
The Difficult Big Issues in Outdoor Education

including accreditation, incident data base development, fatality scenarios, near miss reports and public relations.

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ABSTRACT:

Active, practical solutions to the “*Difficult Big Issues*” are often in the ‘too hard basket’. This paper will explore strategies to move forward with some of these seemingly insurmountable issues.

The following seven (7) topics will be explored: Program Accreditation; International incident data base project; Scenarios for serious accidents and fatalities; Near miss incident reporting; Saying Sorry; International relations and communication with peer groups; Effective Public Relations e.g. Campaign for Adventure (UK).

An approximate budget of \$600,000 is proposed for these projects.

1. Accreditation

Defined as “*accrediting the programming practices of competent adventure programs*” this concept was an outcome of years of debate and discussion around issues of safety, leadership and competence.

During the 1980’s the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) (based in Boulder, Colorado, USA) developed and implemented the concept of program accreditation. The concept has been developed in Australia notably by specific state outdoor associations rather than Governments. This type of accreditation is particularly helpful for clients and customers who need assistance in selecting an appropriate program for their specific requirements.

It would appear that there are approximately **2,600 accredited organisations and camps in North America and Australia.** The Adventure Activities Licensing Scheme in the UK issues a licence to programs who provide adventure activities to young people under the age of 18 years. The UK scheme is Government sponsored.

In Australia **approximate numbers** of accredited programs in the outdoor sector are:

- ACA (Australian Camps Association): **140**
- ORIC (The Outdoor Recreation Industry Council of NSW): **10**
- NARTA (The National Accommodation Recreation and Tourism Accreditation scheme): **20**

The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) Accreditation Program is the world’s first recognized accreditation process focusing on adventure experiential education programming. After a rapid increase in experiential programs in the late eighties and early nineties, the need for standards of program quality, professional behaviour and appropriate risk management was imperative. In 1994, AEE responded to the need by developing the most comprehensive standards for common practices in the industry

AEE accreditation serves the public, the profession of experiential education and the organization under review.

The public is served by:

1. a ready identification of quality programs from which to choose,
2. an objective, independent source of information about those programs,
3. a reasonable indication of the quality standards for those programs.

The profession of experiential education is served through:

1. a safeguard of the reputation of the field,
2. elevating the practices of the field,
3. self-governance,
4. advocacy for participants and organizations,
5. avenues for continuing education and professional development.

Service to the organizations pursuing AEE accreditation is great and may include:

1. providing leadership within the profession,
2. improving the quality and performance of programs,
3. preserving access to federal lands,
4. preserving access to affordable liability insurance,
5. increasing the ability to attract financial and human resources.

AEE Accredited Organizations and Programs (North America): Total: 48 (5th May 2008)

Types of programs that have been accredited: Wilderness and Adventure Programs; University and College Programs; Primary and Secondary School Programs; Youth Programs; Corporate Team Building and Training Programs.

Reference:

<http://www.aee.org>

American Camping Association (ACA) Accreditation Program: Total: 2,400 (May 2008)

ACA accredits over 2,400 camps. ACA-Accredited® camps meet up to 300 standards for health, safety, and program quality.

Reference:

<http://www.acacamps.org>

**Outdoor Recreation Industry Council of NSW (ORIC) Organisational Accreditation (Australia)
Total: 10 (May 2008)**

ORIC Organisational Accreditation has been designed for outdoor education and recreation organisations, to provide a process for examining the organisation and its policies and procedures.

It is an ongoing process, requiring organisations to constantly review and update, ensuring that they reflect common practices, changing community needs and attitudes. Each organisation is reviewed according to its size and operating context. It is not a process of comparison between organisations.

Organisational Accreditation is one aspect of an overall process of continuous improvement of organisations and the outdoor industry. It is an important step for ensuring 'organisational best practice' and promoting quality standards within our industry, particularly in the absence of legislation.

* A participant will always choose to adventure with an accredited organisation where that is available, especially in an area where perceived risks are high.

* For peace of mind, it is good to know that your organisation has been accredited and deemed to meet the industry standards.

