



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



## 4-H RITE OF PASSAGE

### Successfully Claiming Adulthood

#### BY THE NUMBERS

- More than 45 educational partners locally and internationally.
- Since 2003, 4-H Rite of Passage has mentored and safely guided an estimated 140 youth through their transitions to adulthood.
- There are approximately 75 adults in a queue to become 4-H Rite of Passage guides.

2016

#### ISSUE

A vital question of any culture is how youth are prepared to take on the identity of a mature individual. Positive mentoring relationships have been shown to have a healthy effect on life trajectories and outcomes. Modern young people passing through adolescence without guidance may take unhealthy risks or feel compelled to follow self-destructive paths to claim or resist their approaching maturity.

While there appears to be vast social concern to ensure successful development of young people, there are currently increasing numbers of teen suicides, young adults being clinically diagnosed with depression, and post-college graduate dissatisfaction ratings. Researchers and sociologists have begun to identify trends of delayed adolescence and maturation in young people. Neither identity exploration nor achievement will be exercised sufficiently if a culture does not encourage autonomy, decision making, and the development of personal volition in its youth.

#### RESPONSE

A Rite of Passage is an event *chosen by a young person* that recognizes his or her transition with empowering actions and supportive mentoring. The process of a Rite of Passage allows an individual to confirm and strengthen his or her intentions around a personal "life story," affirming positive, self-scripted narratives that are developed with the assistance of community elders and mentors. It has been particularly well received by youth who enjoy outdoor activities and are ready for reflective time alone in the wilderness. Adults in the community who have participated in the program are available to serve as mentors, preparing the youth for their personal ceremony six months to a year in advance. This period of preparation is known as **Severance**, since the young person is letting go of the person they have been in order to make room for the person they intend to become.

The **Threshold** is the ceremonial time of personal challenge. WSU 4-H Rite of Passage threshold ceremonies generally are held in the summer of each year, in the outdoors. Sufficient time is given for the young person to engage in deep self-reflection. Traditionally ceremonies involve fasting and self-reflection time, followed by a time to share with a group and receive encouragement from community elders.

A ceremony is followed by a year of **Incorporation**, which is the period when the individual will be answering the call to demonstrate his or her new role in the community.



## QUOTES

“What stuck with me the most was how in just 10 days I felt like the people I had been there with I had known all my life. I still think about everything about my experience almost every day. The thing that has really stayed with me was the feeling of me letting myself really go, and becoming the man I always knew inside I could be.” K.A., Male age 17

“Rite of Passage was an amazing eye-opening experience. I would do it again in a heartbeat. I went with an intention to appreciate what I have at the moment and to have empathy for others. It's so life changing, and helps you realize who you truly are as a person. Getting to know yourself and your needs and where you stand in this world. I totally recommend doing ROP. I believe it can really change your perspective on life.” L. P-V, Female age 16

## IMPACTS

### Youth Results

Two integrated cohorts of ROP participants were evaluated by Mark Van Ryzin, University of Oregon, using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965, Hagborg 1993), and the Children’s Hope Scale (Snyder, et al. 1997). Each cohort demonstrated significant growth in self-esteem during the 4-H Rite of Passage. Growth in hope for the second cohort was close to significant ( $p < .06$ ) Participants in the Rite of Passage reported persisting effects that included improvements in attitudes, mood, and altruistic social effects.

### Circles of Influence

Adult participants in the 4-H ROP program have shared our programs beyond 4-H and influenced both local and international communities:

#### Schools and Universities

Montessori Schools of Bellingham, WA; Alberni, Nanaimo, and Victoria School Districts, BC, Canada; Portland Waldorf School; Spring Street International School, Friday Harbor, WA; Alaska Crossings, Wrangell, AK; Renton, Bellingham, and Shelton School Districts, WA; Wild Whatcom, Bellingham, WA; Rooted Emerging, Bellingham, WA; Pinchot University, OR; City University of Seattle in BC, Canada; Naropa University, CO; Cedar Rock Preserve University of Washington Labs; Fairhaven College, Western Washington University.

#### Therapeutic and Intervention Programs

Canadventure Education (Wilderness Therapy for Youth) Sayward, B.C., Canada; Square One Counseling, Bellingham WA; Mason County Detention & Probation Services; San Juan Island Prevention Coalition; San Juan County Health & Community Services Department; Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations, Spokane, WA; Three Leaves Counseling, Jeffery Howard, Private Practice; Mark Lazich Counseling, Private Practice.

#### Leadership, Wilderness, and Governance Organizations

Chinook Observer, Pacific County; Coast Weekend, Astoria, OR; Clatsop County Teen Advocacy Coalition, OR; Kayak Tillamook, LLC; Hautes Etudes Commerciales, Paris, France; Mason County 4-H Summer Forestry Leadership Program, WA; Pacific County Community Historian Project, WA; Panhandle Lake 4-H Camp & Camp Long, WA; San Juan Island Community Foundation; United Way of San Juan County; Wilderness Awareness School, Duvall, WA.



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