The 8IATC received funding from the Australian Government.
Integrating Outdoor Experiential Interventions into the Child Protection Welfare Sector

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Our Operating Context

Berry Street is the largest non-Government provider of Out of Home Care in Victoria, providing residential care, foster care and kinship care services as well as mentoring and leaving care programs to some of the state’s most at risk youth.

The Berry Street Wilderness Program plays an important role in supporting young people in Out of Home Care and fills a unique need for engaging, positive and appropriate outdoor and shared group experiences that may be otherwise inaccessible to this cohort.
“Be bothered to be bothered.”
The Berry Street Wilderness Program

• Who we work with:
  • Participants are aged 13-16 years
  • Typically engaged in Out of Home Care
  • Have multiple and complex health, wellbeing and behavioural difficulties relating to early adversities, including trauma.

• What we do:
  • Expedition based journeys using hiking as the main intervention
  • Single day experiences
  • Long term follow up and reflective opportunities
Wilderness Program Intention

Presently the Wilderness Program works towards the following key objectives:

• Promote physical health (biological wellbeing) through physical activities, experience of self-care and a healthy lifestyle
• Enhance mental and emotional (psychological) wellbeing through experience of healthy challenge (eustress), recreation and personal development
• Strengthen capacity for positive social connection, support and recreation (social wellbeing) through participation in a healthy small group community, and
• Enhance holistic wellbeing through experiences of connection with and care for natural environments (ecological wellbeing)\(^1\)
## Journey Process for the Wilderness Program

### Before the journey
- Recruiting young people
- Identifying appropriate nominations
- Interviewing potential participants
- Selecting the group
- Preparing for the journey

### The journey
- Trek focused min of 8 days
- Some programs are split between a trek and paddle
- Some are trekking only

### After the journey
- Landing back from the journey
- Providing feedback and advocacy
- Keeping connected with participants
- 3 day reward camp
- 1 day reconnect day
- Follow up support
Wilderness Program Evaluation

In 2016 Berry Street engaged Adventure Works to undertake a program evaluation and literature review on the topic of outdoor adventure interventions with and for young people experiencing adversity.

In undertaking this evaluation Berry Street hoped to gain a better understanding of the program’s key components and their impact on its outcomes.
Evaluation Findings

Qualitative measures have revealed that positive memories generated through Wilderness Program experiences are significant to the young people for years afterwards, and even up to twenty years after their program experience.

Survey results indicate that participants felt they gained personal and social outcomes in most named areas as a result of the program, in particular:

- Confidence and self-worth
- Personal growth and development
- Social skills and relationship with others, and
- Communication and behaviours

\(^2\)
“When something is big and you think you can't do it, you still give it a go and you'll get there in the end. Or you'll get over the obstacle. Like most things in life, an obstacle in your way is something you can get over. Be bothered to be bothered, because you have to do it anyway.”
“Now, three years on, I still feel the benefits of the trip. I look at the photos of the beach and I feel happy”.
“I've gained more self-confidence, it seemed to build my internal character and resilience.”
“You wouldn’t think camping/hiking for two weeks changes you, but it does. The sense of adventure.”
“I tried to commit suicide last year and I couldn't do it. The program had started resilience and confidence within me. Really, I think it was the start of my character to be who I am. The knowledge of that stopped me.”
Literature Review

The literature review\(^3\) contributed to the formative evaluation of the Wilderness Program and presents a summary of research to support the development of the program model and practices.

It includes Australian and international literature on programs using outdoor group based adventures as an intervention for young people who have experienced adversity, including potential or known trauma.

It presents current knowledge on how OAI are being used with this target group around the world, and offers insights for other organisations seeking to support young people in similar ways.
Target Group

The focus of this report is on uses of OAI as an intervention for young people aged 13 to 18 who have experienced adversity, including trauma. The review of over 200 published papers found.
Literature Review Findings

Overall, the research evidence was overwhelmingly positive in relation to the benefits of using OAI with this target group, with cautionary notes and acknowledged potential for negative outcomes.

The literature supported the following key mechanisms of change within OAI:

- Experiential adventure
- Therapeutic frame
- Positive social connections
- Contact with nature
Empirical evidence and a recent meta-analysis provide strong evidence for significant positive participant outcomes in areas of mental, emotional, behavioural and social wellbeing; empirical evidence relating to positive change in other areas is promising.

Cautionary notes regarding specific program components and special considerations for this target group were evidenced.
In synthesising findings, it was found that OAI research evidence lined up well with the ethical principles developed by the Australian Association for Bush Adventure Therapy (AABAT), therefore AABAT’s ethical principles were used as a framework to organise a newly developed set of ‘evidence-informed OAI attributes’.

The evidence-informed attributes of safe and effective OAI include programs and practitioner approaches that are: Positive, Inclusive, Integrative, Collaborative, Voluntary, Readiness-based, Responsive, Holistic, Tailored, Flexible, Cultural, Reflexive and Responsible.
THE BOOK OF WISDOM

SHHH!
Contact us

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References


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