that kind of work, if it ever can be.” However, one participant observed a benefit to frequent turnover was “people came in with fresh ideas and they were fresh.”

Reasons offered by participants to explain the high rate of turnover within wilderness therapy field instructors focused on the challenging nature of the job. Two participants mentioned the physical toll this type of work takes on the body as limiting factors to one’s longevity. One female explained she felt as though she was expected to carry “more weight than was probably even healthy for my body to be carrying.” Financial difficulty was another factor mentioned by one participant as encouraging turnover. He felt that money-wise, “it’s not very easy to have what you need” and it seemed expected that field instructors would “live at a lower standard.” Others suggested the “grueling” nature of the work led to field instructors who were “burnt out,” “unable to handle it,” and “exhausted, both physically and emotionally,” by the end of their first year.

Despite this common sentiment that turnover is inevitable, some field instructors do successfully remain in this role for several years. One participant stated, “what is possible, that hope, is what makes everybody want to try and stay with the job as long as

they can.” Another participant attributed longevity in “a really stressful job environment” to the resilient nature of the field instructors who stay.

Impact of age on job perceptions. Three participants mentioned the concept of age in relation to working on the front line in the field of wilderness therapy. The idea that wilderness therapy work “doesn’t appeal to, or isn’t really acceptable to people over a certain age” was mentioned by one participant. Two participants held the opinion that mid to late twenties was the average age of co-workers they had had while in this position. One participant who began wilderness therapy work at age 25, remembers feeling “by far the youngest” of her coworkers initially, but witnessed the average age decline significantly after a few replacements in staff had occurred. Another participant, a decade older at the time, recalls feeling “really old” and that “there was no one else even within a few years of me.”

All three participants made statements regarding the changes they observed regarding their own perceptions of this work as they age. One stated, “As you get older, you get better at knowing how you work and what you need. You know yourself a bit more and so, just depending on the situation, deal with things differently.” A second participant reflected, “I wouldn’t complain like this at age 25. I would be so excited to get \$40,000 a year, living out in the woods, having a great experience with people closer to my own age.” She added, “if people in that age group are not likely to complain or have high standards or expectations, let’s give it to them.”

Themes within orientation. If it is true that mainly young and transient individuals are attracted to this type of work, then the orientation phase will play a crucial role in forming the necessary skills to be successful long term. All participants who

commented on the work orientation period stated a preference for situations where the job was “set up to ease you into that stuff, shadowing and then working on a team,” as opposed to getting “thrown into the fire right away.” One participant noticed, “I didn’t have a person with long time or in-depth experience train me, so I didn’t apply it to its fullest.” New staff receiving just one or two weeks of shadowing, without any additional training whatsoever, was commonly recognized as “not enough time,” “unfair,” and a timeline that “doesn’t really make sense.” Inadequate orientation practices leads to “important work that gets done by underqualified people.” Four themes that emerged within the category of orientation were: *entering the unknown*, *mentorship*, *setting boundaries* and *need for clear guidelines*. Each will now be examined in more detail in the following sections.

Entering the unknown. When asked about their initial feelings regarding this work, all seven participants indicated a sense of uncertainty about entering the unknown. Participants described “feeling lost and not knowing exactly what was going to come about,” “jumping in blind,” and lacking an awareness of “how it would affect me,” how the routine would be,” or “what it would look like in reality.” One participant saw appeal in the opportunity “to embark out on my own,” disconnect “from a lot of the world I knew,” and leave “friends, my entire family, something I had known and grown comfortable with.” Seeing the benefit to his experience working several years for a similar program elsewhere, one participant commented, “Many times, I felt like I was one of the only people that knew what I was getting involved in working with youth.”

Although many participants mentioned camp work or other previous outdoor work of short duration, very few understood what they were getting into and “what it

would feel like to be doing that so consistently for a really long time.” Without long term impacts on one’s radar at the outset, one field instructor recalls, “I just dove into work and accepted whatever happened from it.” Coming to this job from previous experience a summer camp setting, one participant pointed out “because it’s year round, there’s not a break in the same sort of way, or anywhere close, by any means, in the same sort of way.” Regarding time off one participant shared:

I don’t think I knew what that time off would feel like. I think I thought that that time off would feel really free and that it would be really great. Those six days off in between, I thought that there would be more opportunity and that I would have more energy to play and do other things, but the truth was that during that time I really needed that time to do laundry, pay bills, sleep, process some of the week and for me a lot of it was transit. That time was quickly gobbled up. I don’t think I knew quite what that would feel like, how unrelaxing or unproductive the time off was.

Field instructors frequently remarked that the “ever present” nature of this work, even during time off, was not something they were expecting. Two participants spoke specifically about their lack of preparedness for dealing with this specific phenomenon, and that it became harder to manage as time progressed.

Several participants described feelings of discomfort they noticed in themselves or in their coworkers during the early stages of taking on this role. One participant saw newer staff members as “out to sea” and questioned the preparedness of these individuals for either engaging in or handling “intense” situations as they arose. Another participant recounted “a lot of floundering” from a newer staff team that was “grasping at strings to

try and figure out how to do things.” It was mentioned by one participant that it often “took some time” for newly hired staff to develop an effective style and approach of their own.

Mentorship. Several participants spoke highly of their experience with mentorship. One described his experience as an incoming staff as “fortunate” because he was able to learn from “a core group of senior front line staff, some who had been there for four years or more.” When asked what he knew initially of the emotional demands of the work, another offered, “I wasn’t aware of it right away. I was able to understand it fairly quickly from just talking with other staff and seeing what was going on for them.” Two others described the benefits of acting as mentors for new staff in terms of their personal growth. One said, “You learn so much more by talking to people that are going through things for the first time. Talking them through their problems caused me to learn and I always improved.” The other said, “I really enjoyed being able to teach what I know of the program and then learn from them. For me, it was constant growth.”

The importance of having somebody experienced in a “mentorship role” working consistently out in the field was expressed by one participant who clearly stated the value he saw from having a visible hierarchy in place. Without a hierarchy of any sort, he claimed to notice “a lot of problems” and clearly stated the importance of having an awareness of who was “in charge,” “setting the tone,” “doing the training” and “saying this is how I want to see things done” out in the field. When mentorship is a priority, a newer field instructor can feel “part of a team” and have a sense of confidence that even if there is something unknown to that individual, he or she would quickly know who to go to for help.

Several participants spoke of the challenges that can arise from working closely as a staff team where mentorship experiences are inadequate. One participant voiced early disappointment in her realization that she “had a lot more hope that the other people working there who were in their thirties would have a lot more tools and I could learn from them.” Another participant stated feeling forced into a position requiring “a lot of responsibility” by being the “consistent staff” who was “always there.” A third participant struggled with how to “constructively” approach a “style of instruction or leadership” that was “not working.” This participant placed importance on having “a staff team that functions visibly normal, really well and respects each other” so was aware of not wanting “to start of a bad relationship” with anyone he was mentoring and knew he would be working with “for an extended period.” In this case, he recalls finding it “really challenging” to manage situations where “you don’t want to overshadow” or “step on toes” with newly hired employees “because you think a different thing.”

Most study participants described their initial organizational training as one or two weeks of “shadowing” a full time field instructor, often the individual who was about to leave the position. Several participants agreed that this time frame was too short and did not allow for an adequate transfer of knowledge and information “about how to be successful in this program” to newly hired employees before they were “thrown into the fire.” At times, rapid turnover would force two employees that were “green” to be placed on a staff team together and one participant acknowledged an increase in “turmoil, chaos and significant incidents” associated with this situation. To address this issue, two participants agreed that the transition of experienced staff should be staggered so that two new employees would not be on shift together. Other suggestions include “working at the

school for a month and slowly coming out, extended transition time [and] more shadow shifts.”

Setting boundaries. This section provides perspectives from four study participants around setting boundaries regarding their work as wilderness therapy field instructor. One participant shared, “To do good work out there, the job requires of you to go above and beyond what the job requires of you” in many areas. As an example of this, she added, “Some of those nights out there, coming in or coming out were really long and really grueling and really crossed over the boundaries of expectations and contract and what’s reasonable.” Although this participant could recognize the benefits that might accompany “being more boundaried about my space, my time, my off time and what my job description is,” she felt that she “wouldn’t do as good a job with those kinds of boundaries.” She struggled “to see what’s needed out there and not offer it” and although she could “admire” that trait and see that “it would be better for me” and that “it might even role model better stuff for the youth,” she said, “I just don’t know if I could do it” and even then, “I don’t think it would last long.” The following quote is an example of how difficult this employee found setting boundaries around her work. “I was living my work, always. Even when I was off I was living it. I was either recuperating from it or I was in transit to get there or get back.”

Several other participants spoke about the need for clearly setting boundaries around work demands in order for the role to remain sustainable. First, one participant set boundaries by clearly defining his role in the field. He stated, “We’re not therapists, we’re definitely counselors. We listen and we discuss experience and we invite ideas.”

Another participant reflected on his progression in his ability to set firm boundaries around work by saying:

In the past at work I would invest myself completely and I was willing to sacrifice my home time as well and now, I've created a firm boundary. When I leave work, I'm gone. I don't want people to ask me to come in. I may decide to come in and help with something, but I won't take work phone calls, I won't answer emails, I won't answer text messages about work-related things.

When asked to engage in work-related things outside of one's scheduled shift, two other participants had a similarly firm boundary saying things like, "that would have been a breaking of a boundary for me," "that's not reasonable, I need this time for myself" and that "didn't seem like a viable option." One participant mentioned she would have appreciated having a "better understanding of boundaries from management in terms of what field staff do and do not do and how far they can be pushed." Finally, one participant perceived the boundary offered by the time spent driving home after a shift as giving him "time to turn my mind off and leave my work mind behind."

Finally, boundaries between the roles of having certain peers as coworkers and as friends are easily blurred. One participant advises, "I keep my personal life very personal. I don't mix that up with my coworkers because my coworkers are also my friends. It just leads to strange dynamics that I'm trying to avoid." Balancing coworker relationships can be "a hard act to juggle sometimes" and drawing boundaries can help. One strategy he offered is "a lot of my friends, we have a pretty strict code of we don't talk about work outside of work." Alternatively, one participant saw living with coworkers as "positive" and "essential for my general well-being." However, he highlighted that it could also be

“negative because in some ways we would feed off each other in terms of the war story mentality of ‘tough day.’”

Need for clear guidelines. Several participants commented on the need for clear guidelines within their work roles and responsibilities. One estimated it “takes at least a year to begin to get a sense of how things operate and how to talk and deal with specific behaviours.” During this job orientation period, many participants recalled struggling through “much confusion” and “constant change.” Participants noticed a lack of program consistency “even from one day to the next” and were dissatisfied by how many things got “lost in the shuffle.” One participant expressed, “We’re essentially blindfolded and said deal with this kid.”

Without clear guidelines given by someone in a manager role or from a standardized orientation process for new staff, three front line field instructors voiced thoughts that the organization was relying on “the individual talents and capacities of the staff” “to run the entire program based on a relationship that you could develop with each individual kid.” One participant saw it as “unfair” and “disturbing” that:

People were relying on a whim to decide what to do in all situations, so behaviourally, or safety or therapeutic interventions...all those things were depending on how we were feeling and what people thought of on the spur of the moment.

To ensure delivery of “a really cohesive, full, experiential program,” one participant suggested developing and formalizing an orientation package, where standardized questions, teambuilding activities and a review of policy and procedures would be part of a paid day of training for new field instructors. This would ideally

alleviate the “breakdown of consistency” and initiate a shift from operating at a “makeshift” or “just getting by” level, towards “working at a level of excellence...giving these kids the whole and fullest advantage this program has to offer.” One participant stated:

In most programs there’s certain standard things that you are aware of – if this happens, you do this. And that is available, whatever that option is that says that you should do, is available. Many times they didn’t a) have a policy, but even if they did, the options offered or the things would not exist or be available.

Themes within instructional clinics. It is easy to agree that a “variety of qualities and skills” are needed to be successful at this job. However, wilderness therapy field instructors typically arrive to an organization to work in this position with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, inevitably with gaps in knowledge or skills required for the organization’s specific program. Therefore, additional program-specific instruction is required. Even if they had “never even heard of a bow drill before” or “didn’t know how to bow drill or spark rock,” several participants recalled that they voiced initial interest in learning these ancestral skills. One participant even made a request to management for time “one to one with another staff person who is doing training” that would be dedicated to building these program-specific skills. However, in reality, the instructional training provided by the organization was seen as lacking overall. Participants were left on their own to continually find ways to fill in the gaps in their knowledge or skills that would appropriately address initial feelings of inadequacy or eventual feelings of stagnation.

Initial inadequacy. Two participants spoke directly about feeling uncertain whether they were adequately prepared for the job when they began working. One said:

When I first started, I did a lot of bullshitting. I didn't really know what the hell I was doing, but I was able to talk the talk and convince the right people to let me go out and do it and then it was through there that I started building the skills, knowledge and experience.

The other participant exhibited less confidence when she recalled, "I don't think I felt adequately prepared to go out there," "I don't know if I did think that my skills were adequate for the job," and "I'd been out there about two months without really knowing what I was doing."

In terms of gaining program-specific skills, such as bowdrilling, one participant recounts, "At first I was asking, 'how can we get this?' but the response was often, 'it's fine, it's okay if you don't really get it and you'll pick it up as you go.'" One participant believed that to "be better at their job" and "have success," front line staff should "work on their own time to improve themselves." He suggested to another participant, "If you need to know this, then you find a way to make it on your own time, go learn, go take a course on your time off, come over here and ask me to show you." Two other participants emphasized that they would have benefitted from "more formal therapeutic training."

Stagnation. Despite developing "a sense that I had learned a lot" and "a sense of accomplishment working there where I felt competent in my job," these feelings were often accompanied by a sense of stagnation. Continually developing one's skills as an instructor is one way in which the field instructors interviewed in this study were able to combat feelings of stagnation in their work. One participant saw advancing one's skills as

an instructor as the “kind of thing you do for yourself, you invest in yourself.” Another participant described his continual drive for personal skill development as:

Always a question of how to do more and be better in terms of my own wilderness capabilities and knowledge. That way, I’m always in a situation where I’m comfortable, even when my clients are in a situation where they’re scared about something. There’s always that push for myself to have higher levels of certification and more capabilities as well as developing my soft skills, my ability to communicate and interact with clients, to actually try and get at the root of why they’re here.

A sense of making professional progress, shown by increased responsibility, tools, knowledge, power and influence, is also important to avoid a sense of stagnation in front line field instructors. Two participants mentioned that getting a promotion to senior staff within the first year of work led to gains in experience, learning and professional growth. Two participants mentioned their appreciation for the “opportunity to learn in new circumstances, new positions” and experienced “excitement at the prospect of growing professionally, doing something new.” After a while, once the challenge of getting comfortable in the job and focusing solely on the challenge of “making the kids’ experience better,” one participant explained that his focus eventually shifted back to himself again and as a field instructor, he began to think about ways of meeting his personal desires, such as going back to school.

