

arrampicAbile @

NPI

“setting out to conquer another



point of view”



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"We often forget that among the first living beings on our planet Earth we must consider trees, which colonized it making it suitable for our life. They are the ones who provided the first hominids and the first civilizations with tools, shelter, nourishment and energy. Unfortunately, they also pay the price of their immobility. Their permanence often leads us to think of them as inanimate objects, as a decoration of the landscape, and to forget that they have a life cycle, much stronger than ours, and very specific needs for survival. And that, like all of us, they must constantly face life's adversities. It can thus be affirmed that having contact with trees not only represents a fleeting pleasure, but even brings much more profound and lasting benefits. If simple bonding with trees has positive value, perhaps even therapeutic, we can only imagine what it can mean for a human being to come into direct contact with these giants. Climbing up a tree is a very intense experience, which touches and stirs many aspects of our deepest emotions. The experience of living even for brief moments on the powerful structure of a tree cannot help but make us reflect, give us positive sensations, perhaps make us temporarily happy. Being able to move around as a guest inside the leafy crowns of these giants is something new for everyone". (Renè,2013)

In the early 1980's the Coislha Cooperative was born with the aim of introducing both socially and into the working world people with mental health problems, as well as convicts in part-time detention. Gardening maintenance work has been the prevalent job, but in 2004 the cooperative decided to diversify activities with Tree Climbing.

The presence of Renè, Alberto, Nicola, Massimo, Gilberto...the special atmosphere of the School of Monza, sparked the passion for trees and for this fascinating discipline.

The division into parts of the phases, the symbolism of the materials and the peculiarity of the Tree Being, clearly suggested a particular psychomotor activity.

It was initially experimented with the teens of the Antares Day Center, and a Coop award (national Coop Adriatica supermarket) "C'entro anch'io" made it possible to extend the initiative to the local public schools, as a social integration project.

It is in this light and from this perspective that the not-so-casual meeting occurred between the arrampicabile project of the social cooperative COISLHA in Padua and the adolescents of the Childhood and Adolescent Neuropsychiatry ward of the Padua "ULSS 16" public hospital in 2009.

On the one hand, there was the desire to promote contact with trees, the necessary motor coordination for climbing, the challenge of the upward climb (elements which suggested to apply tree climbing in an educational and therapeutic setting). A desire to therefore broaden the experience of tree climbing from a mere working method to a play-recreational-rehabilitative activity suitable to everyone, especially people with disabilities, to whom is offered the possibility of trying an extraordinary activity to help them overcome rigidity. On the other, at the time there was a team working with adolescents with mental problems seeking laboratory opportunities where the participants could experiment new stimuli suitable to their particular disturbance, and to their age of development.

The semi-residential Service of Adolescent Psychopathology under the Complex Operating Unit of Childhood and Adolescent Neuropsychiatry of the ULSS16 of Padua was born in 2000 as an outpatient care, educational and rehabilitation center, geared towards boys and girls manifesting mental suffering and behavioral changes, even serious ones like changes in mood, suicide attempts, psychotic episodes, isolation, school/social phobia, eating disorders and the like, leading to the desertion of school, withdrawal from contact with peers, and their suffering often being lived in the family environment. Alongside the diagnostic and psychotherapeutic care, it was indeed considered important to offer these adolescents a structured system of pedagogical and rehabilitative assistance. Thanks to the project's flexibility in its clinical approach, the rapport with the family and the immediate social context, it succeeds in offering needed support. The main objectives of the service are to: optimize assistance and education towards adolescents in particular situations of mental difficulty, especially in the most critical moments; support the family in their educational role; create an integrated clinical and pedagogical project between services of different institutional levels and roles; improve the adolescent's social reintroduction in his/her life. The multidisciplinary team is made up of: 1 childhood neuropsychiatrist, 1 psychotherapeutic psychologist, 2 educators, 1 healthcare worker, 1 coordinator. The center cares for adolescents with varying types of medium-serious mental and behavioral disorders, males and females between the ages of 12 and 18 for a total of approximately 20 patients during the week, according to the individual's needs and schedule.



In the collective imagination climbing trees is a symbol of youth, adventure, play, testing of one's abilities, discovery of the natural world, escape (at least temporarily) from "earthly" problems. This experience is increasingly more difficult for those living in urban settings. In cities trees have become landscaping, they are merely seen - and not looked at - from the car or out the window. "In order to be understood, trees must be touched" (Shigo, 2009). And the best method for touching them is still that of tree climbing.

But let's return to 2009. Following the first reciprocally intriguing meeting, both parties began to think about what the objectives would be for writing up the project: promoting self-esteem, getting closer to nature - its charm and problems, stimulating intellectual and emotional growth, psycho-physical well-being, incentivizing the development of social relations and rules for living with others.



A strong point of convergence was found in the knot concept: to get to know knots, create one's own knot, to learn how to untie knots which symbolically represent the numerous difficulties that are a part of adolescence, from the primary need to build a solid and secure identity, to the need to loosen and untie parental ties in order

to be able to face the upward ascent to adulthood with one's own view and points of reference: terms and concepts that recall (not only semantically) the climb up a tree.



Another important aspect is the concept of limits, the space-time where one faces one's troubles and fears while being able to count on a protected dimension, where the guide is available to teach and direct, to show the best path and where one is "allowed" to try and go beyond the limits in safety and under control (let go) to experiment emotions and sensations otherwise difficult to come by. This dimension recalls the adolescent's need to put his/her body and mind to the test and expose himself/herself to risk which when addressed in the right direction, helps him/her to find those references necessary for building a solid identity.

Contact with nature, respect for the rules, concentration, measuring oneself against one's own abilities and competencies, being able to experiment new ways of understanding and observing the world only by ascending to 1 meter above ground, the fatigue (greatly feared element by the new generations): all these dimensions found space and time in the creation of this activity.

Proposing new stimuli to today's adolescents is no easy task: the right measure must be found, the right language without falling into traps of complicity and seduction. Moreover, if they are teenagers who filter a difficult, complicated reality of growing up through a psychopathological condition which risks to modify and distort their means for forming healthy relationships, the path becomes even more complicated.

Strong synergy was created between the climbers and educators, in such a way as to translate deliberate interventions and innate "technical" dimensions of this discipline into educational actions. The therapeutic value of tree climbing was likewise defined. It was specified as a rehabilitative activity, appropriate in abilities it develops and in proposals for the developmental age; a moment of discovery, adventure, and experience.

In these past 3 years of collaboration communication skills and involvement in the experience have been refined, with new elements being added in periodically (stories about trees and

their fundamental importance in the history of human evolution). A new video on the tree climbing experience has been created as well, developed with an expert in filming techniques. The response of the adolescents was quite positive: the adrenalin surge from being up high, overcoming one's limits and fears, experiencing new dimensions, having to trust the knot made by him/her. These were elements that characterized the experiences, including the sacrifices, moments of impasse won over with attention and empathy, the difficulty of sustaining the commitment with motivation and constancy. For most of the kids it was an occasion for defining themselves and rediscovering their strong points of autonomy and self-esteem upon which to grow and redefine themselves.

Now the collaborative work is continuing with the objective of examining the therapeutic/rehabilitative value of tree climbing in depth, in order to refine the proposal and make it more effective.

"With tree climbing, one enters into a primary mental state, focuses automatically on the present moment, forgetting all the rest. It is an occasion for reaching, and especially for conveying to those with whom we are sharing this experience, a state of tranquility and fluidity" (Renè, 2013).



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And they began to.....look at them, talk about them, climb them and plant them....

One tree at a time....naturally.

