

# HUMAN



2021 IMPACT REPORT

# NATURE

“Nature itself is the best physician.”

Hippocrates

Acknowledgement of country.

We acknowledge and respect the Nyangbul people of the Bundjalung Nation - original people of the land on which we are based. We respectfully acknowledge the ancient cultural presence in the Australian landscape by First Nation people and their ongoing traditional and spiritual custodianship of the bush, rivers, lakes, beaches, marine areas and mountains that we venture into in our work.



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# Foreword.

## Reflections of our founder.



### Andy Hamilton.

When I look back on our journey I am awed by where we have arrived and what we are heading towards. From the initial vision of stepping outside the box to do things differently for the young people falling through the cracks and missing out on desperately needed support – to a thriving youth mental health charity that is profoundly changing the lives of struggling young people. Through offering this kind of support I have repeatedly witnessed the capacity for life trajectories, that are seemingly headed for tragedy, to shift to flourishing paths of healing and hope. I also have the privilege of remaining in contact with many of these now young adults, who tell me their stories of how Human Nature transformed their lives, and in many cases even saved their lives.

As you will see in this report, not only are we now providing support to a large group of young people across our region through multiple programs, we are also working very hard to consolidate our organisational structure and systems to ensure that we can meet the huge demand for our services from the many families that we are forced to turn down every day. We are all too well aware of the ever expanding youth mental health crisis, and the costs of that crisis to us all.

I am immensely grateful to the many fine folks and organisations who have walked with us on this journey. It’s heartwarming to reflect on the commitment and collective desire to change lives for the better that has carried us to this point.

Each have exemplified what it is to be driven to act from a profound sense of compassion and care, and each have given so much – be it through incredibly hard work and strong dedication to our young people, exceptional operational support, or wonderful generosity in providing the money and resources that allow us to do this important work.

Thank you.

## Our purpose.

**Human Nature exists to expertly support and empower young people to heal and thrive through deeper connection with themselves, with their peers, with nature and their community.**

Young people are at the heart of all that we do at Human Nature. Our innovative approach of using nature as our co-therapist in re-connecting disengaged and vulnerable young people with mental wellness is backed by research<sup>1</sup> and evidenced by the success of our programs. We apply these learnings to reflect and refine the services we offer young people.

## Our values.

### Inspired by nature

We believe **nature is essential** to our lives on this planet. We acknowledge that humanity is inseparable from nature. We have so much to learn and gain from understanding nature. Nature is always our inspiration.

### Positively challenging

We believe in **positively challenging the status quo** and finding new ways to give young people access to mental health services. We aim to change the system for the better and inspire the entire nations to evolve in new directions.

### Power in connection

We believe **people thrive when they’re connected** – to each other, to nature, to their role and purpose in the world. We are informed by, respect and nurture community connections.

### Feel the difference

We believe **people need to feel the difference we make**. Through our stories (and data) we demonstrate the impact and the change we create in everything we do.



# HUMAN NATURE.


## Our story.

Since 2015, Human Nature Adventure Therapy (Human Nature) has been dedicated to offering innovative, nature-based mental health interventions for young people. We are proud to offer mental health support in outdoor spaces, where young people demonstrate they feel more comfortable and open to reconnecting with themselves, their peers, their community and nature. This provides a solid start to the process of healing.


**Human Nature's unique suite of nature-connected programs are based on decades of lived experience, with trust and healthy relationships at the heart of what we do.**

We are excited to present this Impact Report to you, so you can see the strength and innovation of our programs and learn how your support improves the lives of young people.





**“This is a  
program that  
changes lives.  
Actually, it does  
more than that.  
It saves lives.”**



OUR  
AMBASSADOR

**Q. Why do you support  
Human Nature?**

**A.** *“It is young people who very often pay for the choices of their parents. So many are disadvantaged by circumstances out of their control. How does a young person flourish without a sense of a safe space? How do they reframe their traumas and use them to build the foundations of resilience and strength and connection rather than dysfunction and alienation?”*

*I am honoured to be the Ambassador for Human Nature, an extraordinary program that values the lived experiences of young people, and gives them frameworks to build lives with meaning and purpose.”*

## Mandy Nolan.

We are honoured to have Mandy Nolan as our ambassador. She is an accomplished comedian, author, MC, journalist, keynote speaker, humour therapist, activist, mother, political candidate and comedy instructor.