Several study participants described reaching a point where they felt “stagnated” in their professional development and began show intentions of leaving their job. Two participants used this exact word and further explained this feeling as “I wasn’t pushing

myself as much as I could,” and “there wasn’t a whole lot of behaviour that I hadn’t seen before by the time I was done, in terms of how I was going to manage it.” One participant explained that those working on the front line often had a desire to develop new activities as part of the program, yet needed more managerial support to “break out of these routines” and address the related constraints. Another participant connected feeling stagnant to his intention to turnover when he said he was “feeling the need to do more and to take on more responsibility and there wasn’t that opportunity there. There was nothing more for me to take on.” Another participant agreed, “I need to feel growth. You giving me a high five and saying I’m a cool chick only goes so far.” A third participant described feelings of “wanting to move on to the next step.”

Two participants left field instructor jobs to attend graduate school based on the assumption that a higher level degree in social work or psychotherapy could address their desires for more “power and control over programming and long term care stuff with the youth,” “influence,” and “say, in terms of what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go with what was going on.” Based on an expanding awareness of the work gained from experience with “clients who had pasts often related to trauma or more complicated mental health issues,” one participant felt as though he “didn’t have the tools or knowledge in order to work through some of those issues” and decided to attend graduate school in order to address some of those areas where he felt his “work was lacking.”

Themes within communication. Two main themes emerged within the category of communication. These themes were *isolation* and *need for meaningful connection*. Within the theme of *isolation*, the following three subthemes arose: *difficulty building community*, *importance of being alone*, and *nobody else understands*. Within the theme

of need for meaningful connection, the following three subthemes arose: *value of debriefing*, *added value of debriefing with coworkers* and *use of alternative forms of communication*.

Isolation. Feelings of isolation were mentioned by all seven study participants and the wilderness therapy field instructor role was viewed by one participant as “very isolating.” A participant stated, “My family is just aware that I’m often off doing stuff” and admitted, “I have never been that good at keeping in touch with people.” The sense of being isolated in a remote environment for work may have been seen as an initially appealing aspect of the job, but over time, it reportedly became less appealing for one participant. One participant clearly saw a difference between this type of work and her previous experience of working at a summer camp. She stated, “Camp’s so different because your friends are all with you and it’s like you’re all going through it together,” whereas in a wilderness therapy context, feelings of isolation are more prevalent.

Feelings of isolation were perceived as stronger at times when “someone leaves or quits” and seemingly, “everyone just disperses” so that after having left, one feels “total isolation.” One participant reflected:

So many of the people I worked with and bonded with are all over the place now. Everybody’s everywhere. The communities I worked with are all sort of splintered off, so that’s a funny feeling. Where is everybody? Well, they’re all off in a bazillion different places now trying to figure out what’s next after this kind of work.

While working full time in the field, participants mentioned feelings of being “displaced,” “nomadic,” “transient,” and “not stationary” as contributing factors to their

sense of the difficulty involved with building community. Three participants spoke about the difficulty they experienced in relating to people who did not have a job in the field with their company or a similar company. In the following sections the two subthemes that emerged within the main theme of isolation will be presented: *difficulty building community* and *nobody else understands*.

Difficulty building community. Five of the seven study participants spoke about the difficulty they experienced when attempting to build a community outside of their immediate work context. One contributing factor was geographical distance of one's home during time off from the workplace. One participant stated, "for the most part I lived somewhere away" and was "poor at maintaining connections long distance." He added, "People knew that I wasn't around, but I'm already not." Another participant described two impacts of his choice to live "in the middle of nowhere" as being "isolated from the rest of the world" and "distant from the community." A participant who would "bounce around from place to place" on time off, then also stated she "didn't feel like [she] had anywhere to settle." She added, "it would have been different if I already had an established community in that physical setting to come back to, people you had established enough relationship with that it would just be easy to pick up and hang out with." For her, stress and anxiety were associated with the thought of having "to get up early the next morning and drive in to eight days with no contact with people" outside of her work context.

Even if it was theoretically welcomed or "needed," in reality, the general feeling from participants was that making and maintaining connections and relationships outside the job with people that don't work at the same place is "really hard." One participant

recalled getting a second job to meet new people. Another participant mentioned that “from the beginning” he would prioritize building community “wherever I would be living” if he were to begin working in a similar job again. A third participant explained a “negative side” of this work was the accompanying feeling of a segmented life, fragmented into the two areas of being “in the woods” and “at home.” She recalled thinking at that time that it was “really hard” to make the two sides “congruent and feel like I wasn’t missing something.”

Several participants mentioned moving closer to a larger town as one way in which they tried to feel part of a larger community, but this change was not often seen as a feasible solution since their atypical work schedule remained a thwarting factor to building community. In terms of developing new friends:

Not being able to hang out with them consistently was a real constraint because I would see them every other week, so it ended up being two weeks a month that I could hang out with them. And that’s just not normal.

Another participant told this story:

I set some goals initially around trying to make more social contacts outside of my work or professional friend network. At one point I ended up moving to [Littleton] and I was like, I’m going to get to know a lot of people. I knew some people that lived there, but that didn’t end up working out as well as I had hoped because they all moved away. At one point I was like, I’m going to join the volunteer fire department cause it would be a great way to meet people, but then my schedule actually impeded me from meeting all the requirements for that.

One participant stated, “With people I didn’t work with, they were doing their lives and I was off gallivanting in the forest somewhere” and this “put a strain on any of those relationships I tried to develop.”

Finally, several participants described a link between community development and a sense of limited sustainability in their job. One stated:

After a while, I figured that I wouldn’t stay long enough, so I kind of just stopped trying to build relationships in that community because I didn’t see it as a sustainable job, so therefore why try and build a community when it’s not going to be something that’s going to be long term.

A second participant echoed that sentiment with his statement saying he developed a recognition that the job was “not necessarily sustainable in the long term in terms of work-life balance, just because it was hard to build a community outside of work that gave [him] that balance in order to continue doing the work.”

Nobody else understands. Several study participants indicated there was a lack of individuals outside their immediate work context who could truly understand their work and any accompanying issues they may have wanted to discuss. Three participants described feelings that “nobody really got it” and “no one really understands what you’re going through.” One participant said, “It was very difficult to explain the work I was doing other than taking bad kids into the woods. I wouldn’t necessarily get into large details because there just wasn’t the same level of understanding around what that was.” Another stated, “They would hear me, but I don’t think they really got what was needed or what was going on. How could they understand that lifestyle? It’s just so different.”

Study participants offered examples of reactions from people to whom they described their work that justified their perceptions of the work as “unique,” “uncommon,” “another world,” and “such a different experience.” “Glorified” perceptions of this work from people outside of the industry generally included disbelief, “awe,” “excitement” and “reverence.” Several participants felt as though these perceptions lacked a true understanding of “the full breadth of just how intense” their work could be. When describing one’s work as a field instructor, two participants expressed disappointment that friends and family were largely unable to envision their work as more than that of a “glorified camp counsellor” or communicate a deep understanding of what it was like, based on their use of non-specific expressions like “uh-huh,” “wow,” or “whoa, that must be so hard.”

Need for meaningful connection. Although several participants mentioned that it feels good to “vent” or “voice a bunch of concerns” about work-related issues, the need for more meaningful, constructive connections with others was obvious. Debriefing was described by participants as “talking through things” or an opportunity to get something “off your chest.” One participant shared, “What is useful is actually to have something to problem solve and come up with ideas and commiserate on a level that is not just yeah, they’re idiots.” Since leaving wilderness therapy, one participant’s experience working in other organizations “where debriefing is a really big part of their system” allowed her to recognize its importance.

When working 24 hours a day in the field, one participant observed, “there’s really no time” to debrief effectively out there, “nor is it professional to.” Finding appropriate opportunities to debrief specific incidents and issues encountered when

working full time as a wilderness therapy field instructor may be difficult to do, but this process was considered to be valuable by several of the study participants who prioritized a time and place for these conversations to occur. Informal debriefing opportunities reportedly occur mostly during one's time off or at appropriate moments shared between coworkers while still in the field or driving together to and from work. Two subthemes that emerged within the main theme of need for meaningful connection are: *value of debriefing* and *added value of debriefing with coworkers*.

Value of debriefing. Some individuals may consider debriefing to be more of a formalized "proper sit down and have a conversation about something" while others best engage in this process while engaged in an activity with others like "out climbing." One participant voiced that the process of debriefing was useful in "dealing with some of the issues of burnout in terms of being able to manage some of the stress that a lot of people ended up carrying home with them." The following quote describes another participant's retrospective thoughts on what she felt would have been most effective for her in terms of debriefing:

Hearing them express all that stuff sometimes it would feel like at the end of the week it would have been nice to have a debriefing that was just to be able to show the emotion that you can't show professionally. I wasn't afraid to have some tears because what they're saying is really important and intense, but to actually personally express myself, to say this felt terrible hearing this kid say this and this is how it affected me and have the freedom to do that, which is sometimes a bit awkward when it's not set up.

Several field instructors reportedly sought out opportunities to debrief with individuals who were not their peer level coworkers in order for this process to occur. Some people used individuals disconnected from the organization, such as friends and family, to debrief with more broadly, or to gather feelings of support and “general encouragement.”

When situations occurred in the field “that were extremely stressful” or “fairly significant,” professionally trained therapists or even individuals holding other management roles within the organization would many times be sought out by individual field instructors for debriefing about the incident. One participant noted he “got a lot better” at seeking out opportunities to “chat with one of the therapists on staff” or “sit down in my supervisor’s office and yack for an hour” and that “helped [him] to manage some of those things as they arose.” Another participant “always tried to make a point” to talk informally with his boss every week, “to make sure things were going well from my perspective.” If returning to the position of field instructor in the future, one participant vowed that she would come up with her own ideas in setting up personalized systems for debriefing with her supervisor or a therapist from within the organization. She also stated that she would “take a little more initiative” to ensure that these processes got set up early on, instead of placing the onus on other overworked staff.

For two field instructors who had supervisors that were not easily accessible, to remain connected to the management and students, the opportunity to “come down to the school” to “check in” with management was offered. One voiced that she did not see that as a “realistic” or “viable” option because the location of the school was over four hours away and the visit would have to have occurred during her “limited time off.” However,

she did recall “there were other instructors who did do that, go and check in and talk to the kids on their time off.”

Several participants mentioned journaling as a positive way to release stress and anxiety and debrief with oneself “the emotional stuff,” like “stories of really difficult traumas” that might stick in one’s head. Journaling was seen by one participant as what he “needed to do” in order to “purge a lot of the thoughts that were in [his] head.” Two participants described destroying their journals after some time had passed, illustrating the personal nature of its contents and that it was words neither wanted anyone else to read. Conversely, another participant wrote “daily venting” in the form of “letters” in a book each night, so she felt as though she was “talking to someone.”

Added value of debriefing with coworkers. Six of the seven participants mentioned the value of debriefing issues with one’s coworkers, either while still in the field or after the shift was over. Debriefing personal or work-related issues with coworkers while on shift allowed employees “to process whatever they needed to process and still exist and work where they were.”

While on shift, it was mentioned by two participants that “just before bedtime” was a good time for “checking in” with other staff to “gauge where the other people are at, if they are tired or what’s going on with them.” One participant explained:

Sometimes that conversation would gravitate towards what we had dealt with that day and other times it was just an opportunity to hang out and chat about whatever. In some ways that time was quite useful, depending on how the day went, for feeling somewhat normal.

After “significant incidents” was another time coworkers on shift “tried to come back together” to “chat with one another,” “make a plan to deal with the situation,” but also determine how they were going to take care of themselves and each other. A significant amount of debriefing between coworkers was also reported to take place during staff carpools. Talking in the car offered “really valuable support” by providing a private place where you could “really speak your mind.” One participant felt that after a long week, engaging in this kind of talk “really helped break it down well.” One participant reflected:

Maybe that was the most support network use I ever got in those years was having a staff member that you’re forced into this little box for four hours right before or right after a shift for a week to either vent or talk about nothing.

Several participants saw coworkers as the only option for talking to someone who “really understood.” One stated plainly, “there’s no one else that you can talk to who’s going to understand what you do.” The opportunity to “debrief and have someone really get it” was seen as “really needed,” “pretty essential” and “often more useful than people that have no idea.” No matter how close someone is to you outside of the work context, “there are many things that only someone else that worked there could be a support,” in terms of processing or brainstorming a solution to some issue.

Themes within support services. The three themes that emerged within the category of support services were: *maybe I’m not okay*, *alienation* and *frustration*. Two subthemes that emerged within the theme of *maybe I’m not okay* were *emotional exhaustion* and *intentions to turnover*. Two subthemes that emerged within the theme of *alienation* included *disconnection from management* and *drifting apart*. Two subthemes

that emerged within the theme of *frustration* were *feeling unheard* and *feeling undervalued*. Each theme and its corresponding subthemes will be presented in greater detail within the following sections.

Maybe I'm not okay. According to one participant, "When you work in a field where you're supporting people with mental health issues and addictions and all sorts of other challenges that are mental and emotional, admitting that you're not okay emotionally is a big deal." This participant explained there exists a feeling of "pressure not to be in a bad way when you're trying to emotionally support others." She also expressed:

When I think more and more about why I'm so unhappy here, it's that I just feel a desperate lack of support, progress, goal setting and general care for field staff is lacking or non-existent, making it very difficult to keep myself afloat.

It was suggested by several study participants that unresolved issues of emotional exhaustion existed throughout all levels of their employing organization. One participant sympathized, "I imagine it's very stressful to have your staff out there say 'I'm not okay' and have no choice but to send them in." The existence of these often covert demands and their impact on the study participants will be presented within the main theme of *maybe I'm not okay* as two distinct subthemes: *emotional exhaustion* and *intentions to turnover*.

Emotional exhaustion. Awareness of the emotional impacts of the work may be easier to identify in one's coworkers than in oneself. One participant stated, "Sometimes it's easy to see it in other people when they're down or when they want something or need something and don't ask for it. It's hard to recognize that in yourself." Given that

one participant described observing her coworker “trying to do everything and be everything,” a sense develops within the team so that it is recognizable “when people need a certain kind of support, often times it’s just a break.”

Consequently, a sense of dependence on one’s coworkers to “take care of each other” and “pick up the slack” often developed quickly within staff teams because “out in the field, there’s nobody else except for the three of you.” One participant added:

You really need to have a relationship to support each other. If you don’t have it, you’re in a lot of trouble. You’ll have a really hard, miserable time. Your performance is definitely not going to be as high if you’re not feeling support from your peers to do your job. Part of the success of the team I worked on was that we took really good care of each other and we cared about each other. I respected my coworkers a lot.

The job of a field instructor was described by one participant as “exhausting.” Another participant revealed she was often “absolutely spent because of all those relationships and asking kids questions and being fun and funny and engaging.” Emotional exhaustion was frequently observed in participant’s coworkers. Exhausted individuals were described by one participant as “tired, not as invested as they used to be, suffering from compassion fatigue and not sure where to go.” Several participants offered that they had seen their co-staff “crumble,” “get angry,” “defensive,” “spent,” “tired,” have “less patience” and show signs of “burnout,” “exhaustion” and “not being able to do it anymore.” Increased interpersonal conflict between members of the front line staff team was attributed to “burnout” and “frustration with organizational things.” One

participant claimed to see the work of coworkers “deteriorate” with increasing levels of emotional exhaustion.

