

Teresa Group Camp Report 2018

The Teresa Group is Canada's oldest community-based charitable organization specifically serving children affected by HIV and AIDS and their families. As a comprehensive pediatric HIV provider of support services, The Teresa Group works with approximately 300 families and over 500 children who are affected by HIV and AIDS. The organization provides leadership through example, information, education and innovation.

For many children, being affected by HIV can have a negative impact on mental health. Children living with, or affected by HIV, may endure ongoing stress related to worry about their own health, or that of a family member. The ongoing stigma and discrimination associated with HIV can also negatively affect self-esteem and one's sense of self-worth. Many of the families associated with The Teresa Group face ongoing challenges related to immigration, poverty, and housing; these factors can negatively impact a child's sense of wellbeing as well as their current and future mental health. Feelings of depression and anxiety are not uncommon among this group of children.

Given these many possible negative impacts, The Teresa Group supports a one-week camp for children affected by HIV. It was begun in the hope that the program would allow children and youth affected by HIV a chance to connect with peers facing similar challenges, gain a sense of belonging within a supportive community and reduce their isolation. The goals of the camp are to build supports, learn life skills to help empower them to live self-sufficient, independent, productive lives, and most importantly to have fun. The counsellor in training (CIT) program included 6 boys and 6 girls, with a focus on leadership and team building. CIT participants shadowed cabins and counsellors, and had frank discussions about HIV. The camp overall is a safe space for those with disclosed and undisclosed HIV diagnoses but the CIT program is specifically focused on explicit HIV support.

To help assess how well the camp achieved these goals, The Teresa Group undertook an evaluation; the results of that evaluation are discussed here. Where applicable, results from the current year are compared to previous years since the same evaluation framework was followed in multiple years (although slight modifications were made year to year).

Methodology

To measure the shorter-term goals of the camp, evaluations methods included:

- a survey with campers at the end of camp
- an observational tool completed by camp counsellors on the campers
- a parent survey
- a counsellor survey.

The camper outcomes assessed included:

- Emotional intelligence;
- Friendships and social connections;
- Physical activity levels;
- Personal development and self-confidence; and
- Other learnings and benefits.

Camper, counsellor, and parent surveys also included some process items related to satisfaction with the camp. Camp counsellors evaluated the training and support provided, and rated the campers based on their observations within the first 48 hours of camp, and again at the end of camp.

Response Rates

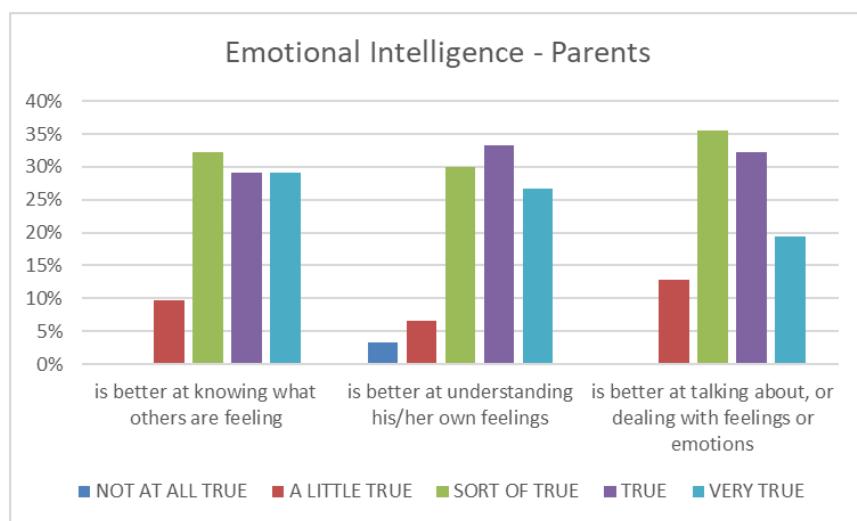
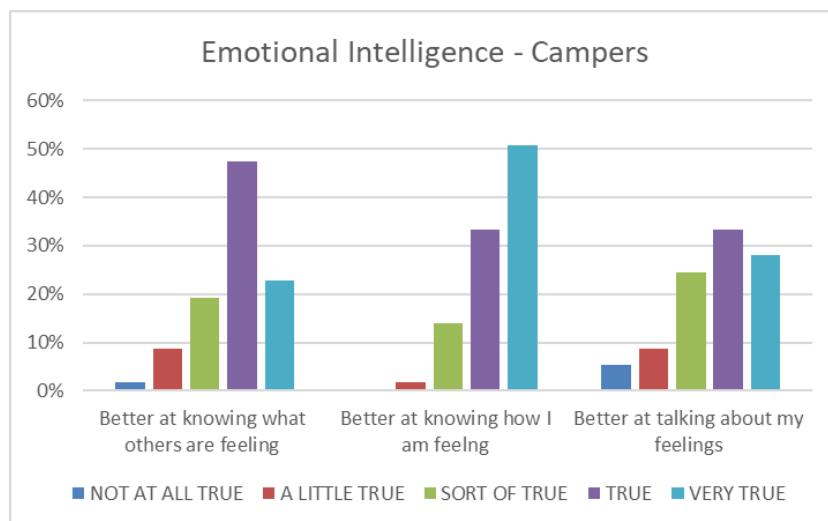
Overall response rates were quite varied among stakeholder groups. Out of the 58 youth who attended, 57 gave survey responses for a 98.3% completion rate, a high number that compares similarly to the 2016 and 2017 response rates (100% and 93.8%, respectively). There was an improvement in parent responses (30), compared to only 11 responses in 2017. Out of the 24 counsellors, only 10 gave responses for a response rate of 41.7% (compared to 17 out of 22 counsellors in 2017, 77.3%).