# Board Chair.



## Scott Beachley.

Over the last uniquely turbulent year, Human Nature has endured; indeed, it has grown, strengthened and demonstrated remarkable resilience. There is always more work to do but I want to pause for a moment of satisfaction for the good work done well, to show respect for the commitment of the team, and to express profound gratitude for the donors and volunteers that continue to make it all possible.

One can reflect that through the COVID-19 pandemic, locally / nationally / globally, we all as organisations, communities, families and individuals have endured extraordinary stress and disruption. There is no preparation for it and perhaps no end in sight. This period of time has unique potential for deep and enduring impact on the mental wellbeing of our young people (and the rest of us). Our evidence, if we need it at all, is in the acute and ever-increasing demand for Human Nature's services and support.

### **We will continue to adapt and evolve to meet these needs the best we can.**

A few months back I had the privilege to join a small group of staff and program participants in Human Nature's rebranding project. The success of this effort, beyond a cool new logo and colour palette, means we can better communicate who we are and why we matter to the collective young people, staff, donors and supporters and Northern Rivers community.

### **Through a powerful and intense discovery process, we were connected with our core purpose of Transformational Alliance and heroed the term, 'Where challenge meets change'.**

This is what we're about – not solely in sharing the journey of young people who connect with us, but in the way we do business and confront risk, adversity and opportunity in a constantly changing environment.

The rebranding experience ran parallel to the later phases of Project Evolve, led by board director Brenda Wraight who stepped in as Managing Director for nearly 12 months to do the deep work required. Evolve was designed and delivered to build a resilient and agile organisation. We've successfully scaled up with a clear purpose, adaptive organisational structure, a broader suite of robust and resilient programs, the right staff to deliver them and a new Clinical Governance Council to guide the therapeutic team. Brenda's grace, compassion and determination saw Human Nature through immense change and successfully positioned us to anoint our first CEO to lead the next phase.

After an extensive search Sharyn White joined Human Nature on the path early in 2021. In a few short months as CEO Sharyn has earned the faith of the team and board, moved the headquarters to our awesome new Ballina home, encouraged holistic growth and maximum impact while keeping an eye on the bottom line. The organisation is in good hands to ensure we step into an unknown future from a solid footing.

### **None of what has occurred in Human Nature's last 12 months would be possible without the generous commitment of our many donors, large and small.**

This support enables us to deliver programs, reach more young people and build a sustainable organisation well-positioned for a successful future. But we're not done yet.

It is clear that regardless of Human Nature's growth the demand for the services we offer continues to grow at a rate greater than we can match – despite our best efforts. There will always be youth in need that are underserved, whether in the Northern Rivers area or anywhere else. The need outstrips our scale and pace – it's a fact and a challenge we face daily. Our innovative program delivery, our increased efficiency, our fresh and focussed leadership, our amazing therapeutic staff and the time they dedicate to young people will always be constrained by what is possible, less than what is necessary. Even the most generous funding we so gratefully receive is finite – it makes it possible to do so much, and so much more than before, yet still we can only do so much. This is in no way a failing, it is an opportunity for courage and leadership. We can all do more to serve these young people.

I wish to close by thanking our donors, volunteers, advisors, staff, board and of course the young people with whom we work. This is the community that makes Human Nature what it is, and what it can be.



# Our board of directors.

Human Nature is governed by a highly skilled board of Directors, who are six professionals who provide governance, leadership, business and financial expertise to strengthen and steer the organisation:

**Scott Beachley**  
CHAIR

**Brenda Wraight**  
DEPUTY CHAIR

**John Akehurst**  
DIRECTOR

**Hugo Hayes**  
DIRECTOR

**Sandi Middleton**  
DIRECTOR

**Troy Mason**  
DIRECTOR

**Stephen Grant**  
DIRECTOR

In the past year Lea Schodel (Treasurer), Peter Clark and Andy Hamilton retired from the Board. Their contribution has been greatly appreciated.

# Advisory groups.

Human Nature is also supported by the newly established Clinical Governance Council, and the Youth Leadership Committee.