Some participants made astute self-observations of the ways the work was impacting them emotionally and in response, several even developed their own personal coping strategies. When one participant mentioned to her co-staff she was “not doing that well” or “finding it really stressful” and outlined ways she might take care of herself if necessary, such as taking time alone. She added, “a lot of times for the person to say ‘sure, no problem, just let me know’ was all that I needed.” Another participant developed coping strategies that included “creating, on Monday night, to-do lists for the next week” and “trying to make the most of my time with people and trying to do things that I enjoy on my time off.” A third participant set up for himself “opportunities to take a rest” or “take time off to go travelling for extended periods of time to really reboot.” He added, “You really needed that every once and a while.”

At the end of their time working in this position, several participants described negative feelings. These feelings included being “really beaten down,” “like I’m not valuable,” “defeated,” “bitter,” “hopeless,” wanting “to leave no matter how much they are going to pay” and feeling “so small in a realm where you’re supposed to feel big and good.” One participant described her “feeling of professional self-confidence” as well as her state of health as “diminished” by this point. Another perception from this participant was that people in management positions within the organization were “angry” and “disappointed” in her, which she found to be “really shattering on a number of levels.”

Several participants recalled distinct memories of negative experiences or moments from early in this position that made each one question their choice and how

much longer he or she could continue working in this position. One participant questioned his ability to “handle” the “intense anxiety and stress” he was experiencing. Another participant described the dread she felt when leaving for a shift “in tears being like ‘this is going to be hellish.’” A few months into the job, one participant recalled her feelings in one specific moment when she considered quitting as being “pretty distraught because [she] felt like [she] hadn’t connected significantly with any of the students, [she] felt physically incapable, [she] was beyond uncomfortable, [she] was in tears.” Another participant shared, “when I first started this career, I used to get sick to my stomach before work.” One participant mentioned feeling “wrenching anxiety being out there” and reported feeling “gripped with anxiety” at night before the start of each shift. These feelings were unusual in the rest of her life and when combined with feeling “really uncomfortable about how things were done,” eventually played a role in her decision to leave the position of field instructor.

Intentions to turnover. All study participants eventually reached a point in time where they each chose to quit their role as a full time wilderness therapy field instructor. However, knowing it’s time to move on and actually leaving the role are not always simultaneous. One participant shared the following observations of her friend working “in the field right now:”

Every week, it’s like psyching himself up to go. He knows he doesn’t want to go, he knows that it’s too much, he’s done, but he psyches himself up to go and convinces himself that he needs to go. It’s the difference of yeah I can do this, but I don’t want to do it. And he’s having a really hard time leaving. He’s been really clear that he wants to leave, but in some ways he feels like he can’t. I’m watching

the burnout happening and I'm waiting for that time where he's like, "I just can't go in anymore. I'm just too tired. I just don't have the resources in me anymore to make myself do this" because he's not flourishing.

Two female participants described times within the first few months of working in this role when they seriously considered quitting the job. One participant recalled thinking at that time, "I don't know if I can do this if this is what this job means" and "I don't think I can keep this up." The other participant brought to mind thoughts like "Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe there's something really wrong with me and this isn't that bad because all these people continue to do it."

When participants were asked about their feelings regarding the time at which they decided to leave full time work as a wilderness therapy field instructor, there were varied responses. One of the participants who is "still doing the job" hasn't "taken a break, except for the odd vacation," and claimed to "still love it." However, when asked what marker might signal the point at which he will finally call it quits for good he responded that he will leave when either his body fails, he stops loving what he does or "when my work that [he's] doing with [his] clients starts falling apart."

Some participants recalled feeling "really relieved" and "elated" once they had made the decision to leave their role as field instructor. A participant felt "a relief" to reduce her feelings of responsibility "in so many ways, especially therapeutically," by no longer working full time. Another participant described how he "didn't just one day decide to quit." He shared that although he "definitely had hard times where [he] was very down, burnt out or tired" it wasn't like he was fed up and had to get out. He was

sure to make a plan for his departure and from his perspective, he made an effort to set things up appropriately before he left.

Several participants described their personal sense of readiness to leave the position of full time field instructor. One stated, "I did not ever want to do another winter out there again," then added, "I don't want to ever do eight days again." Another described the "last straw" as not being informed of a schedule change that had been planned for several weeks, information that was "exactly what [she had] been asking for" and consequently, having the feeling that the ensuing situation would be "just another gong show waiting to happen." A third participant decided to take himself "out of the line of fire," based on his feeling that the working circumstances were "getting dangerous" and were "a recipe for disaster." He also felt "really, really nervous and worried" that "something bad" was going to happen. He cited "getting kids that were inappropriate" and things "getting unmanaged" and "unsupervised" to the point where he did not feel safe as contributing factors to his decision to leave.

Alienation. The geographically remote and unusually demanding context of wilderness therapy work often requires field instructors to adapt to this unique lifestyle in various ways. One area requiring some degree of creativity and flexibility is finding ways to avoid feelings of alienation by adequately having their personal needs for social support met. One participant observed she "really wanted to be able to connect with people" and during her time off would try "to make the most of [her] time with people," doing things she enjoyed. Two participants saw themselves "spending a lot more time with family" in their current life, since they now have family that live "close by" and no longer work a demanding 8 on, 6 off schedule. Five of the seven participants saw use of

the satellite phone for personal calls by staff while on shift as common. This practice wasn't necessarily condoned by management at the time, yet it was seen as something several field instructors felt they "needed to do," especially if there were "some pretty significant things going on in [their] personal lives at home" or "there was a bad day." A lack of presence of management can feel like a lack of support for the front line field instructors. Similarly, atypical scheduling and emotional exhaustion created difficulties maintaining interpersonal relationships with people outside of the work context. These two ideas will be presented in the form of the two subthemes emerging from the main theme of alienation: *disconnection from management* and *drifting apart*.

Disconnection from management. Several participants commented on the management's lack of familiarity with the realities of the wilderness program from a front line perspective. A common sentiment was that "the people in the office didn't know" and the program was "being organized by people who didn't know it themselves." One participant recalled his surprise that there weren't "more people coming up from the school more often. The plan was to have people like the staff supervisor coming up once a month, but it was a rare occasion" in reality. Another participant felt as though "a lot of things were managed from an armchair and ideas thrown out by people who didn't have a clue whether they were realistic or not."

A sense of disconnection from management was perceived by some field instructors to reflect a lack of support and sense of alienation from the rest of the organization. One male participant recalled "feeling unsupported" and alone, "trying to make decisions without any influence from others." This participant also shared his observation that at several wilderness therapy organizations "the management isn't

supporting the field staff as well as they could, so the field instructors [have] to exist on their own and feel disconnected.” Another participant reported that the management was “not really present at all” in the field and added, “This is in an environment where they’re not there. They do not see how things unfold every day, like zero. It’s all based on reporting and hearsay.” Another participant described reaching the point of his “wit’s end,” revealed by feelings of “not having a way to deal with this, not having support at the other end.” A similar viewpoint was shared by a female participant who stated, “support from [the organization] was so lacking, emotionally, for myself and my co-staff. I didn’t really feel supported by [the organization]. They didn’t come to me enough.” After ten months of requesting help from management in increasing increments, one participant described reaching the point of “demanding” that her supervisor call her each week, feeling “desperately in need in debriefing and emotional support for some of the stuff that had been going on.”

Several participants mentioned they would have needed “more communication” from the management of the organization in order to feel adequately supported. One participant recalls, there were “a significant number of rotations that I received no phone call, no contact, no supervision whatsoever.” Another participant added:

In theory, we were supposed to check in before I went into the field every week. In reality, not so much. There would be an email or a quick phone call about who was coming out, who was going in. There really wasn’t enough debrief around that happened after quote unquote incidences in the field.

A third participant contributed that she “learned in a situation where [she] had really great staff support, so the contrast made it stand out even more” once she transitioned into full

time work as a wilderness therapy field instructor. She frequently got the sense that her supervisor was mad at her when “she didn’t call and say are you okay” or “there was no debriefing from that week.”

Drifting apart. During one’s limited time off, although maintaining relationships with people outside of the wilderness therapy work context was perceived by many participants as difficult, close relationships that participants relied upon for social support were especially challenging to navigate. One participant observed there were direct effects from working in wilderness therapy that “could be detrimental in terms of relationships, friendships, family.” Accordingly, he viewed this work and its accompanying lifestyle as “a conscious choice” and explicitly stated that what he does and how he lives is something that is “not going to change if it isn’t working for other people.”

Five participants mentioned romantic relationships with individuals outside of the work context impacted their feelings or behaviours around this job. For those participants involved in romantic relationships while working as field instructors, stress in the relationship was attributed to “spending weeks on end away from home” and coming home “burnt out.” One participant attributed the time spent away from his romantic partner to his experience of an intimate relationship “inevitably” falling apart. To try and avoid this end, another participant’s approach was simply to try to “make it work” and deal with any issues as they came. Another participant attributed the fact that she was soon to be getting married as having changed her “willingness to be away as much.” To be successful in one’s personal relationships outside the job while working in a

demanding environment, two participants acknowledged the need for compromise. One stated:

It takes a very special person to do that long term and to see it as a lifestyle choice so, either selecting individuals who are okay with being away from their families or long term partners for that period of time or needing to structure the staff changeover and how staff participate in the program, timing-wise, differently.

The demands placed on a field instructor's romantic partner may change over time. For one participant, her boyfriend at the time "felt terrible," as it was "really hard for him to see [her] falling apart, having such a hard time." Consequently, she recognized how he shouldered "lots of responsibility" in an effort to buoy her up to go do something he knew she was miserable doing. Despite his unfamiliarity with specific details of wilderness therapy, he became:

The person [with whom] I'd problem solve and discuss a coping strategy for each shift. So whatever it was going to be, that this person is a stranger or we've got a really tough group, we'd come up with a few ideas just for that shift, say I'm going to use this strategy or last time, this strategy didn't really work. So, he became that person, even if he didn't understand all the issues, I'd get home to him and tell him whatever I needed to get stuff off my chest.

The atypical work schedule had observable impacts on the sense of stability in the relationships field instructors built outside of work. For a participant who was "quite happy to just live in a house with a bunch of the people [he] worked with," he saw "consistency" in his relationship with his coworker housemates. Whether he saw them regularly or did not see them "for a while," he describes the work as, "in a weird way,

this consistent thing.” Two participants perceived their marriage (since working in the field) as a “big change” in their lives, scaling down the willingness they once had to embrace the “nomadic” lifestyle of a field instructor. Another participant reflected:

As we are maturing, lots of my friends have also established themselves, and so lots of people now have homes and places they call home and regular phone numbers and you know where to find them. Five years ago that would have been much less the case.

She also recalled that during the time spent working in the field, “I wasn’t super interested in whatever wasn’t going on in my immediate vicinity.”

Knowing that the option for satellite phone contact with someone who could act as a personal support from outside the immediate environment existed was enough to help lift the spirits of some field instructors. One participant called using the satellite phone his “substitute hug.” Using the satellite phone was seen by one participant as “huge” and “really helped to regroup and finish the week strong.” The importance of being able to call personal supports on the satellite phone was mentioned by five of the seven participants, especially in situations when a loved one was recently admitted to hospital or when someone was feeling down and “needing to do that to make sure the rest of my work week goes well.”

Making a “personal phone call on the sat phone” was generally seen as accepted within the staff team, even if management remained mostly unaware of this process. When discussing use of the satellite phone, one participant stated “I don’t know if they ever noticed. I don’t know if they reviewed that bill.” Even though not policed by management, it was effectively self-managed and was not perceived as a practice that

was “abused by any staff.” Another participant explains, “It was never a common thing. It wasn’t a habit. You didn’t just call home because you wanted to talk to your mom or something like that.” “I didn’t do it very often. I probably would tend to be that type of person that wouldn’t assume that it was okay to do that” stated one participant. In terms of frequency of use, one participant noticed that “people who were in partnership relationships” acted as if they were “more justified to use the sat phone” for personal calls.

There was no policy mentioned by any of the participants regarding regulations from management around the familiar practice of using of the sat phone for personal calls, but it was never reported to be outright banned. One participant listened to “some spiel about how it’s like \$25 a minute” from his supervisor, but in the end, it seemed as though his use of the satellite phone for this type of outside support was encouraged in his case, especially if it was something that was set up in advance. Four participants mentioned getting approval from management, either before or after using the satellite phone in the field for personal reasons. All four participants considered it to be positive when their supervisor saw it as “a good decision,” “had no issue with that,” or said “that’s fine,” “not a problem,” and “if you ever need to use it, go ahead.”

Frustration. Frustration built over time for several participants from the perception that “nothing’s changing” and that “the company wasn’t really addressing the issues” that were brought to their attention by the workers on the front line. A participant offered his view that appreciation for the front line staff must be shown “in multiple ways:” first, financially, second, with time off and care, and third, through recognition. One participant stated he was “frustrated a little bit with some of the politics of the

organization” and that this was a factor in his decision to leave the position of front line field instructor. Although one’s personal frustrations might be easy to pinpoint, one participant shared, what she and her coworkers needed “was sometimes quite different. It’s hard to know how to please us all.” The main theme of *frustration* will now be presented in the context of two subthemes: *feeling unheard* and *feeling undervalued*.

Feeling unheard. Several participants mentioned feelings of not being heard or giving forth recommendations that were “falling on deaf ears” or “on ears that just really didn’t get it.” One participant stated “I remember really clearly feeling frustrated because I wasn’t listened to.” This participant described his experience of feeling “very disconnected” from the management in this quote:

When I had questions I needed answered I would email them and I wouldn’t hear back. I would try and call them and I wouldn’t hear back. When I would speak to a valid concern I was having, I would get kind of brushed aside and they would just tell me to go try this and if it doesn’t work we’ll figure it out later. That wasn’t efficient for me because I’m going “this isn’t working for me now. I don’t want to figure it out later.”

In this case, the participant chose to leave that position when he “realized that the management and the support structure were not what [he] needed to feel like [he] was doing the project confidently.” More than one participant observed inconsistency surrounding instructor team meetings stating, “There was no monthly check up. Quarterly, there were supposed to be meetings, [but] that would change.”