There were more female campers (34) than male campers (24), although a less uneven balance than in 2017, and they ranged in age from 9 to 17. The average camper age was 12.2, similar to the average age of 12.7 in 2017. About 65.5% of the campers had attended camp previously – an almost 20% increase over 2017.

Year	Female	Male	Average Age	Returning Campers
2018	58.6%	41.4%	12.2	65.5%
2017	65.2%	34.8%	12.7	46%
2016	51%	49%	12.3	66% (estimate)
2015	58.5%	36.6%	12.1	60%

Emotional Intelligence

The following figures illustrate the changes in emotional intelligence experienced by campers as a result of the camp, both self-rated and as perceived by parents:



Since attending camp, campers rated themselves more highly than their parents regarding "recognizing personal emotions" (average ratings of 4.2 versus 3.6). Parents and campers rated more equally (averages of 3.8) the items "recognizing emotions of others" and also had similar ratings on the item "better able to talk about and deal with their feelings" (3.7 and 3.5 respectively).

YEAR	Recognizing personal emotions		Recognizing emotions of others		Better able to talk about/ deal with own feelings	
	Camper	Parent	Camper	Parent	Camper	Parent
2018	4.2	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.5
2017	4.3	3.6	4.1	3.5	3.8	3.5
2016	4.0	4.0	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.9
2015	4.2	3.9	3.8	3.5	3.8	3.8

Quotes from campers:

"I learned self-awareness and self-love" (female, 17).

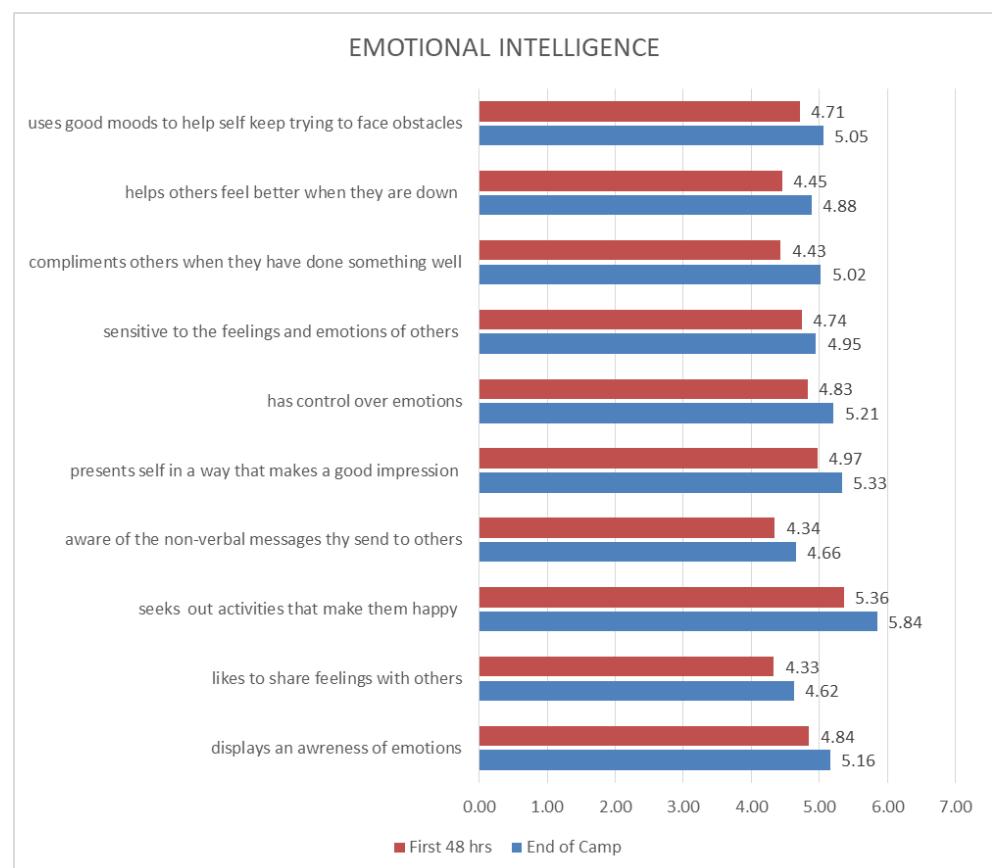
"Camp has improved my communication skills" (female, 15).

