

SageWalk Wilderness Program Visit Report

Wednesday, January 21st, 2009

SageWalk is located, sort of in Central Oregon. The office is actually in Redmond, and the field, well, that is a well kept secret, but not really. It is out in the middle of the Central Oregon desert. The day begin with Michael Bednarz, Executive Director and Sarah Casson , Admission Director pocking me up at my office.

From there we journeyed for about 2 hours to the SageWalk field which is located about 2 hours East of Bend in the High Desert of Central Oregon. Our plan was to meet with the boys Recovery Camp for an Intro-Circle. One the way to the field we stopped for snacks and beverages for later in the day. The drive was a good opportunity to field questions and become more familiar with the group we would visit with, staffing and any updates new to SageWalk. I have visited them before but it had been about 6 months and had not yet met Michael.

We arrived in the field after a beautiful drive on dirt roads, through the desert, a few frozen puddles and lots of sage brush. Once arriving at the East Camp where the Boys Recovery Camp is located we met with the Spirit Chaser, BobCat who welcomed all of us with his smile and warm hug. As we approached the group of boys were sitting around the fire with Head Instructor, Desert Rain and CADCI, J-Tree. They were in the process of a Chain Analysis circle and talking about why they are here and what they are going to get out of the program. We joined the group and listened as the boys gave one another feedback and support. Not all support was received in agreement, but it was received with respect. Each boy has their own opinion about recovery.

The foreman, who is a student, had been chosen to be a foreman of the group for the day. His responsibility was to start our Intro Circle. This Intro Circle allows the boys, Sarah, and myself to introduce ourselves, and the boys shared how long they have been in the program, how many miles they have hiked, why they are here, what they are working on, and the special question usually asked by the guest – me. We all shared our information as a group and learned more about each other. After the Intro Circle one student asked what is and Ed Consultant? This gave me the opportunity to describe why I was there and what an Educational Consultant does – basically. Once the boys had enough of that information the direction of the group went back to journaling, writing letters and working on their bow drilling skills- not easy mind you. I know!

We gathered ourselves and walked back to the suburban jumped in, warmed up and ate some lunch.

On our drive back to Bend we debriefed the experience of the Boys Recovery Camp, and I had a good conversation with Mike and Sarah about Sagewalk life.

Parents searching for alternatives to medicating their children for behavioral and social problems are turning to wilderness therapy programs when “office” therapy at home fails. Wilderness programs can be a first-line intervention ... and they are not “boot camps.”

SageWalk appears to be addressing students’ psychological needs and provide them with challenges. SageWalk also seems to be a well-designed program.