Several participants connected longstanding feelings of being unheard with work-related consequences that included increasing levels of frustration and eventual intention

to leave the position of field instructor. Two participants cited consequences of feeling unheard as them becoming “more assertive” in their requests to management. In contrast to earlier requests, these participants eventually found themselves “not asking for things, but demanding” until the point was reached where management “just started trusting that what we needed was probably really what we needed.” Any issue between field instructors and management that was ignored “became huge because it was voiced and nothing happened as a result.” One participant noted that her coworker “had important things to contribute that no one cared about.” Another participant recalls being repeatedly “told [she] just had to deal with that” and that she was being “unreasonable” in her requests for help. In a later conversation with management where she was finally taken seriously, this participant stated, “I’ve been asking for help for months, yes, I do need help.” Consequently, she had experienced uncomfortable feelings like she was being “hung out to dry,” “asking too much” or “being a prima donna.” Another participant stated, “I don’t know how many times I’ve been told to ‘deal with it’ by therapists.” One participant felt that despite stating she had “had enough as an employee” she was “not really being taken seriously.” Consequently, situations arose where she “didn’t necessarily feel like [she] was safe.” Her perception was that the organization’s need for money was considered “bigger than what people were saying they could manage emotionally.” After giving their “opinion about a student that was inappropriate after having spent several weeks with them,” “the management and therapists would disagree and then [the field instructors would] have to continue to spend time with this student who wasn’t engaged or seemed to be sabotaging the whole experience for the rest of the students.”

Several participants stated that feeling unheard by management strongly influenced their eventual intentions to leave the position. One participant stated he'd had enough of "people not understanding the seriousness of what we are doing out here and what we need, in spite of requests and saying what's going on." Another participant attributed his perception that he was "bringing up concerns and being more or less ignored" by management toward his decision to leave the position. A third participant attributed strengthened feelings of intent to quit from the frequent sense that whatever was requested from management, "that thing was never coming." When describing the time she realized "I'm not doing this anymore," one reason for her decision to leave was cited as:

I've made these comments, I've been asking for this or I've talked with whomever about this over this year and I don't see results. I've asked for these things and I'm not getting them. I don't know what else to do.

Feeling undervalued. Staff retention was perceived by some study participants to be derived in large part from employees feeling valued, "taken care of" and "invested in" by the organization. Intention to remain on the front line was not observed when employees felt "taken advantage of" by the employing organization. One participant was frustrated by the imbalance he described as putting "a lot of investment in the company," but seeing "very little in return from the company itself." In order to have retention of front line staff, there has to be some sort of recognition of experience." He added, "You can't expect me to work a really hard job like this without a raise, without any change to things." Financial compensation that increases in line with the rising cost of living is an important part of feeling valued, however this was not the only aspect mentioned.

Initiatives that showed “a plan of development” focused on “growth, appreciation, investment in people,” were also seen as positive signs of significance from a front line employees’ perspective. One example where a participant recalled feeling valued by the organization was when the manager “sat down and figured out a plan of how [he] was going to improve [him]self for work.” Another participant suggested, “Another way for you to demonstrate your appreciation for me or that you value me would be to continue to support me through arming me with more tools” in the form of additional training sessions or certification courses.

In the list of priorities for managers in the organization, some front line employees felt as though offering support for their emotional wellbeing was placed towards the bottom. One participant likened “support or soft policy and procedure related to caretaking” of field instructors to being icing on the cake. However, “if the cake isn’t even baked,” seeing how each employee feels at the end of his or her shift simply does not happen. Another participant explained how much he “missed having a supervisor above me take care of me and look in and check up on me to say ‘How are you doing? How are you feeling coming into work?’” One participant described feeling “hurt” by the management’s lack of “sympathy.”

Since much of a field instructor’s work occurs far from the eyes of managers and supervisors, several participants acknowledged that their work was in some way “not recognized, not acknowledged in just how draining it was.” One participant recalled seeing a recognizable decline in one of her coworkers from being “just so into it” and acting like “the king of the forest” to someone who was “angry,” “lackluster” and “pathetic” in the way “he was constantly talking about the ways he was valuable... and

they weren't taking advantage of that." She thought it "too bad" that her coworker's self-confidence had been "brought down like that" to make him into somebody who believed "the message he had gotten" about being "all washed up" or not having "anything really special to offer."

Several participants mentioned feeling undervalued after a traumatic event or eight day shift, when what they were promised from management, in terms of communication or support, was never actually offered. One participant was promised by her supervisor that they were "going to talk every time" she came out of the field. In reality, she recalls, "I can't count how many times that happened, two or three maybe. It would just disappear and also, might be abbreviated like, 'okay, that sounds bad, I've got to go'." She expanded on this idea, saying "when a crisis or a potentially volatile situation would occur" she was "surprised by the response" from management, considering it "almost no response." She perceived this lack of communication as if the carpet was being pulled out from underneath her and felt as though management "didn't actually have [her] back" and were not concerned if she had been injured or threatened. These feelings "might not have been a big deal" if there was "support or caring" from management, "even just a question about what we felt we needed to deal with it." She elaborated:

Even if they hadn't had all the resources, if they'd said 'you're right and we are struggling and we're sorry that you're feeling like that and we know it's a problem, tell us what you need and we'll tell you what we can offer.' Even if it's nothing, if it showed some care it would be different.

Two other participants made similar statements regarding the “recognition” of the need for a “grander gesture” towards debriefing issues occurring at work with someone in a management role. One stated:

Even a casual phone call, attending more thoroughly to what was going on would have felt good. Even if it didn’t mean sitting down in a formal fashion and going through a process, more of an effortful gesture would have been good.

Another participant simply stated he just needed “more communication.” He explained:

I’d get a phone call the night before I went in the field if I was lucky, someone giving me a bit of a briefing about what’s going on with current clients, the incoming clients and that kind of thing. I would have a brief conversation at the end of the week with the therapist, talking about what’s gone on and then it was left for me to walk back into my own life and then not hear from the actual management again until the day before you go on shift. What would have made sense to me would be to have another phone call to debrief with management afterwards because often there were some intense situations that were happening that you just kind of walked away from.

Themes within evaluation. When working in an environment where you rarely “know if you did the right thing or not,” a regular, individualized evaluation process was seen as important by several study participants. Although a suitable venue for receiving constructive criticism as well as discovering one’s strengths, this type of evaluation process reportedly didn’t happen regularly, if at all. One participant was frustrated that he “hadn’t had an evaluation” for the entire time that he was working full time as a field instructor. He added, “I don’t even know if one exists. How am I supposed to know if I’m

doing something well?” One participant emphasized the significance of this process saying, “it’s important to be able to get feedback. When you had someone you trust give you sincere feedback, it was invaluable.” The single theme that emerged within the category of evaluation was: *need for meaningful feedback*.

Need for meaningful feedback. Working for a different organization, one participant attributed “having a lot of good feedback at the beginning” to his current confidence in his skills. In contrast, this same participant stated, “my biggest problem with the job [as a wilderness therapy field instructor] was freedom and lack of oversight from management because it meant there was a lack of constructive feedback.” Three participants spoke of the “lack of constructive feedback from managers” as a problem. Feedback from “someone who’s not in the thick of it, with a better, different perspective to help develop things” was seen as a valuable missing piece to their experience. One participant saw a “lack of collaborative development from the manager side of things” as a negative aspect in the development of both the program and the individual employees. This lack of attention meant “there wasn’t much reflection on the week from managerial [employees] to address anything, make the team stronger or experience better.” As one participant described, “you’re looking for a supervisor to call you and check in with you because it’s an environment where you do definitely need a lot of support, validation, reassurance that you’re doing something right.” This participant felt that management should more commonly give employees “suggestions and ideas of how to improve or what they would like to see happening in the field.” He especially appreciated being asked his opinion on how something was working and then receiving verbal support from members of management that were willing to “figure out a plan” to improve the program.

If managerial evaluation is non-existent, front line employees are then left to take this task on themselves, setting up opportunities on their own to offer “positive feedback as well as constructive” to their peers. One participant who made a point of providing both types of feedback to his coworkers recognized, “Everyone needs that. It’s a good way to grow.” Another participant took it upon herself to spend some time while driving into work with her coworkers “planning for the week” and “figuring out how we can work together best.”

Over time, many instructors may be left “wondering what one’s worth is.” Without regular evaluation from management, “there’s no one to say if you did something wrong, other than your fellow team to hold you accountable.” Consequently, one participant stated, “sometimes I found myself in more of a caretaking role, on shift or off shift, with co-staff. Another thing for me to manage was offering them support.”

One source of positive validation and feedback that was mentioned by three participants was receiving thanks from students and parents. One participant would keep gifts from students, such as letters goodbye or pictures, and when looking at these items he said they “made me feel fantastic.” When feeling low, another participant “would try to think about all the kids who had thanked me or hugged me or told me that I really helped them.” One participant felt as if the “most significant thanks” he received was from the students of the program.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this chapter was to familiarize the reader with the process of data analysis as well as to introduce the fourteen themes that emerged from this aforementioned analysis process. The themes and subthemes that were derived from the data were organized into six distinct categories using Parsons’ (1980) model of staff

development. One to four main themes were placed within each category of this model. In addition, six of the identified themes contained two or three related subthemes. The following chapter will further discuss the overall findings of this research project. Additionally, implications of the research, recommendations for future research and limitations of the study will be presented.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, study findings are examined in relation to the following research question: How do the perceptions of necessity, accessibility and use of social support systems affect the intention to turnover for wilderness therapy field instructors? The discussion will be presented using Parsons' (1980) staff development model, the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) and will be situated in the concept of employee turnover. Implications of the findings, recommendations for future research as well as limitations of this study are also discussed within this chapter.

Introduction

Working full time as a field instructor for an organization offering wilderness therapy programming is a job that is unquestionably demanding and this work inevitably impacts these individuals emotionally. One participant stated, "All of us that have done that work recognize the depth at which it strikes us." Although the daily challenges faced by these individuals have begun to be explored in recent research (e.g., Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009), no previous research study has investigated how wilderness therapy field instructors access or utilize social support or how they perceive its necessity. This study was specifically designed to gather a rich description of these perspectives from seven individuals with full time front line experience. Study findings will broaden the current understanding of social support for these individuals, a factor that could influence the rate of premature turnover for full time field instructors.

The findings of this study showed growth over time of field instructors' perceived lack of social support from the organization. Emergence of themes such as *frustration*, *alienation*, *isolation* and *need for meaningful connection* exemplify the personally damaging consequences of one's development of a perception of inadequate social

support. Growth of this common perspective is problematic, as it could also play a role in an employee's premature intention to turnover. Further examination of effective management of job demands may reveal noteworthy differences between employees persisting in this role longer than one year and those that are not.

Without passionate, dedicated individuals working as field instructors, wilderness therapy programs would not exist. Program managers work hard to ensure appropriate care and safety standards are followed in relation to their adolescent clients (Russell et al., 2008). However, these same issues are not often viewed as priorities in relation to their front line employees. One study participant revealed, "The most creative, inspired and involved in their work are the people who believe in the value of it and really feel that it's important." By denying what is perceived as an adequate amount of social support to high quality front line employees, program managers risk damaging the self-esteem of these workers (Garske, 2000). If a direct link between the prevalent perception of a lack of organizational support and premature turnover of these individuals is confirmed by the findings of future studies, then managers could eventually have substantial research evidence to guide them in spending appropriate time and resources on providing adequate social support for their front line employees. If solutions to the problem of premature employee turnover can be found through increased social support, detrimental costs to the organization and the individual employees could be avoided (Hinkin & Tracy, 2000).

The literature indicates that the therapeutic process used in the remote context of wilderness therapy programs does have positive effects on adolescent clients (e.g. Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Russell & Hendee, 2000; Russell et al., 2000) and thus,

it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the benefits experienced working full time in wilderness therapy as a field instructor could closely mirror these positive transformational experiences. For field instructors, several of the gains derived from working in wilderness therapy were seen when applying what is taught to clients “out in the woods” to their personal lives. For example, when building professional rapport with adolescent clients or coworkers, two participants attributed improvements in their relational skills, such as understanding conflict and de-escalating other people’s behaviours, to their experience working in wilderness therapy.

In their close personal relationships, field instructors noted the application of relationship skills like conflict resolution and talking about their feelings to be “strongly influenced for the better” as a result of time spent working in wilderness therapy. Work as a field instructor was also reported to reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and offer effective tools to work through stress or approach challenges “more readily.” Wilderness therapy work was also seen by study participants as integral to learning about themselves, feeling a sense of personal growth and developing a higher tolerance for what it takes for them to feel overwhelmed. The benefits outlined by the field instructors in this study mirror measurable program impacts in areas like increased self-esteem (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994b; Neill, 2002; Neill & Richards, 1998), positive personal growth and leadership development (Russell, 2001) that have only been previously been documented for the adolescent clients enrolled in wilderness-based programs.

After analyzing the findings of this study, it appears as though the equivalence of experience between adolescent clients and field instructors is glaringly unequal when examining one major program component: social support. This topic will be explored in

detail within the following three sections. These sections will examine how social support is perceived by field instructors in terms of necessity, accessibility and use. Within each section, study findings will first be discussed in terms of organizational support offered by managers or professional therapists, then, in terms of coworker support. Each section will conclude with a brief discussion of the topic as it relates to outside support offered by friends, family members or intimate partners external to the work context as well as self-directed support, initiated and carried out by the individual.

Do field instructors perceive social support as necessary?

It would be unlikely for field instructors to arrive to their first wilderness therapy position with all the necessary tools to cope with the countless challenges they will face, emotional and otherwise. When asked about the necessity of debriefing and other methods of social support to their desire to continue in their role as a field instructor, several study participants retrospectively saw benefits to engaging in these processes. Gathering social support from friends, family and partners outside the wilderness therapy context was also considered imperative for those individuals who didn't feel a need or desire for time alone to recharge or disconnect from work-related issues. Women may have a higher need for social support than men, but further research is needed to confirm this relationship as a suggested explanation for Marchand et al.'s (2009) observations that male field instructors often remain in this role longer and suffer lower levels of anxiety than female field instructors.

Organizational support. On behalf of the employing organization, implementation of support mechanisms beyond what was offered to the participants of this study is necessary to increase one's sense of social support. Study participants frequently identified that front line employee support from management was "needed." A

need for support is clearly evidenced when one participant explains, “certain groups are draining on many, many different levels. Sometimes it’s tough...not being able to or not knowing how to manage.”

However, the observation that adequate social support was “not always there” indicates a perception simultaneously exists that these workers were not consistently able to deal effectively with work-related issues on their own. One participant described her co-worker as “flabbergasted” and “disgusted” with the lack of support received from management. She herself felt, as time went on, “it became harder to be okay with that lack of support” from management and it started to wear on her. She also identified, “There were lots of incidences like that where, either for myself or my co-staff, after a really traumatic event, there wasn’t enough processing around how we might or might not be affected by that.” Several study participants voiced feeling as though the organization did not “have their backs” when it came down to offering support by means of a regular phone call or meeting with a supervisor about a distressing event.

Perceptions of inadequate managerial attention to the social support needs of field instructors presented two consistent outcomes in the experiences of several study participants. First, feelings of frustration and alienation often built up over time as a result of one’s requests for support being consistently ignored or not prioritized by management. Without adequate mentorship, discussion of boundaries or clear guidelines provided by management, several field instructors felt “out to sea” and alienated, both from the rest of the organization and from friends and family who had trouble understanding exactly what their job involved. Disconnected from management when at work, both geographically and in terms of frequency of communication, field instructors

may consequently endure challenges and accordingly develop coping strategies that remain unseen and unknown by managers who work predominately from a base camp or office that is far removed from the wilderness therapy expeditionary context.