The purpose of the Clinical Governance Council is to provide independent, considered and objective specialist clinical governance and therapeutic advice and expertise, thought leadership, and recommendations to the Human Nature Board of Directors and management. It addresses the need for appropriate organisation wide clinical and therapeutic governance for Human Nature’s service related activities.

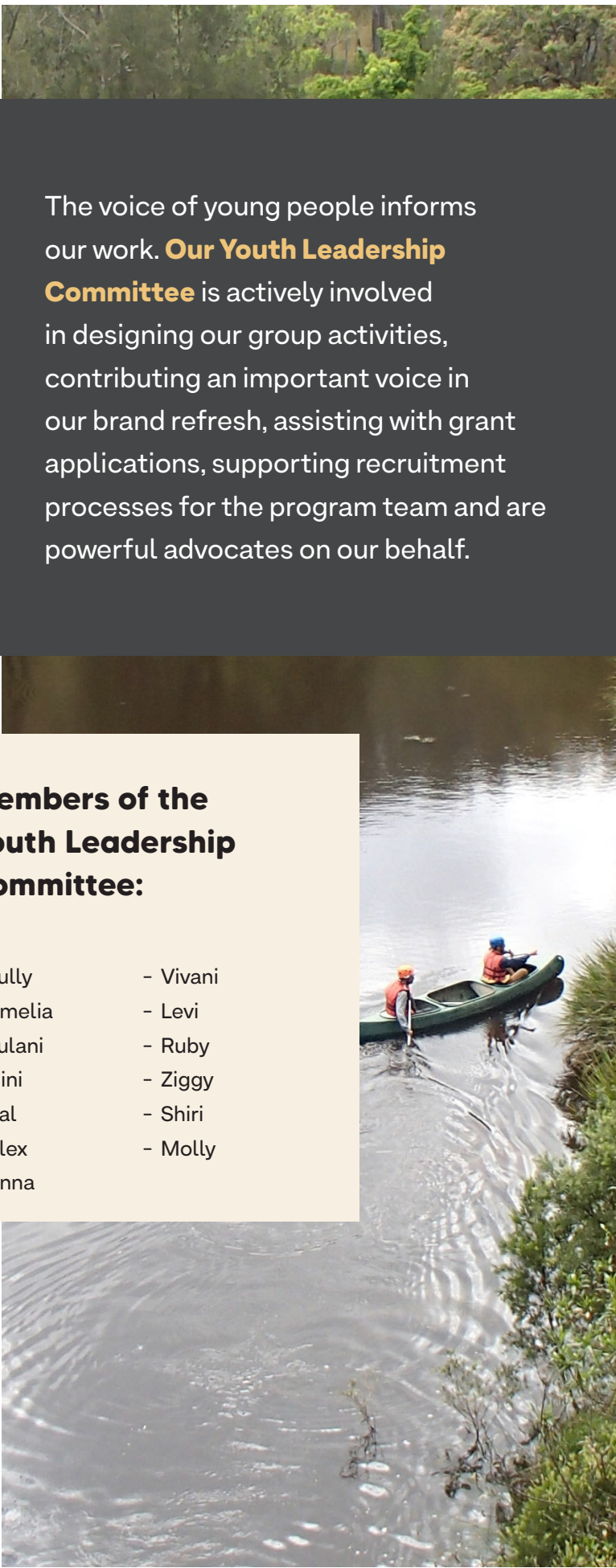
The voice of young people informs our work. **Our Youth Leadership Committee** is actively involved in designing our group activities, contributing an important voice in our brand refresh, assisting with grant applications, supporting recruitment processes for the program team and are powerful advocates on our behalf.

## Members of the Clinical Governance Council:

- Brenda Wraight
- Andy Hamilton
- Dr Carlie Atkinson
- Dr Richard Lakeman
- Samantha James
- Sharnie Roberts
- Dr Will Dobud

## Members of the Youth Leadership Committee:

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| - Tully  | - Vivani |
| - Amelia | - Levi   |
| - Lulani | - Ruby   |
| - Nini   | - Ziggy  |
| - Kal    | - Shiri  |
| - Alex   | - Molly  |
| - Anna   |          |





# The humans of Human Nature.

In March 2021, we welcomed our inaugural CEO - Sharyn White. Sharyn brings significant health sector management experience and a passion for improving the health and wellbeing of the community.

