

# Study: Spirit of Adventure programme fosters longer-term youth resilience

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New research from the University of Otago shows that youth programmes, such as the long-running Spirit of New Zealand tall-ship experience, do work to create lasting resilience in our young people.

The Department of Psychology study, led by PhD student Jill Hayhurst, surveyed a large group of young voyage participants from around New Zealand. It showed they experience a significant increase in resilience after they have completed the programme, and this increase is maintained long-term.

The study, just published in the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, assessed resilience, and factors that are linked to resilience such as self-esteem, in 272 [young people](#) with an average age

of 16.

On board the Spirit of New Zealand, the young trainees face being away from home, making new friends, daily 6 am swims around the ship, climbing the rigging, and eventually sailing the ship on their own. Throughout the voyages the crew support the trainees, encourage teamwork and teach sailing skills.

Ms Hayhurst says in this way success is guaranteed, making the Spirit voyages ideal for studying the potential of resilience to be developed. Since its inception in 1972, thousands of kiwi youth have taken part in the programme.



The 272 study participants completed surveys four times: one month before the voyage, the first day of the voyage, the last day of the voyage, and five months after the voyage. Voyage participants were compared to secondary and tertiary students in order to ensure any changes observed were due to the voyage and not other factors, for example normal psychological changes experienced over time.

"Our results suggest the Spirit of New Zealand voyages are an effective and relatively long-lasting means by which to nurture resilience and encourage the skills and experiences necessary for Kiwi youth to flourish," she says.

"The finding that the resilience is long lasting is particularly exciting, as while many youth programmes have positive outcomes, these benefits usually disappear once the participants return home. Self-esteem, social effectiveness, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, social support and weather conditions (e.g. smooth or stormy sailing) all contributed to the youth's increased resilience."

The study used the metaphor of physical immunisation when trying to understand the [psychological resilience](#) process. This term means that like immunisation, people's ability to face adversity grows after a dose of stress. The size of the dose is critical however, as too much stress can overwhelm people.

"Effective programmes must walk the line between challenge and success. This may explain why although many youth programmes aim to increase resilience, their effectiveness and outcomes are mixed," she says.

"Everyone experiences difficulties in life, whether it be daily hassles or major trauma. Resilience is the process by which people bounce back from adversity, or adapt following crisis. Ample evidence shows that

there are more risks for children and youth today than in the past, as the prevalence of depression, suicide, and child poverty continues to rise. For this reason, we believe that understanding and promoting resilience is paramount."

**More information:** Jill Hayhurst, John A. Hunter, Sarah Kafkaa & Mike Boyes, "Enhancing resilience in youth through a 10-day developmental voyage." *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*. [DOI: 10.1080/14729679.2013.843143](https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2013.843143)

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