Looking at historical data, there is a consistent but slight discrepancy between how young people view themselves, and the view their parents take, where young people typically rate themselves slightly higher than their parents.

According to the counselors, there were improvements across all of the components of emotional intelligence when comparing the campers at the end of camp to their first 48 hours. The biggest differences were seen in the items: "compliments others when they have done something well" (average score increase of 0.59) and "seeks out activities that make them happy" (average score increase of 0.48).

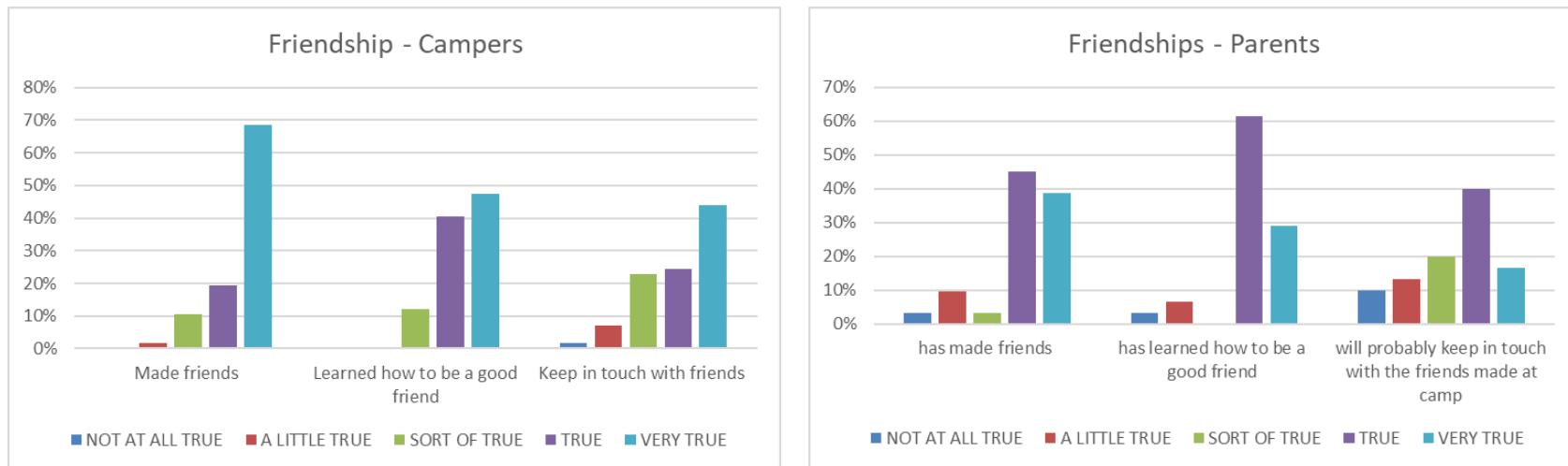
A counsellor of the senior boys reported "camper has definitely gained confidence in pursuing his own interest during 'choice' activities. He has also gained independence with self-care. I am loving forward to see even further emotional intelligence to mirror physical maturity next year".

A parent also commented about their daughter "She is more in tuned with what's going on now. She pays attention to details more and wants help more. She is all about being a better person, want to be a role model. She wants to help in the community and shows more empathy and sympathetic."