Consequently, a second outcome from the perception of management as unable to meet their needs for support was the development of a strong reliance on implementing self-directed, informal methods to garner social support from either coworkers or other individuals outside their work context.

At many points during their tenure, as well as when transitioning out of the field instructor role, several study participants perceived that they were not afforded adequate levels of social support from their employing organization. Ironically, these same organizations were decidedly committed to offering extensive social support to their paying clients. Throughout the duration of the wilderness therapy expeditionary programming and often for several months following the completion of the program in the aftercare phase, intense individual counseling of wilderness therapy program clients and their families is considered an important part of their success (Russell et al., 2008). For front line instructors also, the importance of debriefing opportunities with supervisors, on an informal and formal basis, cannot be overlooked (Garske, 2000). An effective debriefing conversation to offer social support to front line staff could take the form of a face to face meeting or a phone call with a professional therapist or work supervisor with the goal simply to provide the opportunity to discuss any traumatic incidents or anxieties around work-related issues. Recommendations from study participants for the institution of a more formalized debriefing process with management are also supported by related research conducted by Mitchell and Irvine (2008),

highlighting the “potential value” of an outlet for “personal emotions and reflections” (p. 36).

Study participants had myriad examples of feeling unappreciated and undervalued by management, leading to the development of the major theme of frustration. One participant described “feeling someone cares about you as an employee and wants to see you do well and grow” as “huge.” However, that same participant “felt at numerous times throughout [his] career so far that the management aren’t really invested in the staff and don’t really care.” Front line managers must pay closer attention to ensuring that social provisions such as reassurance of worth/competence are provided within their relationships with field instructors in order to prevent feelings of frustration from building. The findings of this study are consistent with related research where rehabilitation counselors and front line nursing assistants also reported dissatisfaction with “recognition received,” “perceived advancement opportunities” (Garske, 2000, p. 12) or “lack of acknowledgement or reward for good work” (Bowers et al., 2003, p. 38).

Coworker support. A strongly perceived lack of guidance from a supervisor that could offer a professional perspective based on related experience and knowledge of situations “in the field,” meant field instructors often felt as though they had only each other to turn to for work-related advice and support. If limited instruction was given from management regarding potentially unfamiliar program-specific skills like bow-drilling or spark rocking, experienced field instructors might take on this teaching role for their co-staff during their time off for no additional financial compensation. The theme of mentorship within the team of front line staff arose, but despite the value placed on the perception that this was an important facet of social support by several field instructors, it

was frequently not a formalized process and was born out of a willingness within more experienced instructors to take on this role.

Outside support. Several field instructors recounted stories of meeting up with friends and family during their time off and found themselves often using this context to talk about issues that they were dealing with at work. One study participant described that she relied on “two or three close friends and family” to “talk to about whatever comes up.” This participant describes a troubling transition in her use of this “relatively small group of people” to process work-related issues:

At first, it was almost a casual basis to say how was your week and I enjoyed having stories and they were happy to hear from me and the social support was, it was [them saying] ‘great to see you doing that.’ As the year progressed, it changed in that I needed more and that the people closest to me got worried about me and started asking questions really on a coping level as opposed to debriefing. And it changed for me because instead of good listeners or just good people to chat with about things, they became lifelines.

It is clear from this statement that although friends and family outside the work context may be supportive listeners, they are not generally a healthy or appropriate replacement for professional help when dealing with significant work-related emotional issues.

Having someone available to speak to about these issues who is professionally trained in counseling and mental health seems like an obvious better choice. However, if the option to meet with a trained professional is not perceived as necessary by management then coworkers, friends, family and intimate partners inevitably become alternative sources of

support one may feel forced to use for processing of one's individual work-related issues, despite an acknowledgement of how this process could strain the relationship.

Self-directed support. Finally, if the provision of reliable alliance/tangible support is perceived to be inconsistent when offered from management, coworkers or outside support networks, a field instructor may try to find a sense of consistency in choosing to support him or herself independently. Although spending time alone was considered something one becomes accustomed to as part of the lifestyle that accompanies work as a field instructor, several participants mentioned a preference for time alone during full time employment. Observing a desire for aloneness when not at work within several study participants is consistent with past research involving outdoor adventure field instructors (e.g., Birmingham, 1989). One study participant, self-described as "the lone wolf," was "very much used to wandering around on [his] own" and preferred "doing many things on [his] own." However, this same participant used an "internal feeling" of aloneness to signal a need to "interact with people and seek out [his] friends." He described noticeable changes in his preferences for time alone since beginning work as a field instructor, stating:

In university I thought of myself as a pretty social person, there would always be people around. Once I started spending all this time in the field, I found myself getting home from a shift at work and I wouldn't want people around, I wouldn't want to talk, I'd want to be on my own and allowed peace. It was a way of recharging, regrouping myself.

Several other study participants alluded to their need of a balance of time alone and time with others to feel supported. One participant stated, "Sometimes it's nice to have

someone. Other times, I just want to be on my own.” When field instructors intentionally create opportunities to speak to those individuals with whom they have supportive relationships, either professionally or casually, the perceptions of how easily these interactions can be accessed may play a role in regulating the level of social support one can acquire from each connection.

Do field instructors perceive social support as accessible?

When field instructors are feeling emotionally “not okay,” it is not clear where they should turn for help. Despite the hypothetical availability of opportunities for field instructors to interact with qualified mental health professionals from within or outside the organization, the systems and resources required in order to offer adequate social support to front line employees never materialized for study participants to access it in the manner or frequency that they felt was necessary at the time. One participant recalled that “debriefing or professional counseling” with someone outside the organization was never specifically offered during her time working as a full time field instructor.

Organizational support. A critical therapeutic incident is defined as “an unplanned event that occurs with an individual or group that is clinical in nature, and that is potentially damaging to self or others” and examples include restraints, violence and running away of a client (Gray & Yerkes, 1995, p. 95). Without established guidelines or policies to deal with such incidents, the aftermath of such an experience can be overwhelming for a field instructor who may be wrought with questions regarding how the incident was handled (Gray & Yerkes, 1995). Although some study participants recalled “debriefing with the therapist who would have been out there” after a critical therapeutic incident, it is evident from the variation in responses that the process of initiating a debriefing talk with a qualified therapist was not clearly defined or

consistently initiated by members of management. In the absence of an open-door policy or a formalized process that is organized in advance, in depth debriefing of a critical therapeutic incident is not certain to occur. Negative consequences for field instructors who are not consistently offered adequate opportunities for debriefing critical therapeutic incidents could include premature burnout or employee turnover (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Gray & Yerkes, 1995; Kirby, 2006).

Building a formalized and consistent debriefing process into the program policies for field instructors to discuss incidents or ongoing issues in a confidential, professional manner, was suggested by numerous study participants. Instituting such a process within those organizations without a formal debriefing policy would “allow staff to discuss some of their frustrations more openly and deal with their own issues as they arise in the work.” One participant thought “having more of an open culture to discussing these things” would be “essential to being effective as a field instructor. A formalized process could take the form of a phone call or a face to face meeting with a therapist “once a week for an hour after their shift.” Deliberately creating an “open-door policy” as part of the staff culture at the organization could open up opportunities for front line staff to debrief regularly and feel reassured that they are not making “bad choices around treatment” of their adolescent clients. Introducing this practice early in the orientation stage could downplay any stigma that might be consciously or unconsciously attached to this process.

Immediate debriefing of critical therapeutic incidents after they occur in the field with a supervisor or a professional therapist could almost guarantee the perception of an accessible means to a sense of social support for field instructors. Asking for

personalized therapeutic attention from a mental health professional, similar to what adolescent clients in treatment would receive, was not specifically encouraged or publicized by the organization as an accessible avenue for field instructor use. One participant remarked, “A lot of places, ironically, that should have the most understanding about all this are the least understanding and most judgmental.” Since asking for this kind of help was reported to be uncommon among field instructors, it was unclear if a perception existed that by admitting one’s need for additional professional support they might be subsequently putting their jobs in jeopardy or suffering other unknown negative consequences. For those field instructors that did ask for help from management or professional therapists, it remains unclear from the study findings whether or not this process and the results of this request were a positive or negative experience overall.

There was inconsistency within the study results regarding who should initiate the process of creating an opportunity for personal debriefing between field instructors and a manager or therapist following the occurrence of a critical therapeutic incident. One participant stated, “I knew that I could debrief with someone [from the organization], but I don’t think I ever specifically asked for debriefing.” In retrospect, this participant shared that although she felt as though she had some access to people to speak to within the organization, she never knew how much she appreciated more opportunities for debriefing until she experienced more from another job since that time. Instead of being approached by a manager or therapist, several participants felt they needed to be self-reliant in “making those opportunities” or formally requesting “a debrief with a superior for something that happened in the field.” In other cases, participants were approached by

the therapist or management after a critical therapeutic incident “to talk and to debrief what exactly had just happened,” creating much-needed opportunities for field instructors to speak openly about their feelings. A management team that showed an openness to talk and an understanding of the “profundity of what was going on out there and really what we were participating in on this bigger level” was seen by one study participant as paramount to alleviating grievances among fellow workers.

Coworker support. Informal debriefing processes between field instructors are an integral part of building a strong foundation between individuals working together in such an intense, remote environment. Peer debriefing sessions were reported to commonly take place while driving home together after a shift or on the phone prior to the start of a shift. In order to maintain strong, supportive coworker relationships, effective use of communication skills was often prioritized in an effort to resolve interpersonal issues as they came up. Similarly, when dealing with traumatic events in the field, field instructors would give precedence to looking after one another, and making an effort to come together to devise a plan about how to best proceed. However, some situations or issues may lie beyond the scope of one’s peers, and a field instructor may consequently feel the need to process what is bothering him or her with a supervisor, a qualified therapist on staff or another mental health professional from outside the organization.

Outside support. The social support received through family and friends in a social network is thought to have a buffering effect on stress (Kerstetter et al., 2008). However, irregularity is the norm for face-to-face communication with people outside the work context of most field instructors. For field instructors with friends and family near

where they spend their time off, these individuals may become commonly relied upon sources of social support when not at work. Several study participants attributed the atypical scheduling of their work shifts to inconsistent and segmented relationships with friends and family. One participant described the constraints of the work schedule as “I always felt like I had people, but the access was so different.” She saw in depth conversations as “less frequent,” and attempts at creating and maintaining friendships were perceived as “challenging.” Forming a sense of community wherever field instructors were living was a common goal within the study participants, yet significant barriers existed. It was perceived as “very difficult to create community being in a city six days out of fourteen, every other week” since “things like getting together on a Friday night for drinks was really hit or miss because you only got half the time of everyone else’s schedule.”

Self-directed support. Newly hired field instructors are unlikely to have had extensive prior exposure to clinical therapy outside of their work and may not consider its use for themselves to cope with difficult personal issues, work related or otherwise. Perhaps hesitation to request professional therapeutic support is due to a stigma that field instructors attach to asking for support in this way. Several participants identified themselves as “independent,” “introverted,” “not one for asking for help all the time,” or not needing “more than a base level of support.” One participant divulged he tries to rely on himself “more than others” and therefore, he was “not the best person to judge” when he didn’t have social support or that he needed more of it.

Limited previous contact with professional therapeutic support may lead to one’s ignorance of its potential benefit. A candidate hired as a full time field instructor may be

required to have first aid training, a specified amount of wilderness guiding experience and be a college graduate from an outdoor recreation or related field (Russell & Hendee, 2000). However, he or she is not usually academically trained in clinical psychology or therapeutic counseling and may be hired with little to no experience in these areas. After positive experiences debriefing work-related issues, one participant reflected, "I don't think I was aware how helpful that could be." She added, "When you don't have it, sometimes you don't know what you don't have." If formalized, professional counseling services are perceived as inaccessible, field instructors may alternatively seek out informal, non-professional support through communication with co-workers who are easily able to understand their context.

Ensuring adequate support for field instructors working full time in wilderness therapy programs "could in turn improve the overall quality of care in an intervention that has shown promising results for youth and families in need" (Marchand et al., 2009, p. 373). One fundamental step in initiating this process is ensuring adequate social support systems are available to be accessed by field instructors. First, whether formal or informal, on shift or off shift, accessibility to social support in the form of supervisory or professional therapeutic debriefing was rarely perceived as clearly outlined to the study participants. Thus, unless connected to a critical traumatic incident, this type of social support was perceived to be difficult to obtain in many circumstances. Second, social support from coworkers was perceived to be highly accessible. Most members of the front line staff team were willing to communicate with one another to improve their performance and any needs for support were successfully self-directed and managed within the team. Finally, social support from friends and family outside the work context

was easily accessed, when scheduling constraints allowed and field instructors were motivated to seek out people in this category with which to debrief any issues or events from one's work. However accessible these sources of support were perceived to be, it was also recognized that their appropriateness for filling this role was questionable. Although not consistently offered or implemented, assistance from management is integral to the establishment of effective, long term social support systems that can address the varying needs of field instructors in terms of support.

How is Social Support Utilized by Field Instructors?

The constraints inherent within the work context faced by wilderness therapy field instructors mean alternative approaches must be utilized in order to adequately meet one's needs for social support from management, coworkers, or outside support from friends, family and intimate partners. For example, while she was away, one participant arranged with her partner that they would both "think about each other at 10:30 every night" to feel like they were together in some way. While in the field, it may also be appropriate for field instructors to employ various methods of self-directed support.

Organizational support. Despite frequent debriefing with coworkers, friends, family or intimate partners, several study participants sensed that a need often remained unmet for more intense, formalized, confidential processing with a trained professional counselor or member of management from the organization. One participant stated, "I definitely debriefed with people all the time...people who would have been in my chosen support system, like my family and friends, but I don't know if that's healthy. I wouldn't call that a healthy replacement."

Yet if some level of fundamental social support can be gained from maintaining relationships with outside supports such as close friends, family members or an intimate

partner, perhaps organizations that are willing to make changes that will assist field instructors to utilize tools or resources aimed at supporting these relationships could lead to increased longevity of front line employees. For example, setting up guidelines outlining appropriate use of the satellite phone for personal calls would offer field instructors a sense that management understands their need for intermittent outside support from close friends, family members or intimate partners. More formalized and consistent implementation of social support measures could become an important way that program managers can clearly indicate the value they place on the retention of front line field instructors. Likewise, formalized mentorship programs and other sharing opportunities with management could increase the feelings of social support within front line workers, especially for newer field instructors.

Coworker support. Several study participants agreed that effective social support on a deep, personal level must occur outside of one's eight day work shift schedule, since "in the field, you're on the go the entire time." However, some debriefing conversations with coworkers were reported to take place within the work environment. Usually the opportunities to check in with other staff regarding any personal issues came late at night, once the clients were in bed and all duties completed. Although this may have been beneficial for some study participants, having these types of conversations within this setting may negatively impact one's intended results. One participant was adamant he didn't "talk about personal life as much at work, like relationships" because he recognized he would start to detach from where he was and would "start thinking about home too much." Due to fatigue, lack of privacy or limited time for reflection,

some study participants felt debriefing while on shift was inappropriate, less effective and less in depth than it might be outside of this specific context.

