

Applicable Policy

We are looking at the Outdoor Behavioral Council (OBH) that is also working alongside Association of Experiential Education (AEE) to form the OBH AEE Accreditation for outdoor therapy programs, which is a local policy.

Policy Description

The Outdoor Behavioral Council (OBH) is a group of licensed mental health professionals who use wilderness experiences to meet the therapeutic needs of clients. In 2013, they asked the Association of Experiential Education (AEE) to join OBH Council to expand on the existing standards to develop their current practices.

The intent of AEE OBH Council partnership was to create a detailed set of ethical, risk management, and treatment standards created by long standing leaders in OBH. These standards are for health care providers to work under and to bring effective and safe measures for therapists to use.

OBH's application consists of group living and regular formal group therapy sessions to encourage teamwork and social interactions. The council practices through wilderness therapy where experiences for clients are used for clinical assessment, establishment of treatment goals, and individual or family sessions. OBH pushes for a strong ethical care and support for all service providers who are registered under this council.

The intended population for this policy is service providers who are registered with the OBH AEE council and outdoor behavioral healthcare providers who work with young adolescents with mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Leaders in the OBH council are the ones who provide oversight to these service providers. They are the ones who create and enforce the regulations that they are to follow. The OBH consists of trained professionals and practitioners who are trained in therapeutic techniques and interventions to implement into adventure and wilderness therapy.

There are three goals that this policy has for its service providers. The first goal is to gain valuable insight and perspective from leaders in the outdoor behavioral healthcare realm in order to

improve their standards. The second goal is to improve all aspects of the program through rigorous internal and impartial external review to provide active and direct use of client's participation and responsibility in their therapeutic process. The last goal is to distinguish the program in a growing field of wilderness therapy by continuing empirical research to support the evidence on the effective and successful impact that wilderness has in helping struggling adolescents. Since OBH is a relatively new field in treatment for adolescents who struggle with behavioral, substance abuse, and mental health issues, facilitating research to study the efficacy of this treatment modality is an important goal for OBH.

One problem that OBH intended to address is the lack of an association to assist healthcare providers with safe regulations to follow when using wilderness therapy for therapeutic processes in adolescents. Therefore, AEE OBH Accreditation provides impartial validation that registered programs meet or exceed standards that have been developed for outdoor behavioral healthcare programs. To address this issue, they also ensure that these programs operate above industry standards of ethical care, treatment evaluation, and risk-management practices. As a result of AEE OBH, outdoor behavioral providers strive to adhere to these professional standards.

Applicability to Organization

Nurtured Through Nature aims to be an effective, safe, and ethically integrative organization which offers unique outdoor experiences as a major piece in therapy. In order for the agency to express and build upon this expectation, it is crucial to Nurtured Through Nature that the AEE OBH accredits the program to further emphasize the commitment the nonprofit has towards being safe. The AEE OBH Council has formed its policies with the goal to have the most influential, effective, and appropriate services in outdoor therapy. There are specific aspects of this policy which address the need for programs to have plans and practices in place to be equipped and prepared for the health risks which are involved in outdoor adventures (Accreditation, n.d.). The AEE OBH expects programs to have aspects which set them above industry standards when it comes to ethical care and risk-management practices (Accreditation, 2020). In order for Nurtured Through Nature to uphold these guidelines and expectations, the organization must adjust its operations in a way that equips, educates, trains, plans, and informs all

employees and clients about specific health risks and health information which relates directly to the outdoor therapy practices.