* Insurance is getting increasingly expensive and hard to obtain. Accreditation could help you benefit from competitive rates.

- * Accreditation also ties in with systems developed by other organisations such as:-
- NSW Maritime Authority (formerly Water Ways)
 - NPWS (National Parks and Wildlife Service)

The National Accommodation Recreation and Tourism Accreditation scheme (NARTA)

Total: 20 (May 2008)

NARTA is an accreditation package developed under a joint agreement between Christian Camping International Australia and the Outdoor Recreation Industry Council of NSW.

With the potential to provide for all aspects of the outdoor industry, from hardtop organisations, activity providers, soft top camping and to those seeking organisational structure accreditation, NARTA seeks to respond to the needs of CCI and ORIC members and the outdoor recreation industry in general.

NARTA is administered under the auspices of the Accreditation Advisory Group (AAG), of which Christian Camping International Australia and the Outdoor Recreation Industry Council of NSW are 2005 Foundation Members.

Who is Eligible for Accreditation by NARTA?

NARTA is available nationally. Participation is voluntary though it is highly recommended.

Reference:

<http://www.oric.org.au>

Australian Camps Association (ACA) 'Camping with Confidence' Australian Campsite and Outdoor Activity Provider Accreditation Program

Total: 140 (May 2008)

'Camping with Confidence' is a national accreditation program designed to ensure the camping or outdoor experience is able to be conducted in a manner where the safety of participants and staff is assured. This means the buildings are appropriate and that proper activity equipment is provided and used in a safe manner. It ensures there are clear procedures for supervising campers and administering bookings and proper planning has been done to manage emergencies should they arise.

The variety of campsites and outdoor experiences ensures that different groups - large or small, children or adult, school, special interest, community - can enjoy diverse experiences. Accreditation recognises the diversity and ensures that regardless of the type of experience your safety has been considered as paramount.

This program is independently endorsed by Tourism Accreditation Australia Ltd (TAAL)

Reference:

<http://www.auscamps.asn.au/accreditation/>

The Adventure Activities Licensing Scheme (UK)

The Adventure Activities Licensing Scheme is a Government sponsored scheme, which was introduced in 1996 under the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations. The scheme ensures that those who provide certain adventure activities to young people under the age of 18 years will have their safety management systems inspected. Where appropriate, a licence is then issued.

Reference:

<http://www.aals.org.uk>

Recommendation: Peak Bodies confer with the objective of having a national scheme which can cater to the outdoor recreation and outdoor education sectors.

Deadline: 31st December 2012

Budget: \$50,000 per annum x 4.5 years = \$225,000

2. International incident data base project (based at Princeton University, New Jersey, USA)

This project has been in “gestation” for over five (5) years. It requires human and financial resources to move forward. On the 17th November 2006, the author was involved in a significant, historical event for the International Adventure Based Experiential Learning (ABEL) community.

A 75 minute international conference call using SKYPE www.skype.com. (Voice over Internet Protocol - VoIP) between eleven (11) people domiciled in Scotland, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand was convened by Rick Curtis, Director, Outdoor Action, Princeton University, USA.

BACKGROUND: For the past 40 years, particularly in the Adventure Based Experiential Learning (ABEL) sector, some influential members of the community have perceived that the ABEL sector is dangerous and puts people's lives at risk. This perception has influenced the media, insurers, educational administrators, parents, legislators, the judiciary, politicians, governments, bureaucrats, risk managers, outdoor programmers and many others in the community.

The lack of credible, wide ranging, international incident data from outdoor programs has disabled (to a certain extent) the Adventure Based Experiential Learning (ABEL) sector. This sector has been unable to produce any relevant data to counter the perception out in the community. Hence, it would appear that many outdoor programs are now being "dumbed down" in response to the community who are suggesting that ABEL programs are "dangerous and put people's lives at risk". It would appear that the ability to obtain insurance coverage is sometimes based on perception rather than fact.

The INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT DATA BASE PROJECT

It is imperative that outdoor programs (large and small) think very seriously about becoming involved in incident data collection for the benefit of themselves and for the benefit of the International Adventure Based Experiential Learning (ABEL) community.