Friendship and Social Connections

Positive outcomes can be observed around friendship as in previous years. The following figures illustrate the proportion of campers who made friends, learned how to be a good friend and maintained friendships after the camp. The possibility of maintaining friendship beyond camp proves to be a little more elusive, though campers tended to rate it more possible than their parents (average ratings of 4.0 versus 3.3).



According to the counsellors, social connections (comprised of 10 components) among campers improved from the first 48 hours from an average of 5.0 to 5.4 (on a 5-point scale) by end of the camp. A counsellor reflected on an intermediate camper "*I am very proud of this camper. He has made a friend from junior cabin*".

In addition, several parents considered making friends one of the top learnings and benefits of the camp and reflected on improved friendships and social interactions among their children:

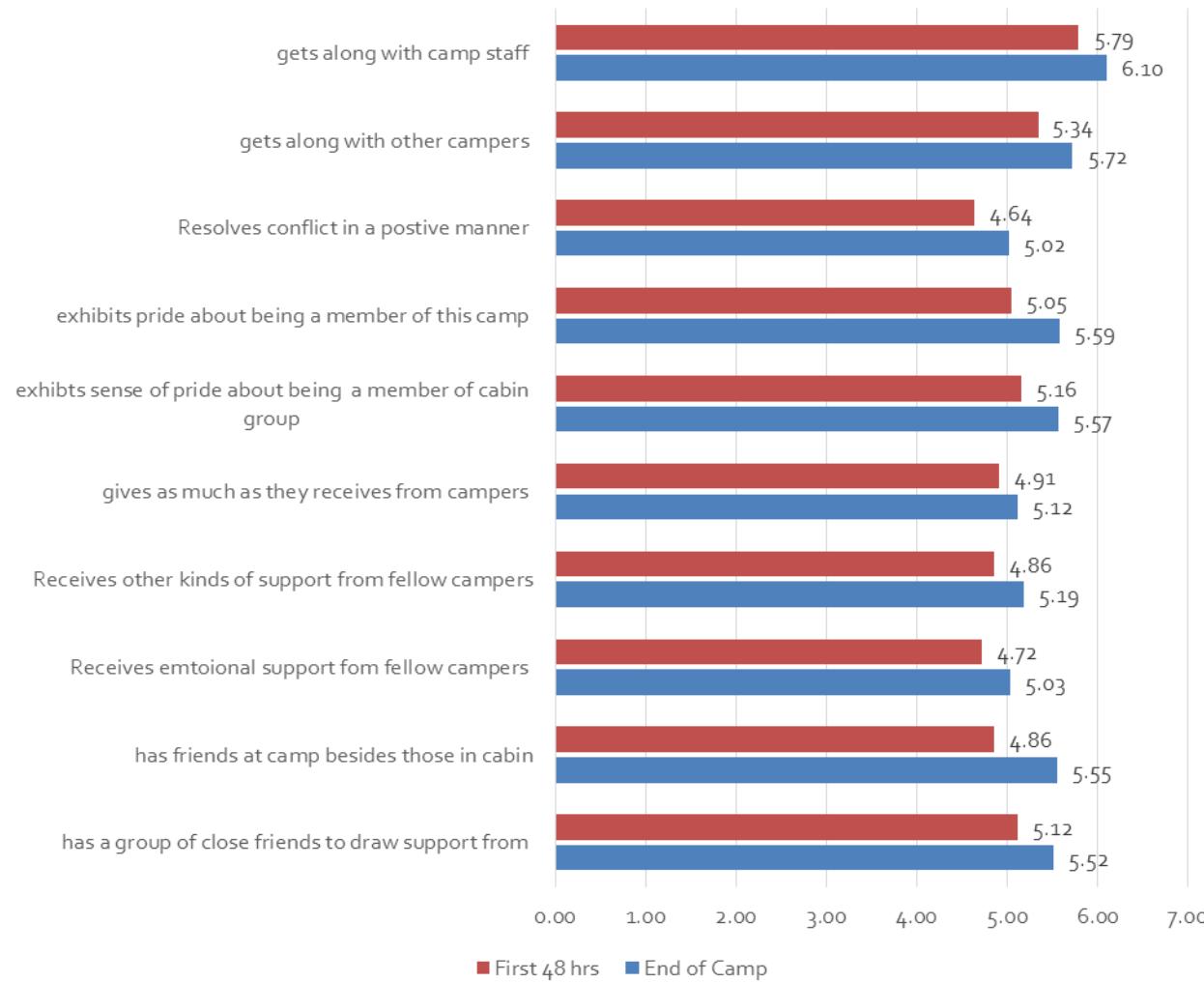
"My daughter is an introvert and doesn't know how to make friends. I have seen somewhat of improvement in her behavior since".