In order to attain and uphold accreditation with AEE OBH Council, there will be teams who carry out rigorous internal and external evaluations which are executed by third-party OBH specialists (Renewal of Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Accreditation, 2019). One of the initial steps in this process includes the agency filling out an expansive and detailed Self-Assessment Study (SAS), receiving a site visit, and undergoing a final evaluation by the AEE OBH teams (Outline for the AEE Accreditation Process). It is important that Nurtured Through Nature is thoroughly prepared for this process, and that the agency has adjusted its operations in order to address the policy's expectation to have health-safety and risk-management plans and practices in place. The agency will need to initially make plans to evaluate and update the outdoor adventure therapy endeavors and integrate current and effective health and safety guidelines into all aspects of the adventure operations. Employees will need to be trained and educated about risk factors which are a part of each outdoor experience. The agency will need to publish official risk-management policies as well as educate the appropriate staff personnel on actual health and safety processes in the case of any and every type of emergency (Outline for the AEE Accreditation Process). The OBH AEE policy will drastically impact the operations for staff because it will require the agency to prepare and equip staff for health-related risks by completing trainings, gaining specific health certifications, and implementing structured plans to address risk.

The OBH AEE policy will also influence Nurtured Through Nature's operations by calling for a structured plan to address safety and risk practices when initially interacting with potential clients. While it is crucial that employees are made aware and appropriately trained on safety issues, it is vital that clients are informed, educated, and asked individual questions about the specific risks of outdoor therapy and how these risks relate to them. Clients should be made aware of what risks are associated with each of the activities they are involving themselves in. Nurtured Through Nature should plan and publish all information about health and safety risks and pass this information along to any person interested in the program. Also, it is important that all clients are informed and taken into account on an individual basis

when it comes to risk analysis. Because of the variety of individual differences in clients, it is likely that different people will have varying health-related concerns. The agency will need to have a form which requests important health information from clients, and there should be a plan to address and alter treatment for different health concerns in clients. Ultimately, the agency should address the health and safety concerns and aspects on each level of adventure therapy, discuss the implementation of plans and trainings, and formally publish all information and policy updates for all staff to view and adhere to.

Applied Organizational Policy

1.0 Risk Management Policy

Objective:

It is the responsibility of Nurtured Through Nature, its employees, and staff to ensure the safety and well-being of the volunteers and clients of Nurtured Through Nature. Employees are expected to be responsible at all times, safety adhered, and protective of clients by following the safety protocols and adhering to the risk management and health emergency policies.

1.1 Illness and Injury Prevention Plan

- The program will have an Illness and Injury Prevention Plan that will be covered in the Employee Orientation and provided to employees in on-going training sessions, which addresses the following:
 - Emergency procedures in fire, natural disasters, medical emergency, evacuation, and drills.
 - Personal protective equipment will be provided
 - Safety related roles will be defined
 - Safety policies will be documented
 - Safety training
 - Wilderness safety
 - Run-away prevention

- Self-harm prevention
 - De-escalation
 - Emotional safety
 - First Aid and CPR
- Nurtured Through Nature implements adventure-based therapy, an intervention for adolescents and young adults. Nurtured Through Nature creates a safe environment for our clients to receive treatment and life skills by trained Licensed Clinical Social Workers. The agency will maintain high standards of safety and health emergency by
 - Training the staff with industry-standard best practices
 - Using safe equipment during outdoor activities
 - Requiring therapist and staff ongoing professional risk management training

1.2 Incident/Accident Reports

- To submit a report, use the attached document and fill out with accurate information. Upon completion, reports are to be turned in to the appropriate supervisor. Incident or accident reports must include a brief description of the incident, including names, dates, and times of the event. These reports will remain confidential, for reviewers use only.
- It is the responsibility of the employees to submit an accident or incident report to management. If failed to submit a report, this may be flagged as non-cooperation with the Health Emergency Policy, which may serve as work suspension or termination.

1.3 Local Registration

- Activities must take place in registered land only, carrying permit of land with them.

- Activities must be appropriate, following state and federal regulations.

1.4 Outdoor Program Personnel

- Must be 21 and older
- Client ratio of 1:4
- Attendance take place upon arrival on land and departure
- Only staff who completed and exceeded safety training allowed outside with clients

1.5 Runaway Incidents

- All runaway incidents will require an incident report found under 1.2 section. Law enforcement must be contacted immediately and notify appropriate adults.