One study participant clearly articulates the limitations of relying on using coworkers for debriefing conversations.

If whoever was in charge said let's sit down and debrief and you can say anything to me about how you felt, that would feel fine, but when it's Joe Blow that I did a shift with and I'm saying can we talk about how our week went, I don't feel that comfortable crying and releasing, just fully expressing how it was for me.

Outside support. For those field instructors involved in intimate relationships, the potential for relationship problems is augmented since one partner of the romantic relationship must leave the home to invest a significant amount of time and resources into work. A field instructor involved in a romantic relationship must find a way to manage his or her emotional responses to work-related issues that does not negatively impact one's intimate partner. Study participants attributed stress in their intimate relationships to "spending weeks on end away from home" and coming home "burnt out" after a shift. One participant attributed the time spent away from his romantic partner to his experience of an intimate relationship "inevitably" falling apart. According to results of a study by Marchand et al. (2009), 22% of wilderness therapy field instructors attributed breaking up with an intimate partner to demands arising from their work as a field instructor.

To succeed in an intimate relationship where atypical and demanding circumstances exist, both parties must adapt their expectations and communication behaviours to emphasize flexibility and compromise (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000).

Feelings of support from an intimate partner are seen by Knapp and Vangelisti (2000) as vital for coping successfully with challenges and may be regarded as beneficial by those field instructors that manage to make such a relationship work. However, any support derived from such a relationship will remain inaccessible for field instructors who are single while working full time as a field instructor. Based on the results of a study conducted by Marchand et al. (2009) where almost half (48%) of all respondents reported that they were single, this would mean a significant proportion of field instructors are not receiving benefits from this source. Involvement in a relationship perceived as intimate may allow a field instructor to find increased depth in his or her interactions and risk more meaningful self-disclosure and personal sharing with a trusted individual (Martin & Thomas, 2000).

Self-directed support. When facing extremely limited opportunities for outside communication while on shift, field instructors may turn to alternative methods of self-directed support. A journal can act as a useful tool to chart one's personal growth through day-to-day emotions and reactions to people and events, as well as providing a tangible reminder of one's trustworthy relationships and supportive friends. Journal writing often acts as a regular part of wilderness expedition programs (Russell & Hendee, 2000) and therefore, is a highly appropriate option for self-directed support within the work context. Journaling may afford field instructors an opportunity to release negative emotions that may be interfering with one's ability to engage positively within the group (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011).

Use of self-directed support through written reflection could be an easily implemented solution for dealing with one's work-related emotional demands while

remaining physically present in the work context. Use of journaling to deal with work-related issues was described by almost every study participant, either during one's work shift or back at home. Future research is needed to validate the use of communication methods such as letters, text messages or satellite phone calls to offer emotional and social support to field instructors while they are on shift.

Every employee will confront work-related challenges differently and may require a collection of approaches in order to feel uniquely valued, heard and adequately supported. However, the findings of this study indicate some field instructors feel forced to leave, diminished, "beaten down," "bitter" and unsure of their future ability to work in a similar job. The negative connotation of these words indicates a problem is occurring in this industry that requires a detailed investigation in order to find a solution.

It seems as though the most effective social support system for each field instructor is one with adequate variation and use of creative alternatives so that his or her individual needs can be met to a sustainable degree within all contexts. The methods used by a field instructor to obtain what is perceived as an adequate level of social support will vary on a case by case basis. No matter where, when or with whom activities such as debriefing are occurring, feelings of adequate social support must be achieved for each individual field instructor. Since feeling adequately supported is seen as a necessity by many study participants, access to and use of some effective combination of opportunities for the purpose of achieving personal support is imperative. Without creating these opportunities for social support, premature front line employee turnover may be imminent.

Employee Turnover Revisited

Reasons for high turnover within front line field instructors in wilderness therapy programs are not only important for organizations to consider from a financial or resource management standpoint, but also from a humanistic understanding. Perceptions of inadequate social support may be closely related to the high rate of turnover for front line employees, yet may also force these workers to endure deplorable levels of personal stress from increasing demands. As one participant explained, “it’s hard for [the management] to contribute to your care if you’re one of those people rotating through.”

If organizations offering wilderness-based expeditionary programs insist on providing high quality instruction from a dedicated, experienced and professional field staff team, they must adopt specific hiring and incentive practices to encourage this (Ross, 1989). Implementation of a diverse set of strategies to build supportive and sustainable work communities will be imperative to address the myriad work-related demands facing front line employees (Thomas, 2003). For example, turnover could potentially be reduced through adopting practices such as realistic job previews, mentoring, or extensive staff training programs (Marchand & Russell, 2012). High rates of field instructor turnover are common within the wilderness therapy industry. Kirby (2006) asserts that field instructors are “inherently transient and prone to turning over no matter what kind of job or work environment they are afforded” (p. 4). However, instead of using only one strategy in an attempt to satisfy the needs of all field instructors, an individualized approach may be what is required for increased retention of front line employees.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) theorize that early burnout of an employee is caused by a “mismatch between the nature of the job and the nature of the person who does the

job” (p. 9). According to the person-environment fit perspective, if this mismatch exists, the person’s abilities will fall below the job demands and lead to increased stress levels and intentions to turnover (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). The stressfulness of one’s job is inferred from the lack of person-environment fit, which could be seen as the extent to which the person’s abilities fall below the job’s demands (Cranny et al., 1992).

The theory of Person-Environment Fit could be used to explain rapid turnover of field instructors working in wilderness therapy programs. Job demands may often be perceived as too challenging to be sustainable and lead to high turnover rates of employees (Marchand & Russell, 2012). One possible reason is that field instructors may hold unrealistic expectations about their job demands and underestimate the adequacy of their training to effectively deal with long term impacts arising from the job demands of wilderness therapy work (Marchand, 2009; Marchand & Russell, 2012).

Managers must seek out creative and individualized initiatives to reduce the frequency of premature turnover (Thomas, 2003). Most wilderness therapy program managers find themselves bound by the confines of a tight budget and little information available due to limited research in this area. While all wilderness therapy programs tend to embody similar values and goals, the unique approaches by managers can incorporate organizational practices and policies that naturally create differences in the job demand stressors, perceptions of support and ultimately, one’s longevity on the front line (Marchand & Russell, 2012). While attempting to implement solutions that address a wide variety of challenges, managers must start by examining the basic procedures that are currently in place to ensure these practices are meeting the needs of their present employees.

Unwanted turnover among field instructors is perceived as a problem for many wilderness therapy organizations since it is associated with negative consequences such as poor financial performance and compromised continuity of client care (Kirby, 2006). Because of high rates of turnover, recruiting and retention of front line employees is regarded by 50% of camp directors as “their greatest concern” (McCole, 2004, p. 328). Contrastingly, this trend seems to be accepted by the field instructors interviewed in this study. One participant stated, “Ever since I’ve worked in the field I’ve known and people always speak to the fact that there’s always a high turnover, everyone knows that.” Two subthemes emerged within the study findings that were related to this idea. One was *acceptance of high turnover*, within the theme of *initial uncertainty of longevity* and the other was *intentions to turnover*, within the theme of *maybe I’m not okay*. Study participants also considered this prevalent issue to be the responsibility of management to resolve.

Several of the field instructors participating in this study shared their perception of challenges involved in full time wilderness therapy work to be amplified when compared to other work they had done in the past. In agreement with Kirby (2006), who noted that those who worked seasonally were less likely to turnover, many study participants remarked on the all-consuming nature of full time wilderness therapy work and how much more difficult it was to sustain than a seasonal contract doing expeditionary or summer camp type work.

Unlike a summer camp environment where one’s friends might be working alongside them and available as sources of social support, a theme of *isolation* was present for these study participants. Study participants echoed findings from recent

research by Marchand et al. (2009) and Lawrence-Wood and Raymond (2011) that it was difficult to discuss their experience with close friends and family members and also tough to maintain those relationships. Based on the relevancy of the two subthemes of *difficulty building community* and *nobody else understands* to each study participant, the theme of *isolation* was therefore, highly prominent among all seven study participants.

Study participants perceived the demands from their role at work to increase over time. Several field instructors felt as though their time off became increasingly used up with errands and recovering from the previous week or preparing for the next week. Without appropriate coping mechanisms in place to deal with work-related challenges, one's perception of demands increasing over time amounts to high risk of burnout and premature turnover in front line employees. Participants in this study support Kirby's (2006) analysis that the longer an individual is employed the more likely he or she is to quit. However, the reasons given behind this decision were not consistent between all study participants. The difficulty in identifying consistent antecedents to turnover are supported by the attribution made by Teschner and Wolter (1984) that staff burnout is more to do with "an absence of ongoing personal growth" and less as a result of long working hours and high demands (p. 19).

It is important to recognize that much like the teenage participants, field instructors also "describe similar physically and emotionally intense experiences, reporting that after program completion they undergo a period of adjustment, where they experience a range of positive and negative adjustment symptoms" (Lawrence-Wood & Raymond, 2011, p. 324). Upon leaving such an intensely relational environment, students and staff alike may struggle when dealing with opposing emotions of missing it and never

wanting to go back and thus, experience some “period of psychological, emotional and behavioural adjustment after program completion” (Lawrence-Wood & Raymond, 2011, p. 325). Reactions during a transition period are suggestive of a process where field instructors attempt to “understand, appraise and integrate their experiences; recover from the physically intense nature of the experience; undergo a period of mourning; and cope with significant environmental changes” (Lawrence-Wood & Raymond, 2011, p. 334). In Lawrence-Wood and Raymond’s (2011) study, this adjustment period was seen as neither abnormal nor a drawn out process, but one that has the potential to be distressing and is possibly unique to wilderness therapy programs. Lawrence-Wood and Raymond (2011) suggest that informal debriefing practices, in the form of casual conversations with fellow staff members or other social contacts, is one way of supporting improved adjustment and thereby, benefitting the program.

One study participant described the magnified difficulty she encountered when leaving the field instructor role since she was embarking on this transition without any acknowledgement of how tough it would be to leave something that profound. She suggested recognition of this challenge must become part of the employee culture. Just as students are ceremoniously acknowledged as program graduates and then supported through aftercare, field instructors could benefit from having separate, yet similar cultural norms that might include ongoing conversations that display managerial recognition of the impact of the profundity of the work “while you’re living it,” followed by an intentional transitional process or ritual that occurs when front line field instructors move on to other roles. Especially when employees leave, “recognizing how profound all that

stuff is needs to be part of the culture” and that culture must be created by managers and administrators willing to take time for “meta-processing what it is we’re doing out there.”

One participant recalled, “Those last few months were really terrible in the sense of creating a lasting, negative memory and it’s stayed with me that way.” If her requests to management had been met, she thought she “would have stayed longer,” “transitioned out of it in a much more satisfying way” and might have been afforded the opportunity to leave “with the feeling of respect and joy of having done my dream job and that [she’d] contributed and that [the management] had felt a great deal of respect for me.” Instead she described her feelings around quitting as “really bad,” “judged,” “like [she] was a disappointment to people,” “terrible,” “shame,” “struggling,” “embarrassment,” “feel badly for jumping ship,” “anger that [she] somehow failed at something [she] thought [she] could do,” and “that [she] should be ashamed of [her]self for not being able to stick with it and take whatever was being thrown at [her].” It is unknown how much of this emotional struggle was acknowledged by members of management. If there was a plan in place to help this participant transition more effectively out of this work, perhaps the detrimental personal costs she described could have been avoided.

Young adults today may approach employment in this field with idealistic expectations and then experience feelings of pressure and disappointment after recognizing the realities of the job (Marchand, 2009). These feelings may develop more commonly for employees who place a high value on the worth of their work and have a desire to ensure it is in line with their personal ethics and leads to the betterment of others, personal growth and skill development (Kirby, 2006). Sustained high rates of instructor turnover could indicate that the job expectations of field instructors are

commonly not aligned with actual experiences, as was seen in research by Marchand (2009). Disappointment surrounding the reality of the job and exhaustion from the increasing demands related to the lifestyle required for this work may unexpectedly motivate high quality field instructors to quit (Marchand, 2009). Deplorably, these employees, just months before, may have entered the role of field instructor with great enthusiasm, passion and hope for what was to come.

Implications of the Findings

The findings from this research study present implications in three areas. First, a multitude of practical recommendations can be made to managers of organizations to enhance the perceptions of social support held by full time field instructors. Second, implications derived from acting as a participant in this research study will be outlined. Finally, the findings of this study present numerous implications for further research in this field.

First of all, increasing the perceived level of social support offered to front line workers was voiced by every study participant as an imperative change that could be made by the managers of the organization. Improvements in this area could take many forms, but enacting protocols to ensure each field instructor receives “weekly debriefing” as well as “regulated critical situation follow up” after traumatic or stressful events were two frequently mentioned ideas. Another “good thing” management could implement would involve acknowledgement of and creation of policies around the common practice of field instructors using the satellite phone for making occasional calls to individuals in their personal support network. Setting up guidelines for satellite phone use could offer field instructors straightforward evidence that management understands and supports their need to communicate with people from outside the work environment while still

physically present at work. One participant viewed having a manager “working out there” as a possible way to increase the perception of support for field instructors offered by management. If not physically present, management could instead work individually with each field instructor to formulate a personalized plan for skill development and coping strategies. Because the challenges faced as a wilderness therapy field instructor are unique, management must be willing to adopt creative alternatives to ensure each field instructor has equal opportunity to feel adequately supported while working in this role.

Managers must be continually informed of the difficulties field instructors are facing if there is any hope of improving the working conditions commonly encountered in this position. One participant, who considered herself “a squeaky wheel,” remembered at first asking politely for training on program-specific skills and later, practically demanding more advanced notice of staffing changes. Ultimately, the perception that these requests were continually ignored or not sufficiently addressed by management led to increasing frustration and her eventual decision to leave this role. Instructors with longer tenure may develop frustration from feeling as if they are unheard by their program managers (Marchand & Russell, 2012). Wilderness therapy programs could benefit from tailoring their communication systems to ensure that employee tenure is taken into account and actively soliciting the opinions of these employees when making decisions around operating conditions (Marchand & Russell, 2012; Mulvaney, 2011). Connections between this perception of feeling unheard by management and an intention to turnover prematurely also exist for front line staff in the nursing literature (Bowers et al., 2003).

A “more vocal” approach from field instructors who regularly communicate openly with management combined with a management team that is available to listen to concerns and take appropriate action to solve issues could result both parties working constructively to address work-related issues. Many study participants recognized the potential value of their uniquely well informed perspective to make improvements to the way work related challenges are managed by the organization. To work within “a management structure where it actually feels like they want to hear what I have to say” was seen as positive. One participant retrospectively wished she had communicated “more clearly, more formally with management” in asking for:

More debrief from management, more emotional support from management, more structure in how things unfolded, better screening of the kids before they came out to the program, better structure in what it meant for a youth to be ready to leave the wilderness, more backup and tangible interventions for youth that were problematic.