## Sharyn White, Chief Executive Officer.

### What attracted you to take on this leadership role with Human Nature?

I joined Human Nature in March 2021 with a commitment to quality health service delivery and the knowledge that the prevalent models of mental health care are failing young people and their families. What I found was an organisation that meets challenges head on, is not afraid to do things differently and that always puts young people at the heart of the work. I have been struck by the humans of Human Nature, an extraordinary group of staff, Board members and donors all sharing a singular commitment to supporting young people.



### Why are donors so important to an organisation like Human Nature?

After a career working in the government funded health system, I am acutely aware of the rules and limitations that accompany government funding. This inherent rigidity stifles innovation and limits the support that can be provided to individuals. With the generous support of donors and grant providers, Human Nature delivers something fundamentally different. A suite of programs that can respond flexibly to the unique needs of each individual and remains for the long term, a constant presence along their whole journey of change.

### What are the key messages you'd like to convey through this Impact Report?

This Impact Report tells a story of agility and hope. Human Nature now reaches more young people than ever before. While COVID-19 restrictions impacted our signature Recre8 program, meaning only one expedition was offered, resources were redeployed. The Activ8 program, which offers one-on-one therapeutic care, grew by 190% in 2020/21. The Elev8 program also doubled in size.

**"This increase in reach should be celebrated, but it is sobering to acknowledge that each week we still turn people away because there is not the capacity to help all who would benefit from the way we work with young people."**

Demand is expected to grow further as Human Nature becomes more visible in the community and the impact of years of uncertainty related to COVID-19 is fully realised. We are buoyed by the words of hope from the young people who we work with and aim to reach many new young people in the coming year.

### What changes have you seen in your first four months?

Over the past year, Human Nature has rapidly grown and evolved from a small grassroots organisation to a fully fledged youth mental health service. As a medium sized charity, it is now critical that our systems provide solid foundations for future growth. Lots of my attention has been shoring up the work already started to ensure this.

With the help of one of our major donors, Lisa Joel, we were able to move to new premises in Ballina, and now have a space that welcomes young people and offers new ways of engaging them in therapeutic processes. In May we refreshed our brand, which is another important step in positioning the organisation as a youth friendly space whilst also signalling that Human Nature is a serious member of the service and community landscape.

### Who led the organisation prior to you taking on the CEO role?

Human Nature started as a founder led organisation, under Andy Hamilton. It is his commitment to doing better for young people

that led to the birth of Human Nature and underpins the model of care today.

I am also grateful to Brenda Wraight who served as Managing Director prior to my appointment. Brenda provided leadership to the organisation through a challenging time and, together with Andy, the Board and staff, used COVID-19 challenges as a catalyst to evolve Human Nature. Under Brenda's leadership, Project Evolve strengthened the organisation, laid the foundations for a wonderful Clinical Governance Council and poised Human Nature for my arrival and further transformation.

### Is there anything else you would like to add?

Human Nature is certainly an organisation where challenge meets change. Thank you to all of our supporters who make this work possible. Without you there would be no Human Nature and nowhere for these young people to turn when they need help to find their own human nature.