For example, **Outward Bound Australia** reduced their incident rate by 48% over six years by collecting incident data (other factors could have also prevailed?).

The object of this historic international conference call was to move forward with the International Incident Database project which has been on the drawing board for a number of years.

Genuine, pro active support is required to move this project along.

The International Incident Database Project is a project headed by the IIDB Working Group, (based at Princeton University, New Jersey, USA) an international consortium of program and risk managers in the outdoor education field. The goal of the IIDB Working Group is to define an international standard for collecting incident data for outdoor and adventure-based programs. Having a common standard will allow the industry to communicate across programs about incident types, rates, etc. in ways that will enhance our programs. It will also allow us to compare our incident data and rates to other industries.

The Working Group seeks to:

- Define the key data elements that are essential to capture for incidents.
- Create a database structure that is both flexible and comprehensive to handle a wide range of program types and countries.
- Build a model database that will allow programs to store their own incident data and make this available.

In order to facilitate discussion and collaboration, this Web site has been built as an application model for the outdoor education community. This is a Beta application to demonstrate a number of key technology pieces related to collecting and analysing incident data.

- **Database Design** - the application demonstrates the use of a sophisticated relational database design for collecting incident data.
- **Web-based submission** - the submission process is simplified through a Web page that automatically validates the data for proper format and submits it directly to the incident database.
- **Browsing Aggregate Data** - the site allows users to review all of their submitted data. It also allows others to view aggregate data and compare their safety records with other programs.
- **Data Analysis & Research** - the site allows for more extensive data collection and analysis than previous methods.
- Rationale for an International Incident Database Standard
- Database Design Concepts (Technical)

Other Incident Database Systems

- American Alpine Club
- American Whitewater
- National Speleological Society
- New Zealand National Incident Database
- Wilderness Risk Managers Committee

Reference:

<http://www.incidentdatabase.org>

Recommendation: Peak Bodies confer in Australia and communicate internationally.

Deadline: 31st December 2012

Budget: US\$50,000 per annum x 4.5 years = US\$225,000

3. Scenarios for serious accidents and fatalities

Fire drills are carried out on a regular basis within most institutions. These fire drills can be done quickly with little planning and preparation.

Developing a scenario to deal with a serious accident or fatality in an outdoor education program requires significant planning and preparation involving people at various levels of responsibility within an organisation.

People to be considered for involvement should include the Chair of the Board or Council, CEO/Executive Officer, professional public relations consultant; lawyer, insurer, staff at various levels, participants/clients.

Venues need to be selected, an operations room designated, people coordinated to be available on a specific date (sometimes requiring four to six months notice for busy people).

The value of such an exercise is considerable. Things will go wrong. There is much learning, particularly if this exercise is carried out on a regular basis (approximately every two years) and a thorough debrief and report is produced.

Reference:

Outdoor Stakeholders Forum, Melbourne, September 2007. Convened by the Outdoor Recreation Centre (ORC)

Cost to the program: \$1,000 to \$6,000 approximately

Importance: Very high.

Implementation difficulty: High

Recommendation: Peak Bodies encourage workshops and seminars in this area

Deadline: 31st December 2009

Budget: Nil

4. Near miss incident reporting

"Learn from the mistakes of others - you won't live long enough to make them all yourself" - Unknown

It is imperative that near misses are reported and analysed for the benefit of future generations.

What have we learned from the sea kayaking incident on 5th April 2006 at Torquay, Victoria, Australia when 16 secondary school students and four adults were rescued after being swept out to sea? 11 ocean kayaks and 16 paddles were blown out to sea and lost. This was a "significant near miss" which had the potential to be the worst multiple fatality in the history of Outdoor Education anywhere in the world. What went wrong? What went well? What stopped the incident from escalating into a disaster? What was reported and is publicly available? How do we use near misses to improve the quality of care for participants and staff?

