



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 18, 2023**

## **Empirical evidence indicates nature-based therapy is highly effective for children and adolescents**

*98.9% of participants report continued improved mental health 12 months post graduation*

LAKE TOXAWAY, NORTH CAROLINA – [Trails Carolina](https://trailsnc.com) today released the most current outcomes of an ongoing independent research initiative launched in 2014 to assess the effectiveness of its nature-based therapy (NBT) program, also referred to as adventure therapy. Among the findings, **98.9 percent of girls and boys, ages 10-17, continued to report improved mental health 12 months after completing Trails Carolina's program**, according to Executive Director Jeremy Whitworth.

The ongoing research initiative was independently developed and is currently administered and overseen by the [Center for Research, Assessment, and Treatment Efficacy](http://www.createnc.com) (CRATE; [www.createnc.com](http://www.createnc.com)) and the University of Arkansas. The study tracks teens' and families' progress in treatment, including symptom improvement and overall well-being, beginning at admission to the program, upon completion of the program, and 3 months and 12- months after graduation.

According to CRATE's Research Director, Sarah "Salli" Lewis, Ph.D., the survey reveals that one full year after graduating from Trails Carolina, students and parents continued to report significant changes in youth behaviors and symptoms, including those related to mental health, substance use and ADHD. Top-line outcomes are highlighted below and, along with the assessment tools, [can be downloaded here](#). A more comprehensive report of clinical outcomes for students and families will be available in 2023.

<b>TRAILS CAROLINA TOP-LINE OUTCOMES: <i>January 6, 2023</i></b>			
<i>% of participants demonstrating continued improvement 12 months post-graduation</i>			
<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>BOYS/GIRLS</b>	<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>BOYS</b>
Suicidal thoughts	78.9%	84.2%	71%
Depression/Anxiety	90.8%	94.1%	85.9%
Substance use disorder	58%	67%	49.1%
ADHD	83.3%	85.3%	80.3%
Sleep	69.5%	73.5%	63.4%
Peer conflict	100%	100%	100%
Work and school	82.8%	81.9%	84%
Continued improvement in at least one category	98.9%	99.0%	98.6%

The current findings mirror other [nature-based therapy research results](#), including those of Dr. Keith Russell of the University of Idaho, whose 2003 research revealed [teens showed significant improvement in functioning](#) 12 months after returning home from a nature-based therapy program.

The ongoing independent study, along with the [transitional model](#) used by Trails Carolina help to legitimize the work done in NBT, provide evidence-based results for methods and identify areas for improvement, according to Whitworth.

The program's [five touchpoints](#) – cited by parents as a top reason for selecting Trails Carolina – are one example of improvements made based on CREATE's research and participant feedback, he explained. A parent alum whose child completed the program in 2022 describes these touchpoints as “unique” to Trails Carolina.

“We are still in the post-graduation honeymoon phase, but his future looks really promising,” they said. “The program is unique in that it includes individual therapy, family therapy, family support sessions, transitions and more. The staff is easy to talk to.”

According to Whitworth, Trails Carolina pairs psychological counseling with a variety of outdoor activities, including hiking, backpacking, camping, rock climbing and equine-assisted emotional work. To support a successful transition home, students practice, refine and gain confidence in their newly acquired skills through real-life exercises, while family members work with a licensed therapist to develop skills that improve communication and support.

Trails Carolina is a nature-based therapy program located at 500 Winding Gap Road in Lake Toxaway, North Carolina. The program helps adolescents, aged 10-17-years-old, work through behavioral or emotional difficulties, build trusting relationships with their family and peers, and achieve academic success. Founded in 2008, the program is licensed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and accredited by [The Association for Experiential Education](#), the [Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities](#) and [COGNIA](#) for academic excellence. For more information, visit <https://trailsnc.com/> or call 828-475-0218. Follow Trails Carolina on Facebook [@TrailsCarolina](#).

–end–

,