



## Neal Christensen, Ph.D. - Clinical Director

Outback Therapeutic Expeditions | [nchristensen@outbacktreatment.com](mailto:nchristensen@outbacktreatment.com)



Neal comes from the Great Plains state of Kansas where he grew up and lived nearly his whole life. However, it was hard to keep him away from the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Neal became interested in the wilderness while taking a backpacking class in high school. Once he had the taste of the wild, he couldn't wait for his next opportunity to explore the grandeur of the western states. Coming to Utah was a natural fit for Neal with his ever-growing interest and passion for combining the wilderness with troubled youth. Neal's dream was realized when he teamed up with Outback in 2004.

Neal has worked with adolescents in venues ranging from urban psychiatric hospitals to outdoor challenge courses. He has been fascinated with adolescents' ability to endure significant hardships. He has found that kids have a fire inside that can be ignited to deal with life stressors and mental health problems. Neal finds troubled youth delightful to work with, and whom can make significant changes.

**Neal's counseling experiences has involved working with a wide developmental spectrum as well as a broad array of mental health issues.**

In addition to working with adolescents, Neal has worked with young adults in college struggling with issues such adjustment to independence, life and career decision making, and being away from home. While working with college students he assisted them with such interventions as meditation and deep breathing, study skills and time management, and career decision planning.

Neal has also worked extensively with adult men of persistent and severe mental illness, dealing with such disorders as Schizophrenia, Bi-polar Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and drug and alcohol addictions. This was where Neal came to find his interest in psychology and treatment of individuals struggling with significant social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive deficits. Neal found while working with adult men, though struggling with life and social issues such as work and relationships, they were willing to try new ways of doing things. Neal was honored to serve American combat and non-combat veterans at the Leavenworth KS, VA Medical Center.



The richness of Neal's counseling experiences has involved working with a wide developmental spectrum as well as a broad array of mental health issues including Asperger's, Learning Differences, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, psychotic disorders, mood and anxiety based disorders, and substance abuse/chemical dependency. He has utilized a multitude of therapeutic approaches to address these issues, and has great understanding of psychological assessment. Other areas in which he has had great success with are people who have experienced physical and sexual abuse, neglect of family and child service systems, divorce, and grief and bereavement, multicultural identity development, and sexual identity and orientation.

(over)



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His passion for the wilderness and experiential learning came from many years working on and managing challenge courses. He helped to establish 'best practices' to maintain a high quality program. He enjoyed training and developing course facilitators' technical skills and group facilitation skills. He himself has spent many hours employing his knowledge of strength based counseling and psychology while working with participants, from young to old, helping them to learn about themselves personally as well as group dynamics and communication skills.

In Neal's pursuit of his doctoral degree, he completed his dissertation at Outback. He evaluated the effectiveness of wilderness therapy on increasing hope and motivation, enhancing personal agency, and reducing behavioral and emotional symptomology. The study demonstrated positive outcomes and showed additional support for the use of wilderness therapy as an effective intervention to help troubled youth who struggle in traditional settings and other therapeutic treatments.

**One of Neal's greatest accomplishments was summiting the Matterhorn in Zermatt, Switzerland.**

Most importantly Neal enjoys spending time with his wife, Anissa, taking in quiet evenings, traveling to tropical destinations, and working in the yard. Anissa is an elementary and middle level school counselor for a local Utah school district. She works with identified at-risk students on a daily basis. She and Neal enjoy opportunities to connect about issues related to work and found this to be immensely rewarding in their relationship. Neal also enjoys ice climbing and snow boarding in the winter and hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing in the summer. One of his greatest accomplishments was summiting the Matterhorn in Zermatt, Switzerland. He aspires to climb in the higher elevations of the Himalayas and other tall peaks in the US and around the world.



***Outback's Wilderness Programs blend the best of the "ancient cultural systems" with the most effective and proven therapeutic processes. Your troubled teen will experience the highest standards of safety and therapy in the context of one of the most powerful settings for real change - the wilderness.***