In order to have effective communication between all levels within a wilderness therapy organization, the ability of front line field instructors to speak up be heard by management must be actively cultivated. This practice is not always present initially. As one participant described:

At times early in my career I would stay quiet about what was going on, about concerns I had, things that were bothering me. Now I don’t have a problem with speaking up and I think that’s based on the amount of experience I’ve developed over the years and I feel confident in what I’m doing so I’m able to speak a lot easier.

Based on the findings of this research study, additional practical recommendations for improving field instructor perceptions of social support can be made. Several recommendations that could easily be implemented by front line employee managers will be outlined according to the six areas of Parsons' (1980) model of staff development: recruitment, orientation, instructional clinics, communication, support services and evaluation.

During the recruitment stage, organizations must capitalize on the initial enthusiasm of their field instructors to learn the organization's practices and take on responsibilities. Addressing any uncertainty that newly hired employees may feel regarding skills, knowledge or their longevity with the organization should be prioritized. As well, the hiring organization should closely examine personal strengths, skills and professional goals of each individual applicant and honestly evaluate how easily he or she would thrive in this demanding work environment. Steps taken on behalf of the employer to ensure an appropriate person-environment fit for each field instructor hired could alleviate the need to deal with later consequences of a mismatch. The goal of the hiring team should be to ensure, to the best of their ability, a new field instructor's expectations of the job are set up to correspond with the reality of one's experience.

The orientation stage is a crucial time for organizations to offer support to new employees who may feel overwhelmed by job demands that they may have initially underestimated, and if left unaddressed, could lead to premature turnover (Marchand & Russell, 2012). Practical suggestions for ensuring new employees feel "taken care of" during the orientation period are offering mentorship, giving clear guidelines and assisting in setting boundaries around unfamiliar areas such as one's emotional

involvement. If a formalized mentorship program is not already in place, individual employees should be encouraged to independently seek out mentors within the industry during the orientation stage. Several participants indicated they saw inadequate opportunities for program-specific or skills training during the orientation period and a length of one to two weeks in duration was felt to be too short. Improvements to this initial training period could include increasing the time one spends shadowing a full time instructor, alternating responsibilities in the field with other venues such as the office or a base camp before entering full time work in the field or take steps to ensure new field instructors are always beginning work within an experienced team and are not paired with other “green” instructors until they feel more comfortable in this role.

To provide opportunities for professional growth and development, instructional clinics must be appropriately tailored to meet the needs of employees at various levels of experience and with different professional goals. Comprehensive training sessions should aim to both address feelings of initial inadequacy in newly hired employees as well as staving off a sense of stagnation in veteran front line workers. A sense of field work becoming repetitive is perceived as a major difficulty among experienced field instructors (Bunce, 1998). Workshops on career planning or professional goal setting could help experienced front line employees develop a sustainable, long term plan for work in this field and dissuade them from leaving based on their perception of limited opportunities for promotion. One solution to retaining veteran employees could be to offer an educational stipend or collaboration with another organization in order to facilitate the transfer of employees to other job opportunities in the field (Marchand & Russell, 2012). Managers of wilderness therapy organizations

could also ensure that field instructors are making adequate plans to take time off from work and not promote overwork (Ross, 1989). Taking time away from work has been shown to increase one's sense of affective commitment to the organization as well as the likelihood of an employee returning to their role after a break (Kirby, 2006). If managers do not invest in a personalized discussion of each employee's training needs and career goals, a perception of restricted career advancement may arise and could reduce a front line employee's intention to remain in their position over the long term (Bowers et al., 2003).

In terms of communication, the importance of building one's supportive community outside the workplace should be highlighted early on, as well as developing a supportive community atmosphere within the workplace. Belonging needs of front line staff could be attended to by way of regular staff meetings and social activities (Garske, 2000). Hardworking, passionate, and engaged employees are likely to inspire others, so they should be acknowledged individually for their contributions (Bowers et al., 2003; Garske, 2000) and their energy channeled into assisting newer colleagues. Several study participants retrospectively wished they had entered the job with clearer expectations that would have been more clearly made known to management.

Employees should work towards discovering their personal and professional needs in terms of what makes this type of work sustainable for them, as individuals. Front line employees must be unafraid and persistent in requesting their needs are met and work constructively with management to develop creative and effective solutions to this end. Evidence suggests management can provide self-esteem support to front line

employees through their inclusion in decision-making and by simply having conversations about their support needs (Garske, 2000).

A great deal of attention should be focused on support services within any organization, so front line employees can prevent or manage feelings of alienation, frustration and gain tools to address challenging situations. Participants in this study saw any type of debriefing activities to be helpful, either formally or informally, so opportunities prioritizing this kind of meeting would be recommended to increase the sense of social support among front line field instructors. Use of written reflection and journaling could also be an easily encouraged self-directed solution for dealing with work-related emotional demands while remaining physically present in the work context.

Finally, in the evaluation stage, the need for consistent and continual feedback is vital to professional growth of employees. Applicable ideas for restructuring the program can originate from the front line staff if they are given an opportunity to share their input. This process will help front line workers to feel as though they are an important part of the organization and that their opinion matters, without which, premature turnover is likely (Bowers et al., 2003, Ross, 1989). A management structure that regularly evaluates staff retention strategies as well as the organization's overall philosophy and administration procedures would ensure policies remain up to date with the ever-changing needs of the employees and the constantly developing mission and vision of the organization as a whole.

A second implication of this research applies to the study participants who agreed to be interviewed. Participation in this study involves implications for the

participants that go beyond just answering the questions posed by the researcher as part of the interview process. When concluding the initial interview, one participant stated:

The fact of people like you doing research on this subject does reduce some of the feeling of alienation. In a way, your interest and these questions are more support than I received in some of those ways. To have someone say, how did this feel for you? How do you think this affected people? It does validate that I'm not crazy, that this is a pattern, there's a general problem in this area.

Through participating in this research study, it is the hope of the researcher that the other participants were able to gain a similarly positive feeling by reflecting on and processing the challenges that were part of their experience working full time in the field of wilderness therapy. One participant shared, "I am in a really different situation now in life. I have a really different set of strategies and a really different lens that I can see it through." Some study participants may have gained increased awareness regarding their experiences working in a wilderness therapy context. Others may have used the opportunity to connect their experiences from that time to more current behaviours and choices in their lives. It is the intention of the researcher to represent the words and perspectives of the seven study participants as accurately as possible, so that they may feel as though the process of sharing their experiences was meaningful and contributing valuable knowledge to improve the experience for others in this role.

Finally, the findings of this research study present implications for the direction of future research. This study adds to the conversation regarding the challenges faced by individuals working on the front line in wilderness-based therapeutic programs by contributing first hand perspectives on social support. Important questions remain to be

answered regarding the effectiveness of organizational initiatives such as staff retention efforts, mentorship, orientation and instructional training programs. Recommendations for research to further explore the experiences of field instructors can be found in the following section.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this research study illuminate the perspectives of wilderness therapy field instructors regarding necessity, accessibility and use of social support. These study findings are part of a critically important discussion about managing organizations in more sustainable ways for full time front line employees. This conversation applies to all those who work in wilderness therapy, but also to those working within the wider outdoor industry as well. Field instructors of all types are an understudied population and may be frequently overlooked due to the transient nature of their jobs and the uniquely remote context in which they work.

More research must be conducted to gain a stronger understanding of the impacts of this work on field instructors and the most effective ways to support these individuals if the wilderness therapy industry is going to be perceived as a longer term work venture. According to Bowers et al. (2003), the factor that most influenced turnover among front line nursing workers was the widespread perception that they were not appreciated or valued by the organization. The outdoor industry has the potential to make changes so that it could become more attractive to individuals as a lasting career choice and less as a stepping stone. One of the first steps to this major change is conducting research that exposes the true seriousness of one's responsibilities as a field instructor and will encourage organizational changes so these employees are less continually overlooked, undervalued and inadequately compensated for their efforts.

There is currently limited knowledge available for managers of organizations who seek to prioritize retention of front line field instructors. In-depth program evaluation studies focused on making connections between levels of job satisfaction and job performance of employees in this work context could be valuable for managers who are trying to reduce turnover, but are unsure how to most effectively utilize their limited resources. Future qualitative research to discover what constitutes high levels of field instructor job satisfaction and how that translates into feelings of value or appreciation in a wilderness therapy program's front line employees would allow managers to make effective improvements in the most pertinent areas. A case study research design that evaluated success, as measured by reduced rates of front line turnover, of organizations attempting to increase their staff retention rates would provide useful findings as well. Therefore, several types of future research could be used to explore the connection between field instructors' work environment and one's premature intention to turnover.

This research study has just scratched the surface in terms of examining the lived experiences of field instructors and how their needs and concerns may translate into other areas of their lives and the program they are delivering to their clients. Many questions remain regarding the perspectives of these individuals, why they choose to begin or to leave this work, or how to stop or even reverse the common trend of high turnover. Relevant future research could evaluate several other factors that could influence this trend, such as financial compensation, gender differences and staff accommodation.

Perhaps retention of front line field instructors is more heavily reliant on financial compensation than is currently believed (e.g., Wilson, 2009). The findings of this study offered mixed opinions on this topic, with some participants excited by what they would

be making in their first-ever, salaried job and others frustrated by what was perceived to be inadequate financial compensation. In related literature asking front line employees about reasons for turnover, the difficulty of the work and low pay were not frequently the main determinants of one's decision to leave (Bowers et al., 2003; Kirby, 2006; Marchand et al., 2009; Marchand & Russell, 2012). However, in recent research by Marchand and Russell (2012), pay and fringe benefits ranked lowest in job satisfaction. Previous studies have shown that outdoor leaders do not find monetary gains to be the most important reason for their job choice but pay is frequently seen as a reflection of worth and thus, feeling underpaid may lead to frustration and voluntary turnover (Marchand & Russell, 2012). Further research could help determine what baseline pay structure field instructors consider adequately compensatory for their work and what financial initiatives would motivate them to remain in this role longer.

Marchand et al. (2009) observed male study participants had remained in the field instructor role on average five months longer than female participants. Research shows women are thought to have broader social networks than men and depend on their friendships to manage stressful conditions (Kerstetter et al., 2008). However, it remains unknown from the results of this study whether male and female field instructors experienced a significantly different perceived need for debriefing their work-related experiences within their social networks to gain a sense of social support.

Perhaps organizations such as Outward Bound New Zealand, that provide community-based staff housing for the field instructors as well as their families could attract older, more experienced individuals to this line of work in Canada who would not feel forced to choose between having a family or a career (Allin, 2004; Allin &

Humberstone, 2006; Gehring, 2002; Goldin, 2004). An interest in “spending more time in a stable personal life, in the sense that you would come home most nights or every night to a family or a house or a place where you would decompress” rather than “only actually sleeping in my place five times a month or less” was described by one participant as a factor that influenced why he left the job as full time field instructor. The appeal of a living a nomadic, transient life may wane for field instructors over time. Those endeavoring to settle into a longer term job or career in the outdoor industry may face limited options when attempting to find a living situation that will accommodate a field instructor’s specific needs and preferences.

Further qualitative research could more deeply explore these and other questions in order to develop a sense of what adequate social support looks and feels like for wilderness therapy field instructors. A greater understanding could then arise regarding what practices would best allow individuals to feel valued, heard and connected with one another. From this study and additional research, managers can have easier access to effective solutions to various issues that involve front line employees. All these questions will need time and effort to answer, but are of utmost importance for revolutionizing the experience of front line employees at organizations offering wilderness-based programs.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research studies, there are limits to the scope of the findings of this study as they have been presented. First, although commonalities may be shared between the individual participants of this study and others in similar life situations, this study has sought only to portray the lived experiences of those individuals who participated.

The study’s findings are limited to the information derived from the seven participants, selected from a small potential pool of informants who were each once

connected to one organization offering wilderness therapy programming in the province of Ontario. The age of the study respondents spans only twelve years (27 to 39) and they do not represent a diversity of ethnic backgrounds. However, this relatively homogeneous group of seven participants is congruent with Kirby's (2006) observation that "field instructors tend to be young, educated, single, and Caucasian" (p. 79).

Furthermore, the data was collected, transcribed, analyzed and presented by one researcher, who chose to use Parson's model of staff development as an organizational tool. This may be viewed as a limitation to the study, since with another interviewer (perhaps someone with little to no experience with wilderness therapy programs), a different interaction may have been created with study participants and different knowledge produced (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, the findings derived and direct quotations chosen for inclusion within the final report were from this sole researcher's interpretations of the data. The process of reduction and interpretation of the data was thus carried out from the perspective of a white, middle class female with previous expeditionary experience working in remote wilderness environments. Therefore, the findings presented are only one possible interpretation of the data.

Finally, the findings of this research study are limited by the degree to which the participants were able to verbalize their experiences during the interviews. Three of the seven study participants were interviewed face-to-face. However, there may be limitations to the data collected by Skype or phone interviews conducted with the remaining participants. Questions posed by the researcher during semi-structured interviews often referred to the participants' thoughts and feelings from a specific time period, between one and five years before the time of the interview. In this case, study

participants may select to share evidence that confirms what they already believe and distort their memories to make them more consistent with what they currently think (Neuman & Robson, 2009). In addition, one's retrospective account of past experiences may be affected by unknown factors such as events that have occurred in the interim, one's current situation, or residual feelings of anger or frustration. However, in areas like question selection and developing rapport with participants, an effort was made by the researcher to encourage clear expression of each individual's experiences and perspectives.

The overarching goal of this exploratory research study was to gather highly detailed data that "expresses the unique and comprehensive perspectives of the individuals who were interviewed" (Neuman & Robson, 2009, p. 20). The goal of this qualitative study was not to seek out widely generalizable findings or causal relationships, since the organization that the participants were affiliated with may be unique in its approaches in managing and supporting front line employees. However, providing a rich description of social support from within a wilderness therapy work context, as it was perceived this study's group of seven participants, may aid other wilderness therapy programs in Ontario in implementing effective strategies.

Conclusion

This research study was inspired by events occurring over four years ago in New Zealand, where I was first introduced to an organization that had recently undergone a major overhaul. At that time, Outward Bound New Zealand had just invested over two years into gathering employee feedback during the process of reviewing their mission statement, their organizational values and program offerings. Upon my visit, this

organization was reportedly having trouble with staff turnover - no one wanted to leave. The average age of the front line field instructors working at that time was reported to be 33 years old. They had each committed to a three year contract upon being hired, but many continued to stay in a front line role within the organization much longer than that. The organization had been voted the number one place to work in the country (against other organizations of similar size) by its employees for several years in a row. This award exemplified a trend that I found startling, since I had not seen anything similar to this in Canada, despite many years spent working for a variety of well-established organizations offering outdoor-based programming.

Developed as a result of one chance encounter on another continent, this study has allowed me to explore the perceptions of social support for wilderness therapy field instructors. This knowledge is recognized as just one facet of a much larger examination of how small changes could revolutionize the way human resources are managed within the current world of wilderness-based programming. A revolution may occur several years or even decades in the future. Letting the voices of the participants of this research study be heard may be the first of many small steps toward a major change in this industry.