**"True compassion means not only feeling another's pain but also being moved to help relieve it."**

Daniel Goleman



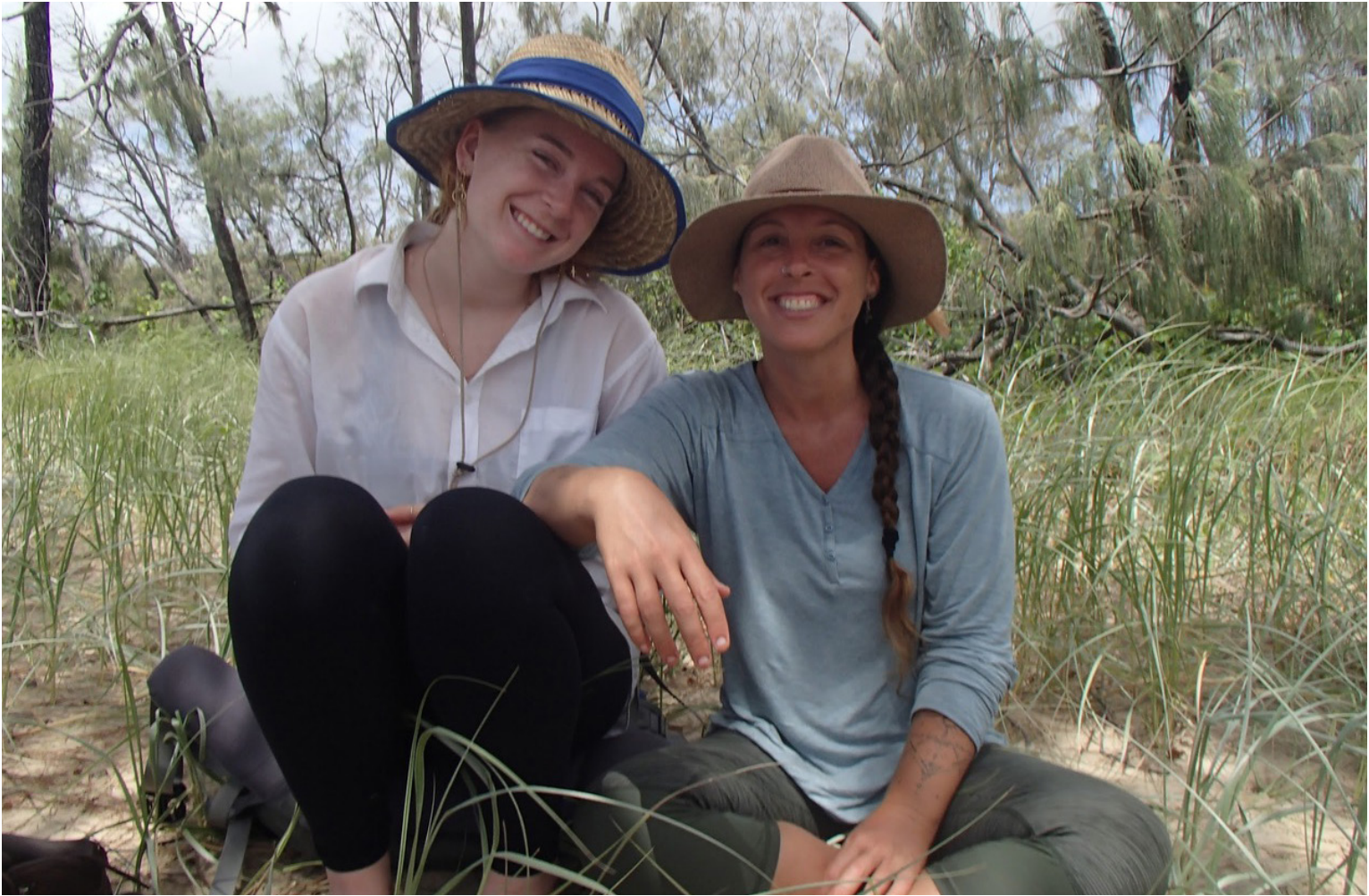


# It takes a team.

The **expertise, responsiveness, compassion and wisdom** of our team is at the heart of Human Nature’s success. We have built a strong therapeutic team of qualified and experienced psychologists, therapeutic mentors and social workers who are passionate to implement the innovative services offered by Human Nature. They provide evidence-based and consistent care to the young people in our programs. For many young people, their connection with our staff represents their first relationship with a supportive adult.

Our skilled and efficient administrative team is equally strong, ensuring our organisation is well supported, professional and highly effective.

- Sharyn White, Chief Executive Officer
- Andy Hamilton, Therapeutic Lead & Founder, Psychologist
- Joy Barber Hua, Head of Marketing & Engagement
- Jen Parke, Programs Manager
- Lia Hibner, Adventure Therapist, Clinical Psychologist
- Monique Vanderham, Adventure Therapist, Clinical Psychologist
- Jack Chiu, Adventure Therapist, Psychologist
- Azriel Reshel, Adventure Therapist, Social Worker
- Dusty McOnie, Therapeutic Mentor
- Sally McAdam, Therapeutic Mentor
- Suzy Tieman, Operations Coordinator
- Sabrina David, Impact Officer



In the past year we said goodbye to Deb Samuels (Head of Fundraising and Engagement) and Josie Kelly (Operations Manager). Deb and Josie both made significant contributions to the evolution of Human Nature and we wish them well on their future adventures.