"He learned how to make good friends".

"She made good friends in camp and will like to attend next year".

"She learnt a lot about interacting with others. Learnt to accept – we will always be different and have different opinions".

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AT CAMP

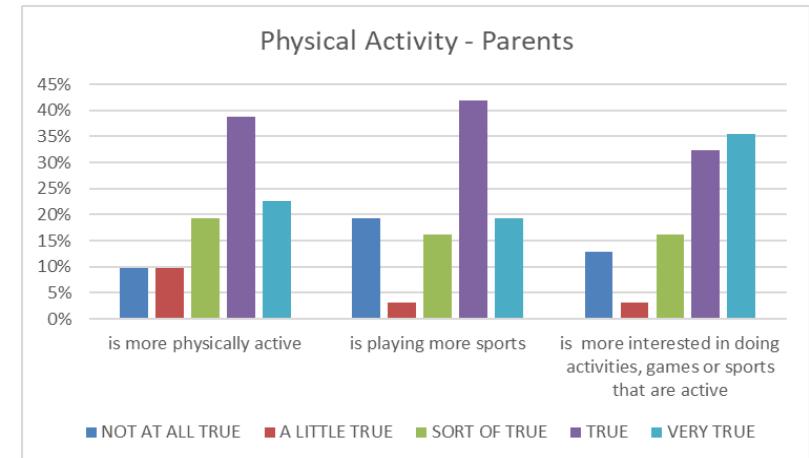
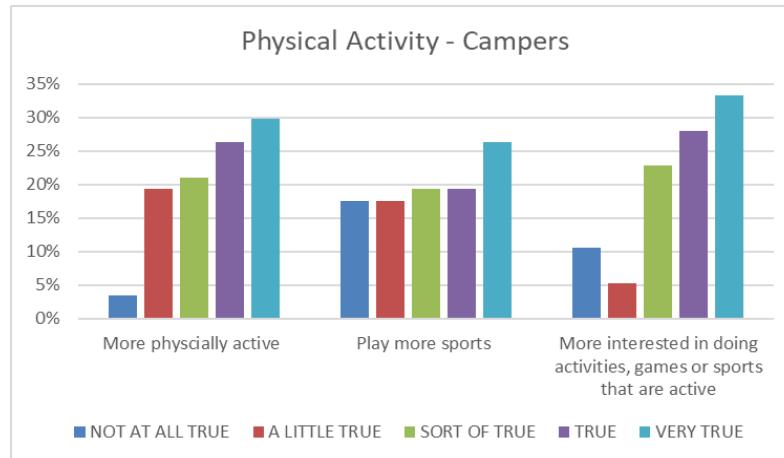
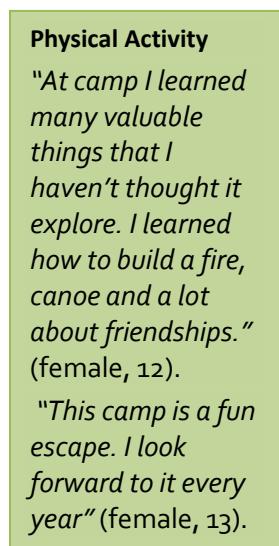


According to the counselors, there were improvements across all of the components of social connection when comparing the campers at the end of camp to their first 48 hours.