The organizational culture resulting from an outdoor industry revolution would look quite different from the world described by the study participants. There would be reduced rates of turnover, so both front line employees and managers could feel secure in their positions and invest themselves in the organization for longer than one year. At the recruitment stage, potential front line field instructors would receive an abundance of accurate information so each could enter the job feeling prepared and knowledgeable

about what to expect. Orientation programs would ensure that field instructors receive suitable mentoring and training opportunities to build individual confidence. In order to avoid stagnation or burnout, employees would participate in paid instructional clinics as an example of the value of their professional development according to the organization. Consequently, these employees would find ways to sustainably invest large amounts of their time, effort and passion into their work. In terms of communication, front line employees will be more appropriately recognized for the high levels of risk and responsibility they take on and the remote, challenging conditions they endure week after week. In terms of support services, there would be a sense of connection and cooperation between co-staff teams, as well as between all levels of the organization, where the voice of each employee is heard, valued and his or her recommendations are acted upon. If an employee needs additional support or career counselling, he or she would know the most effective channel through which to access what is needed. Perhaps future field instructors will be encouraged to write letters or send satellite phone text messages to people in their lives with whom they may want to speak with in person, but due to the constraints of their wilderness work context, temporarily cannot. Finally, field instructors would be supported to grow and develop as individuals, by constantly setting goals, evaluating their progress and planning how to improve their skills and better manage the challenges of the job.

Front line work as a field instructor can be perceived as a sustainable and meaningful long-term career choice. If front line employees in Canada continue today's common trend of quick turnover, nothing is likely to change. The participants of this study were driven to stay for at least one year, some much longer, in a position that was

challenging in many realms of their lives based on the hope and passion to enact positive change in others through their work. Perhaps their stories will encourage younger employees not to wait too long before they demand from the organization what they feel they need in order to have a sustainable existence. The more managers and administrators hear these messages, the more likely they are to rethink the status quo in terms of how they treat their front line employees, a valuable resource. Organizations that prioritize staff retention would likely incur fewer costs related to continual hiring and training of new, short-term employees. Over time, a difference would emerge, where organizations focused on staff retention would be able to reap the rewards of investing effort and resources into advancing the training and experience of their front line employees. Retaining experienced front line employees who are better suited to deliver a higher quality program and make appropriate risk-management decisions in a medical crisis (Galloway, 2004) could potentially increase client satisfaction. Managers could invest in front line employee retention initiatives or annual raises to encourage longevity in high performing staff. This study, and additional research related to field instructor turnover that must follow, will help to change the lives of front line employees in a positive and practical way. This study could be the start of a revolution that will eventually break down the current barriers to creating a work environment that is sustainable and adequately supportive for each front line field instructor.

In closing, the high rates of turnover in front line field instructors are signaling a need for change in the outdoor industry. Marchand et al. (2009) clearly articulated, “The therapeutic field is premised on helping others and should do the same for its field instructors” (p. 373). At the very least, prioritizing support for front line field instructors

could reduce the dramatic human cost of overwhelmingly negative feelings that may be experienced by field instructors who perceive themselves as inadequately supported over long periods of time. Understanding the nature of the challenges of this work and the most effective means to supporting front line employees will be of paramount importance to see a reduction in the current trend of high turnover in front line field instructors.

While several important findings were derived from this study, more research is needed in order to make changes to the perceptions of this type of work at a revolutionary scale.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Invitation

June, 2011

Title of Study: How was your day at work? A retrospective phenomenological study of perceived social support and intention to turnover of front line instructors working in field-based therapeutic wilderness programs

**Principal Student Investigator: Liz Kirk, MA Candidate,
Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University**
**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Tim O'Connell, Associate Professor,
Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University**

I, Liz Kirk, MA Candidate from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled How was your day at work? A retrospective phenomenological study of perceived social support and intention to turnover of front line instructors working in field-based therapeutic wilderness programs.

The purpose of this research project is to gather detailed descriptions of first hand experiences and perspectives in order to better address the problem of low field staff retention in wilderness therapy. This study will examine the experiences and perspectives of previously-employed front line staff regarding the necessity, availability and use of social support networks in connection with this unique and demanding job.

Each participant chosen to take part in this study will be at least 18 years of age and will meet the specifications outlined below:

1. The participant voluntarily agreed to work full time as a wilderness therapy field instructor, signing a contract for at least one calendar year with a Canadian organization between 2006 and 2010.
2. The participant felt confident that his or her previously acquired skills and field experience would adequately fulfill the job requirements prior to beginning full time work.
3. The participant undertook the position of field instructor with the intention of fulfilling the conditions of the contract and/or remaining in this job position for at least one calendar year.
4. The participant voluntarily terminated the employment contract with the organization, either before or after one calendar year had passed.
5. At the time of the interview, the participant will not have been employed full time by this organization for at least one calendar year.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate initially in a 90 minute in-person interview at a location near your current place of residence. Interview questions will explore your current life situation and social support network as well as your reflections on time spent employed as a field instructor in a Canadian expeditionary wilderness therapy program. Approximately four to six

weeks later, you will be invited to participate in a 30 minute follow up interview, conducted by phone. Thus, the overall expected duration of your time commitment will be approximately two hours, spread over six weeks.

This research could potentially benefit various organizations in the wilderness therapy industry, as well as organizations in related fields, that struggle to retain their front line field staff. Personal benefits may be experienced by study participants as a result of having a chance to talk through their feelings and past experiences.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Liz Kirk
MA Candidate
lk10uv@brocku.ca

Dr. Tim O'Connell
Associate Professor
(905) 688-5550 ext. 5014
toconnell@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file # 10-269).

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

Date: September, 2011

Project Title: How was your day at work? A retrospective phenomenological study of perceived social support and intention to turnover of front line instructors working in a field-based therapeutic wilderness program

Principal Student Investigator: Liz Kirk, MA Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
Brock University
lk10uv@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Tim O'Connell, Associate Professor
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
Brock University
(905) 688-5550 Ext. 5014
toconnell@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this research project is to gather detailed descriptions of your first hand experiences and perspectives in order to better address the problem of low front line field staff retention in wilderness therapy programs.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

Once selected as a study participant, you will be asked to participate in a 90 minute in-person interview at a public location (such as a restaurant or coffee shop) near your current place of residence. Interview questions will explore one's current life situation and social support network as well as one's reflections on time spent employed as a field instructor in a Canadian expeditionary wilderness therapy program. Four to six weeks later, you will be invited to participate in a 30 minute follow up interview, conducted by phone. Participation in this study will therefore take approximately two hours of your time, over a six week period. Each interview will be audio recorded for verbatim transcription. Each participant will have the opportunity to view transcripts from his or her initial interview prior to the commencement of the follow up interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

This research could potentially benefit organizations in the wilderness therapy industry, as well as other organizations in related fields, that may struggle to retain their front line field staff. Personal benefits may be experienced by study participants as a result of having a chance to talk through their feelings and past experiences. There may be some feelings of discomfort that arise, associated with discussion of traumatic or emotionally charged feelings and experiences from one's past. If this is the case, the researcher will be providing access information for resources available to help ease any residual feelings of discomfort once the interview has concluded.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

Initial interviews will be conducted in a public location, such as a coffee shop or restaurant, so participants should be aware that due to the use of this setting, there is a potential for someone other than the researcher to overhear parts of the conversation.

Due to the small number of participants involved in this study (eight in total) and the limited number of individuals who meet the specific inclusion criteria, it is possible that someone might be able to discern the identity of a study participant. However, the researcher will take the utmost care to ensure to the best of her ability that the confidentiality of each participant is protected.

Interview data collected during this study will be stored electronically on computers requiring password access. Hard copies of sensitive data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of my faculty supervisor on Brock University campus. Data will be kept throughout the duration of the data collection process for all participants, after which time the electronic copies of will be deleted and the hard copies destroyed by shredding.

Access to this data will be restricted to Liz Kirk and Dr. Tim O'Connell.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty. Data that has been collected from a participant who decides to withdraw from the study will be destroyed and no part of this information shall be used in the final report, as long as the request to withdraw is made prior to January 1, 2012.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. In these situations, the researcher will ensure the use of pseudonyms and avoid any mention of identifying characteristics in order to maintain the confidentiality of the identities of study participants. Feedback about this study will be available from Liz Kirk or Dr. Tim O'Connell upon completion of the final thesis document in May 2012. The principal investigator of this research study, Liz Kirk, can be reached by email at lk10uv@brocku.ca at any time.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Liz Kirk or Dr. Tim O'Connell using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file #10-269). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Informed Consent letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Feedback Letter

Perceived Social Support and Intention to Turnover
Principal Student Investigator: Liz Kirk, Brock University
lk10uv@brocku.ca
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Tim O'Connell, Brock University
(905) 688-5550 Ext. 5014 toconnell@brocku.ca

OVERVIEW

You have just finished participating in a primary interview as part of a research study. The purpose of this component of the research study is to broaden the current understanding regarding how accessibility, necessity and use of social support systems for wilderness therapy field instructors influence one's intention to turnover. This study is part of Liz Kirk's Master's thesis in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University.

If you have experienced any emotional discomfort as a result of participating in this interview, please speak with either of the researchers mentioned above so that you may receive help locating an appropriate resource that will allow you to discuss your feelings. Your participation may offer valuable insights into appropriate types of social support strategies that could be implemented when seeking to address the issue of high turnover among front line instructors within the wilderness therapy industry as well as the larger outdoors community.

Please be reminded that you will be contacted within four to six weeks to schedule a follow up 30 minute phone interview. Should you choose to withdraw from participation in this study at any point, you may do so without penalty by contacting either the Principal Student Investigator or the Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. In this case, your interview data will be destroyed and if you indicate your decision to withdraw from the study prior to January 1, 2012, the information gathered therein will not be used in the final report.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Please remember that the principal student investigator and her faculty supervisor will be ensuring that all information that identifies or could potentially identify you as a participant remains confidential. In any written reports or oral presentations regarding this research, excerpts from the interview may be discussed. However, your name or any locations, organizations or other individuals mentioned during the interview will not be associated with any quotes. This helps us to represent your voice and opinion without compromising your confidentiality. Despite these efforts, such specific inclusion criteria and a small number of study participants, means that there is a chance someone could discern your identity.

All interviews were audio recorded. These audio recordings will only be used for the purpose of transcribing the interview and will be kept in locked filing cabinets

and will only be heard by the researchers identified above, each of whom have signed a confidentiality agreement. Any audio or written data collected during this study will be kept for two years and stored in locked filing cabinets or in computers protected by password access. All data will be confidentially shredded or erased after two years. Only Liz Kirk and Dr. Tim O'Connell will have access to the data.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available to you by email if you choose to indicate your interest in receiving such information. The results will be available in the spring of 2012. If you have any questions at any point during or after the study please contact Liz Kirk at lk10uv@brocku.ca or Dr. Tim O'Connell at Brock University by phone (905) 688-5550, ext. 5014 or via e-mail toconnell@brocku.ca.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Student Investigator or Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file #10-269). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance. The time you took to share your experiences is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Liz Kirk

Principal Student Investigator

Dr. Tim O'Connell

Faculty Supervisor

APPENDIX D: Interview Guide

Opening Statement:

Hello and welcome. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study as an interview participant.

The purpose of this interview is to gather perspectives from informants who have been employed full time for at least six months by a wilderness therapy program in Ontario with a work schedule of eight days on and six days off. Many of the questions asked in this interview will refer to your actions, feelings and opinions during this period of employment. This interview will follow a semi-structured, open-ended approach. This means that the exact wording and sequence of questions has not been determined in advance, but all interviewees will be asked similar open-ended questions from the same interview guide. I hope that you will benefit from the opportunity to retrospectively recall your experiences and describe the answers in depth.

Any names or locations you may mention during the interview will either be omitted entirely or given pseudonyms within the final report. Similarly, you and your employer at the time will remain unnamed or be referred to by a pseudonym within the final report. All interview transcripts or written documents will be carefully and ethically managed and kept in a secure location for the duration of the study.

This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audio recorded. If at any point during or after the interview process you would like to change one of your answers, you may contact me and I will make the necessary changes or omit that answer completely. In addition, approximately two to four weeks from today, I will be providing you with a copy of the verbatim transcript of the interview. At that time, you will have an opportunity to review the interview transcript and again are invited to make any changes to your responses. If at any point during or after the interview you would like to withdraw completely from this study, you are welcome to do so and your interview transcript will be destroyed.

Are there any questions about the interview process before we begin?

(begin audio recording)

This is the first interview with informant # ____ on _____ (date), 2011.

1. Tell me about your current life situation

Age, employment status, living situation, relationship status

2. Define social support for you – how do you know when you have enough?
3. Tell me about your current social support network –

Who? How used? Frequent/effective mode of communication?

4. How many years ago were you last a working FT as a WT field instructor?
5. What major changes or life events have taken place since FT WT?
6. How many consecutive months did you work?
7. What originally led you to work at this job?

When you first began this work...

8. How long did you originally intend to stay in this position?
9. Describe the confidence you had when you began this work that your previous skills and experiences would adequately prepare you for this job
10. How aware were you of the job constraints in terms of

- lifestyle?
- emotional demands?

- limitations in communication?
 11. How were you originally planning on dealing with these constraints?
 12. Describe the initial training/probationary period
 13. What were you surprised to discover upon starting work in this role (that was not adequately addressed during the training/probationary period)?
 14. Tell me about the point at which you decided you would no longer continue to work FT in this position.
- Major factors in this decision? Was there a 'wake up call'? From who?
- What feelings do you associate with that time?
15. Describe the impacts on the organization you observed related to continual staff turnover on the front line
 16. Describe any organizational-level changes you can envision that would specifically address the issue of low retention of qualified and experienced FT WT field instructors
 17. While you were employed FT, describe your social support network
Who – from inside AND outside the organization? How used? Most frequent and effective mode(s) of communication?
- Were you ever offered any sort of formal support from the organization?
18. How important was this social support network to your sense of well being then?
 19. While in the field, what specific activities did you engage in to gain a sense of positive support (from those both inside and outside the work environment)?
 20. Can you describe any indicators of a need for support you observed in your coworkers, especially newer staff?
 21. Did a need for support from your coworkers affect their job performance and/or your working relationship with them?
 22. What would you do differently if you were to return to this same position again?
- Final Question:
1. Is there anything else you would like to share before we conclude?

APPENDIX E: Categorization of Emergent Themes and Subthemes

<i>Category</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>	
Recruitment	Initial appeal		
	Initial uncertainty of longevity	<i>Acceptance of high turnover</i>	<i>Impact of age on job perceptions</i>
Orientation	Entering the unknown		
	Mentorship		
	Setting boundaries		
	Need for clear guidelines		
Instructional clinics	Initial inadequacy		
	Stagnation		
Communication	Isolation	<i>Difficulty building community</i>	<i>Nobody else understands</i>
	Need for meaningful connection	<i>Value of debriefing</i>	<i>Added value of debriefing with coworkers</i>
Support Services	Maybe I'm not okay	<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>	<i>Intentions to turnover</i>
	Alienation	<i>Disconnection from management</i>	<i>Drifting apart</i>
	Frustration	<i>Feeling unheard</i>	<i>Feeling undervalued</i>
Evaluation	Need for meaningful feedback		