# From the heart of our therapists.



## Monique Vanderham, Adventure Therapist.

(Clinical Psychologist)

### What is a key difference in how Human Nature operates, when compared to similar organisations?

A significant point of difference is that Human Nature invests in skilled clinicians. All Adventure Therapists are qualified as either Psychologists or Social Workers. Our clinical knowledge is applied in the relaxed setting of nature, in a safe and trauma informed way. Young people have control over what they want to do and where they want to do it for the sessions, which is 'person-centred care' ... but doubled down!

### What can young people expect during the one-on-one sessions you run?

All aspects of the sessions are trauma informed, which means we work hard to make sure that young people feel safe and have as much control as is appropriate over the sessions. For example, if a young person is experiencing social anxiety and can't go to school, we offer to meet them at their house, or somewhere else they find comfortable. We know that achieving outcomes for our young people through one-on-one sessions is a marathon, not a sprint. We are guided by what the young person needs.

### Could you give us a sense of how mental health support and nature work together through the Recre8 program?

In all our programs we take our skills as clinicians into the outdoors. In the Recre8 program we facilitate experiences for young people where they might, for example, encounter challenges and require some skills of resilience, determination, self-reliance and capacity to socialise and problem-solve with others. These are also core skills that we need in everyday life. As therapists, we support and guide young people to meet these challenges and work through them. During the ten day expedition, we are beside the young people literally and figuratively as issues arise, finding new ways to respond to challenge. We provide trauma informed support, using their experience in nature safely and therapeutically.

### "Nature provides endless learning opportunities. We use the natural world to safely and respectfully create moments of supported problem solving."

In partnership with outdoor recreation experts, we intentionally plan the arc of the expedition to gradually introduce challenges that are

balanced by support, consolidation of learning and playfulness.

### Many young people disengage from mental health care - what is the risk associated with this?

Disengagement means that young people stop replying to texts and calls. They may be uncomfortable telling their therapist that therapy is hard for them, or they don't want to see that therapist any more, or they are not ready for a particular challenge yet.

There is a high rate of young people disengaging from more traditional mental health care for a number of reasons, and many services miss the opportunity of disengagement as the learning opportunity that it is. Young people may be disengaging because their life is overwhelming and they can't see how they can fit sessions in.

Young people's brains haven't fully developed the capacity for problem solving, so pulling back when they most need our support can result in the same behaviours that had them referred to Human Nature in the first place, such as harmful substance use, unhealthy relationships, self-harm and suicidality.

### How does Human Nature maintain such high levels of engagement?

There is a high rate of engagement at Human Nature because young people are supported when they show signs of disengaging. Essential discussions that we have with young people at this time inform the ongoing support we provide. We also acknowledge and accept that not all therapists are suited to all young people. We have a range of therapists which increases the chance of finding a good fit with a young person, which is essential for effective therapy to take place. We check in with young people, and model how to receive feedback. We support

their decisions which can be very powerful in itself. In addition, young people remain in our programs because we provide a service that uniquely responds to their needs.

Human Nature is the last option of support for many young people. It is important that we remember the challenges they might have had, trying to engage with traditional systems that aren't set up for them. They've fallen through the cracks and we are their safety net.

**"Young people often show signs of disengaging from care at the time they need it most. At Human Nature we understand this and adapt our support to meet the changing needs of young people. There is too much at stake to let them disengage in an unsupported and uninformed way."**



“That feeling you get when a client reaches out for help and you know you have a **deep, connected, genuine and wonderful bond** with them is all the more special given most of our clients’ (understandable) deep attachment issues and mistrust of adults.”

## Azriel Reshel, Adventure Therapist.

(Social Worker)

Supporting young people who have had little support from parents or family members is one of the most rewarding parts of my role. I see first hand the incredible difference this makes in their lives. It could be something as simple as attending a school support meeting with a young person, or going to a TAFE or Centrelink meeting with them. Although it sounds simple, it takes commitment and hard work to get to this point of trust. It is highly beneficial and has massive practical and therapeutic outcomes for our clients.