The community needs to be well informed regarding prior accidents and near misses. Administrators and managers must be aware of past situations and be well informed about their own programs:

"Frankly, I had no idea what was going on in the field"

Headmaster, Oregon Episcopal School, Portland, Oregon, USA

After nine deaths on a school sponsored climb of Mount Hood, Oregon, 1986
(The Episcopal School Tragedy)

Reference: *"Lessons Learned II: Using Case Studies and History to Improve Safety Education"*

Published by the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Edited by Deborah Ajango. (2005)

Recommendation: Peak bodies ensure they are engaged and active relative to the publication of near miss reports. Develop policy guidelines.

Deadline: 31st December 2009

Budget: Nil

5. Saying Sorry

The fear of litigation has made it very difficult to say sorry to families of participants who have died or been seriously injured on outdoor education programs. The medical field is making inroads into this very difficult area through [The Sorry Works! Coalition](#). Perhaps we can learn something from them? [About The Sorry Works! Coalition...](#)

Founded in 2005, The Sorry Works! Coalition has quickly become the nation's (USA) leading advocacy organization for disclosure, apology (when appropriate), and upfront compensation (when necessary) after adverse medical events. The website has received over 4 million hits, and the weekly Sorry Works! e-newsletter is read by over 10,000 medical, insurance, and legal professionals.

The coalition believes and advocates that the medical malpractice crisis is a customer service crisis - not a legal problem - that can be solved anytime by medical, insurance, and legal professionals. Sorry Works! provides the customer service framework in a programmatic approach that encourages communication and problem solving with patients and families after adverse events. A simple three-step disclosure process is at the heart of the Sorry Works! program. To learn more about the three-step disclosure process see below or the website.

The coalition provides teaching and training tools to help healthcare and insurance organizations implement and develop successful disclosure programs. To view a complete list of Sorry Works! teaching products, see the website. To develop and provide the best quality teaching products, Sorry Works! has partnered with several leading companies.

Three-Step Disclosure Process

Sorry Works! is a program that needs to be administered by a team of medical, risk, insurance, and legal professionals within a medical, hospital, or insurance setting.

The Sorry Works! program is predicated on a three-step disclosure process:

- * Initial Disclosure
- * Investigation
- * Resolution

Step 1 - Initial Disclosure - is all about empathy and re-establishing trust and communication with patients and families in the immediate aftermath of an adverse event. Providers say "sorry" but no fault is admitted or assigned. Providers take care of the immediate needs of the patient/family (food, lodging, counselling, etc) and promise a swift and thorough investigation. The goal is to make sure the patient/family never feels abandoned. In the spirit of good customer service, pull the patient or family closer to the providers and institution.

Step 2 - Investigation - is about learning the truth. Was the standard of care breached, or not? They recommend involving outside experts and moving swiftly so the patient/family doesn't suspect a cover-up. Stay in close contact with the patient/family throughout the process.

Step 3 - Resolution - is about sharing the results of the investigation with the patient/family, and their legal counsel. If there was a mistake, apologize, admit fault, explain what happened and how it will be prevented in the future, and discuss fair, upfront compensation for the injury or death. If there was no mistake, continue to empathize ("we are sorry this happened"), share the results of investigation (hand over charts and records to patient/family and their legal counsel), and prove your innocence. However, no settlement will be offered and any lawsuit will be contested. Sorry Works! is compassion with a backbone.

Reference:

<http://www.sorryworks.net>

Recommendation: Peak Bodies develop workshops and seminars in this area.

Deadline: 31st December 2009

Budget: \$5,000

6. International relations and communication with peer groups

A concerted effort needs to be made to communicate with our peers around the world. This has become so much easier through the internet. We have much to learn from each other.

Recommendation: Peak Bodies confer and devise appropriate strategies.

Deadline: 31st December 2009

Budget: \$2,000

7. Effective Public Relations e.g. Campaign for Adventure (UK)

It is imperative that the community understands Outdoor Education curriculum's, aims, objectives, outcomes and benefits. This requires a dedicated public relations team that is permanently funded on a long term basis (one or two decades) to consistently assist the community in understanding Outdoor Education.

Since 2000 in the UK there has been an active lobby to lift the profile of Outdoor Education within the community. We have much to learn from people in the UK.