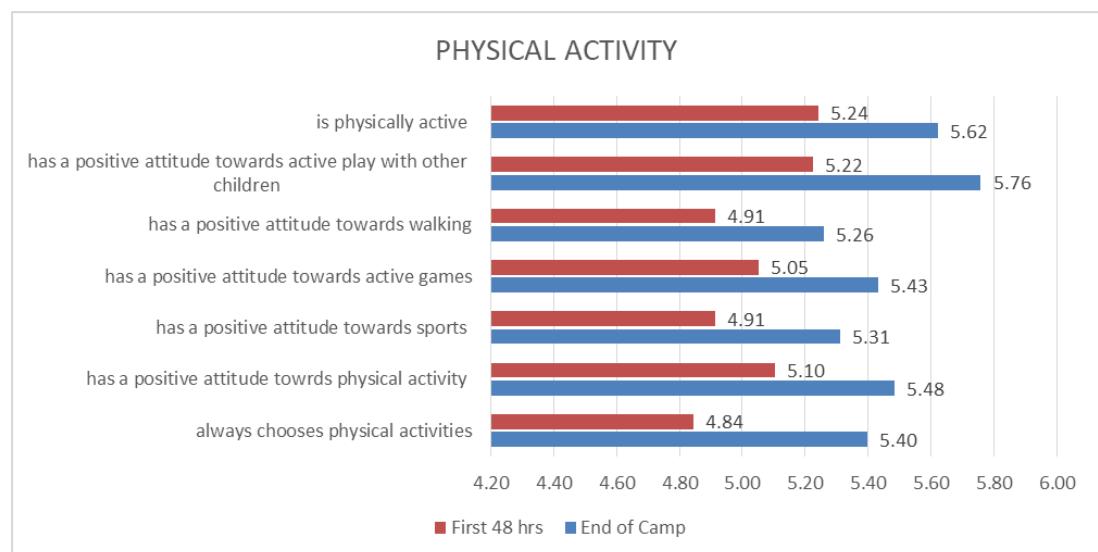
The biggest differences were seen in the items: "has friends at camp besides those in cabin" (average score increase of 0.69) and "exhibits pride about being a member of this camp" (average score increase of 0.54).

Physical Activity

Campers and their parents reported that since attending camp, the campers were more physically active (3.54 campers and 3.55 parents), played more sports (3.2 campers and 3.4 parents) and were more interested in activities and games that are more active (3.7 campers and parents). Parents seemed to rate interest and participation in sports and active pastimes slightly higher than the campers on the 5-point scale. Parents believed that the playing different sports and physical/outdoor activities were some of the top benefits of their children attending camp. Some parents mentioned specific skills that their children learned like swimming, canoeing and wall climbing. The following charts illustrate the proportion of physical activity as reported by campers and the parents of the campers.



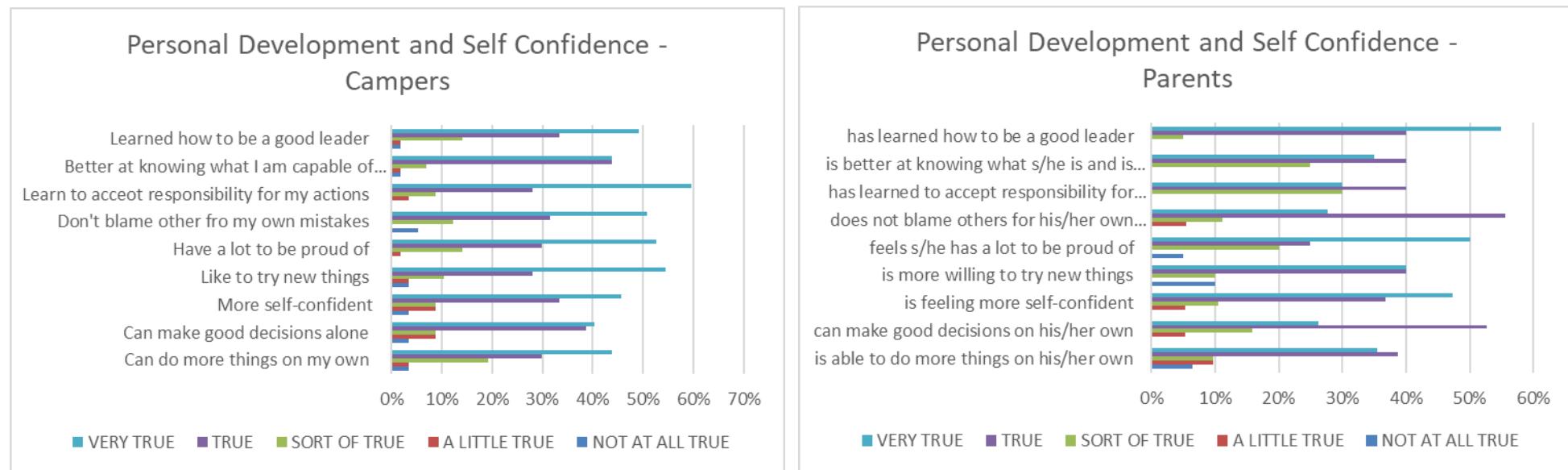
According to the counselors, there were improvements across all of the components of physical activity when comparing the campers at the end of camp to their first 48 hours. The biggest differences were seen in the items: "always chooses physical activities" (average score increase of 0.56) and "has a positive attitude towards active play with other children" (average score increase of 0.53).