Part of the program I particularly enjoy is engaging with Indigenous families. Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people I work with have experienced very challenging

circumstances and as a result have high and complex needs. We have built up lovely relationships with the families and really value their trust and engagement with myself and our service. Our ability to engage young people and their families speaks to the reputation, quality and consistency of our service. We acknowledge that many Indigenous young people and their families find it difficult to engage with services due to fear and mistrust. We are proud to meet these clients where they are and take the time to build strong relationships.

I am grateful for the opportunity to observe daily wonders when I work in nature with some incredible young people.





## Dusty McOnie, Therapeutic Mentor.

It is a privilege to walk on a journey of healing with the young people that engage with Human Nature. The regular outdoor experiences we share involve personal exchanges that link memory creation with profound therapeutic narrative. There is a deep sharing between the participant and the therapist, where both are required to turn up consistently and be present. There is a deep honesty and a sense that both are on a genuine journey together.

When we turn up to appointments with warm clothes, healthy food, a backpack full of outdoor gear, and ask 'what do you feel like doing?', young people soon feel a sense of agency and liberation and begin to lean into the session. Any scepticism is soon replaced with trust and healing. This type of mental health support is individualised, meets young people where they are and prioritises their input.

Holding therapeutic sessions in nature helps to solidify and build upon healing. It's as though young people walk their learnings into reality, through consistent support, appropriate challenges and responsive care. We go far beyond theoretical learnings.



The way we work supports a cumulative experience of change through challenge over time. Our therapeutic team recognises this growth and healing journey and I believe so do the participants. As they do so, they start to step up to things that are confronting, they find their voice about how things are going for them and with courage start to take actions that better support themselves.

**"Our sessions are holistic, genuine and immersive. Both the mentors and the young person show up authentically, and work to expand the young person's confidence and comfort zone. All the young people I'm working with show up for sessions time after time because of that, and because we mentor in a genuine way, are interested in them and in their struggles and have the expertise to support them."**







114 young people's lives changed during 2020/21.

## We're proud of our achievements.

We have much to be proud of over the last year, from continuing to deliver high quality services during a global pandemic, to scaling up and ensuring we are a resilient and agile organisation.

—  
In 2020/21 we welcomed 58 new young people into our service and at 30 June 2021 we were actively working with 96 clients.

### Engagement.

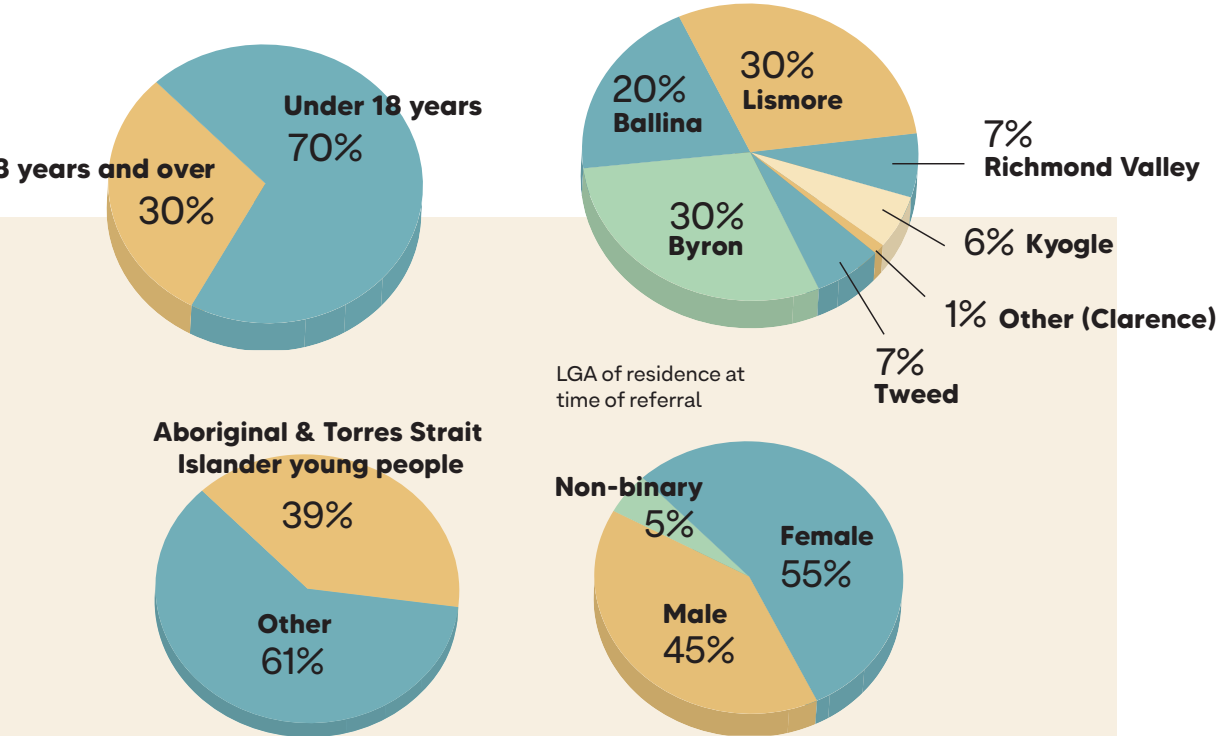
We provided thousands of hours of therapeutic care to these young people through our Recre8, Elev8 and Activ8 programs (see pages 30-35 for a description of these).

