



Outdoor activities in Tahoe are at the center of what The Courage Project does, but the real focus is on the emotional health of the children who participate.
COURTESY/COURAGE PROJECT

that its summer programs are available. It includes paddle-boarding, outdoor rock climbing and mountain biking for children ages 9-13, and outdoor yoga for children ages 6-13.

It's also offered for free and is run by volunteer instructors, all experienced in outdoor activities as well as working with children. The equipment used, as well as the venues where the programs take place, have been donated by area businesses.

Seeing the sheer number of children who needed some type of mental health support in the pre-teen years is what drove Moore to start the project.

"What the research has been telling us for decades is that children best learn through play and problem solving," Moore said. "We want to use the amazing outdoor environment at Lake Tahoe as a vehicle for teaching evidence-based coping skills through these adventures."

It's also a way to shed light on fostering more youth mental health programs.

"It's creating a dialog about mental health with families, and the community, to talk about children who are struggling with anxiety and depression," Moore said. "People can suffer alone and in silence, and they don't realize that they have community support behind them."

That support extends to the group's 100-plus volunteer base. "We're always looking for individuals who have expertise and experience with children," Moore said. "We love people who also have found peace in the outdoors and through challenging adventures—and people who practice mindfulness in their own lives."

As for the future, Moore is working for more donations and grants to keep the Courage Project afloat, plus there is the planning for winter events such as skiing and snowshoeing. She's also getting the word out to school counselors, mental health caregivers and pediatricians so they can offer this as an option for children in need.

As Moore points out, the "courage" in the group's name goes beyond the courage to get on a paddle board or bike up a mountain: "It's the courage to be your authentic self." □

Facing fears

The Courage Project

Brie Moore, a local doctor of child

psychology and the founder of the Courage Project, shared the story of one boy in her program who had a life-changing experience. Living with many worries and fears, as well as struggles to manage reactions with his family at home, he was enrolled in the project's paddle-boarding program, one of several outdoor adventures used by the Courage Project to foster coping skills.

During the session, the boy and his volunteer talked about how fear and doubt gets in the way of life and how the only way to face fears is head-on.

"They talked about the feelings of falling in the cold water, or his fear of looking stupid, really just ticking off his fears one-by-one," Moore said of the paddle-boarding session. "After that, he was willing to open up more emotionally about the struggles he was having, because he recently moved to the area. So, our great courage coach told him to be more like the water, more flexible, in life."

This story, and others, speak to the Courage Project's goals—to take away the stigma of anxiety and depression in children, and to do this through outdoor activities that inspire and encourage emotional growth. The programs are for children who may experience anxiety and depression, difficult transitions in life, social struggles, perfectionism or emotional withdrawal.

In its one-year existence, as The Courage Project has doubled the number of half-days

The Courage Project operates from June 17 to Sept. 15 around Lake Tahoe. Details at courageproject.org.

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