Personal Development and Self-Confidence

Personal development and self-confidence were assessed using nine different aspect including but not limited to independence,

decision making, confidence, ability to try new things, accomplishment, taking responsibility and ownership, knowing limits and leadership. A total sum was calculated for the nine aspects and mean ratings were positive. For campers the sum of the mean rating was slightly lower than the previous year at 38 and much higher for the parents at 36.2.



Year	Overall Mean - Campers	Overall Mean – Parents
2018	38.0	36.2
2017	39.6	31.8
2016	38	33
2015	39	34
2014	39	35

Average camper rating for each of the nine items were extremely positive at 4.2 for campers and 4 for parents on a five-point scale. This is further elaborated for each of the nine aspects in the following figures.

The campers themselves attested to improved independence, responsibility, confidence, decision making and leadership capacity. One of the counsellors commented "Camper has been an absolute pleasure to have in our cabin again. It has been amazing to see how his confidence has continued to increase as well as his independence and to see him actively seek out others to establish friendship". Parents also felt that their children were taking more able to take care of themselves and gained independence and confidence, took more responsibility and learned leadership skills. Once parent commented that their daughter "can at least take care of herself, clean and tiding up her space and prepare a meal for her younger siblings".

The counselors also rated the campers on items of self-confidence. According to the counselors, there were improvements across all of the components of self-confidence when comparing the campers at the end of camp to their first 48 hours:

The biggest differences were seen in the items: "willing to try new things" (average score increase of 0.53) and "appears to be comfortable being away from home" (average score increase of 0.52).

Personal Development and Self Confidence

"Camp has helped me to be more independent because I did a lot of things on my own without my parents. It has also made me feel more confident with myself" (female, 10).

"I learn now to be confident, responsible, independent and learn to respect others and me!" (female, 10).

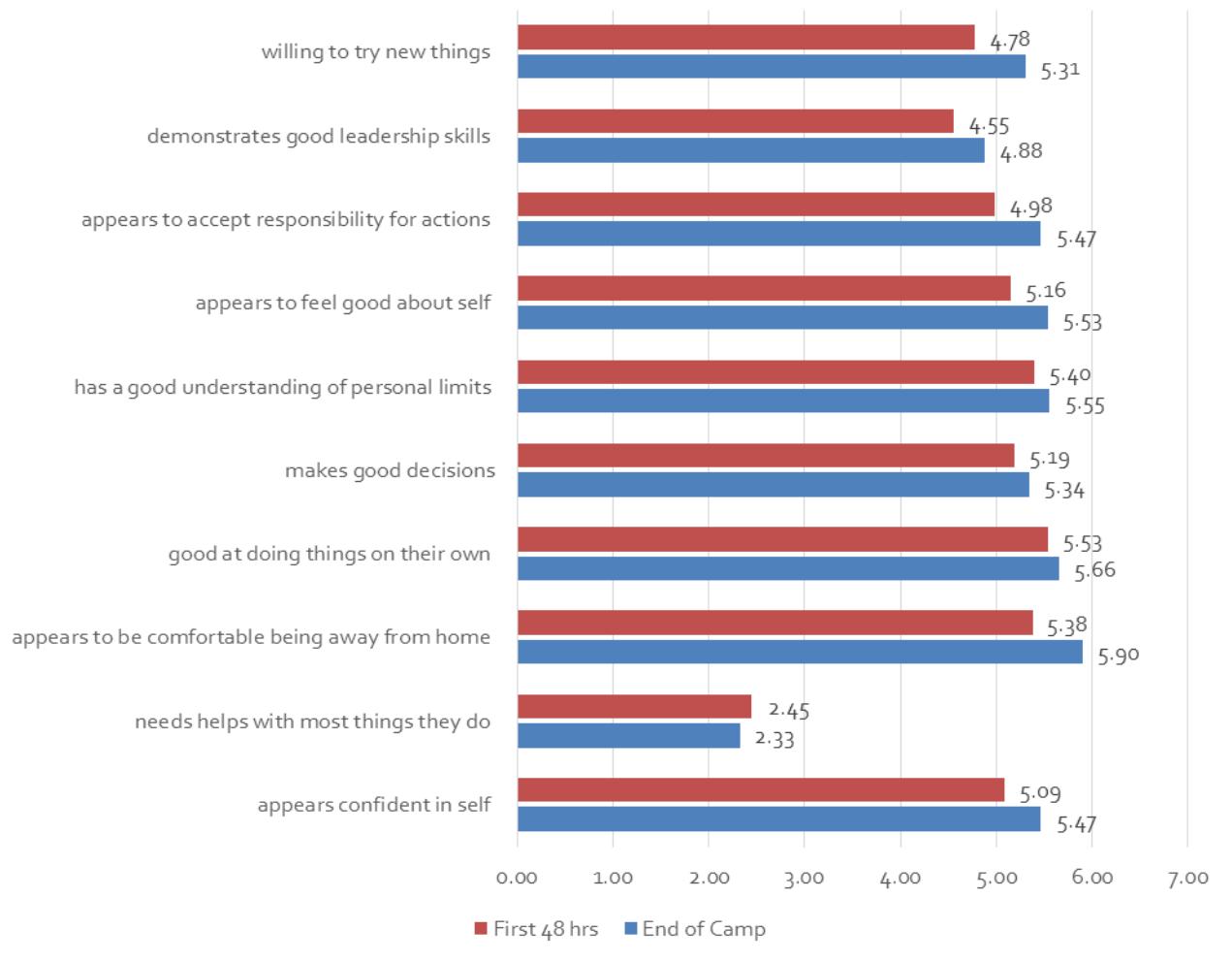
"Camp made me feel like I can do anything" (male, 9).