Campaign for Adventure (UK) *Risk and Enterprise in Society*

A call for the Campaign emerged from a UK national conference addressed by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh in November 2000. The Campaign aims to rejuvenate society's attitudes to enterprise and adventure. It calls for realism and a sensible balance between risks and benefits.

The Campaign seeks to show that life is best approached in a spirit of exploration, adventure and enterprise; to influence and better inform attitudes towards risk; to build wider recognition that chance, unforeseen circumstances and uncertainty are inescapable features of life and that absolute safety is unachievable; and to demonstrate that sensible education and preparation enable an appropriate balance to be achieved between risk & safety and achievement & opportunity.

In the next two years, we will take practical steps to:

- raise society's awareness of these issues,
- enlist the help of the media to celebrate the benefits of adventure,
- produce educational resources that promote the necessary balance,
- help more young people to experience adventure

Anxiety is one of the greatest of modern ills. And it flourishes most in the fat soil of security. It is a middle-class disease, endemic in those countries which enjoy the highest standards of living and the greatest stability. We have banished fear, which is a healthy emotion, only to admit anxiety, which is a morbid one. We no longer wake up in the morning mildly astonished and delighted to have been safely brought to the beginning of this day. We no longer spring to our feet to satisfy ourselves that there is no immediate threat. Instead we come gradually to consciousness, and lie in bed in complete safety, gnawed by anxiety... The man who pins his faith on security is bound to suffer from anxiety, for he knows in his heart that however many insurance policies he takes out, he can never really be safe. This very night his soul may be required of him. It is only when he turns outward, to some end outside himself, in other words embarks on life's adventures, that he saves himself and exchanges anxiety for mere fear."

Tom Price. Former Warden (Executive Director) Outward Bound Mountain School, Eskdale, England (1960's), Mountaineer; Address to the RSA 1966

Reference:

<http://www.campaignforadventure.org>

Recommendation: Peak Bodies confer and establish plans to address the public relations issue
Deadline: 31st December 2010
Budget: \$50,000 per annum x 2.5 years = \$125,000

Contacts and reference material that could be useful:

Victorian Outdoor Education Association
Web: <http://www.voea.vic.edu.au>

Australian Camps Association
Web: www.auscamps.asn.au

Wilderdom Outdoor Education Research & Evaluation Center
Web: www.wilderdom.com/research.html

***** *James Neill's website:(Outdoor Educator/Researcher/Lecturer)*

CONCLUSION

This paper has revisited some of the “old chestnuts” of our profession. We need to tackle the major issues of our profession while considering other major world issues. It is time for a small group of committed, energetic, creative people to put their collective heads “above the parapet” and attempt to solve some of these “BIG ISSUES”.

Solutions also require active involvement of field practitioners. In fact, we all need to take responsibility for these issues. **An approximate budget of \$600,000** is proposed for these projects.

We need to revisit two well known quotes:

- *"Nothing ventured, nothing gained"*
- *"The outcomes greatly outweigh the risks involved"*

Final decisions need to be taken by the peak bodies who have the mandate to proceed. We have the capacity. Do we have the will?

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Alistair McArthur, Senior Consultant with Odyssey Consultants in Melbourne, holds a Master of Education degree. He has over 30 years experience in Adventure Based Experiential Learning (ABEL) and has worked as an Instructor, Chief Instructor, Course and Program Director, Consultant and Executive Director at Outward Bound Schools in the UK, Australia, USA and Canada. Prior to establishing Odyssey Consultants he was Executive Director of the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School.

He has had considerable Risk Management experience within Outward Bound Schools and also as Base Commander of a British Antarctic Survey Expedition for two years where he travelled over 2,500 kilometres by dog sledge.

Alistair is a Past President of the Victorian Outdoor Education Association (VOEA) and served on the Board of the Outdoor Education Group (OEG) from 1996 to 2005.

Alistair McArthur has been a “solutions based” educator and administrator throughout his career. He has used and developed emergency response plans through his direct experience in managing the aftermath of three separate fatalities in adventure programs and also while directing outdoor education programs. He has attended two inquests and also conducts Safety Audits and Risk Management workshops.

He currently acts as an adviser to Outdoor Education programs throughout Australia.

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