"I feel more grown up" (male, 11)

"What I have learned was to use my voice more and be confident when I speak. I also learned people have different ways for dealing with their problems" (male, 17).

"Camp has helped me by me being more of a role model and by making more smart decisions" (male, 15).

SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



Other Learnings and Benefits

Young people were asked to comment on any other ways that camp might have benefitted them. In addition to the above benefits mentioned, some broad categories to their responses included:

- Felt acceptance and embraced differences. Did not treat or make children feel different and created a safe space for differences
- Encouraged participation and built confidence and perseverance
- Learnt how to work with others and through teams making things possible and easier
- Encouraged positivity
- Made some children recognize their potential and embraced new things and challenges

Counsellors felt that the Camp had significantly contributed many facets on the development of young people including social connections, self-confidence and personal development, emotional intelligence and physical activities. While some of these have been discussed above some of the additional quotes from counsellors attest to some of the benefits:

"This camper has improved in both her social skills and camp environment skills".

"This camper has improved so much in just a couple of days – whether it be trying new things, being a helping hand or just opening up".

"This camper has opened up about being bullied at school, music, and videos she likes to watch with the campers".

"This camper was a welcome addition to Camp Mandala this summer. His natural, yet quiet leadership was a great example for other boys in his cabin".

Parents gave universally positive feedback about the camp, with 50% indicating that it was better than they hoped it met the expectations of 45% of the other parents. Every parent indicated that their children greatly enjoyed camp, and 100% said their children would be returning next year. In addition to some of the benefits mentioned above some of the following themes emerged about the learnings and benefits that the young people gained.

- Improved confidence (self-esteem) and independence and ability to cope outside of home
- Made more friends and improved social skills including sharing and acceptance
- Improved communication and interaction skills including listen
- Participated in physical and outdoor activities
- Improved skills to handle more responsibility
- Improved decision-making ability and leadership skills
- Young people had fun the camp made them happy.

Other Administrative and Logistic Issues

Parents highly rated the administration procedures at 4.6 or above out of 5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent). There were some issues around the location to meet the bus (which was rated 3.5) and the drop-off procedures not being clear 3.8. More clarification on transportation and pick up is recommended for the future.

Summary

Overall Experience

On a 10-point scale (terrible to great), the campers rated their enjoyment at camp at 8.8. and the camp counsellors and staff at 9.0. Counsellors were role models and played a critical role in the camper's experience. The camp location and facilities got a rating of 7.1. Parents ranked their children's enjoyment at 8.9.

As in the previous years, Camp Mandala was extremely successful. Both young people and parents rated their camp experience very highly. Participants saw marked improvements in their social connections, physical activity levels, emotional intelligence and personal development and self-confidence. Many campers echoed sentiments of joy, happiness and love for the camp and look forward to the next year. A quote that sums the experience well is "Camp has made me become such a better person in so many ways. I am truly thankful".