The engagement rate in our programs is very high - from 58 referrals, only three young people didn't choose to work with us. Once they are part of our programs, young people continue to turn up. Understanding the high level of disengagement that is pervasive in similar services, we work hard with our young people to maintain the level and nature of support required.



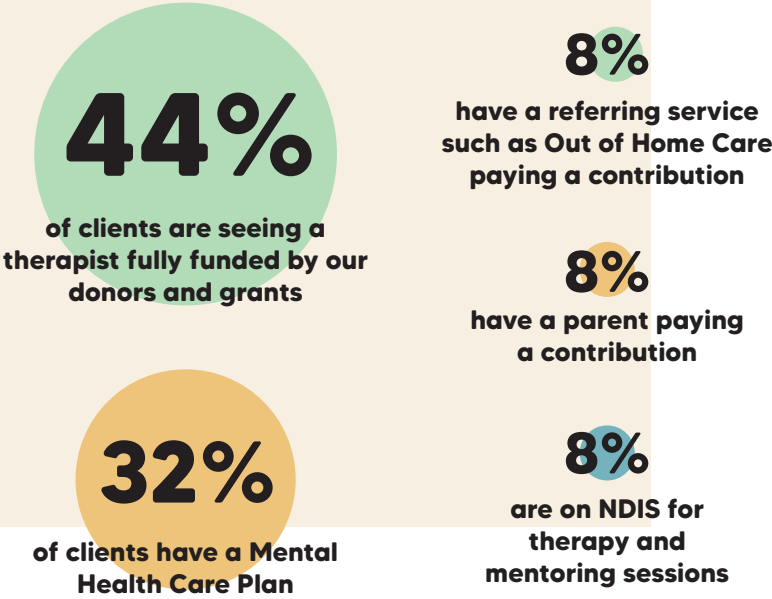
# Who accessed our services?

The charts below provide a snapshot of the young people who accessed our service over the last year and where they came from.



## Our annual outreach.

58 young people = \$1.4million of therapeutic mental health services

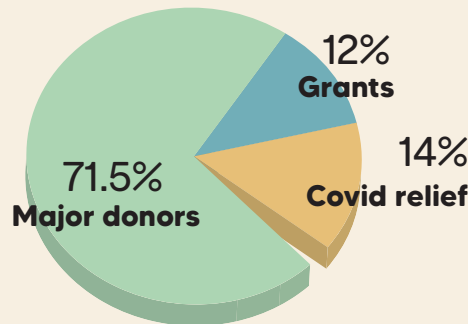


# Financial snapshot.

## Revenue

Our ability to provide services to young people depends primarily on donations. Last year, 71.5% of our budget was funded by major donors and a further 12% was provided by grants. Without the support of our donors and grant makers, there would be no Human Nature.

We are also grateful for the financial support provided by the Government as part of its COVID-19 relief package. This ensured we could operate during lockdown, and comprised 14% of our overall revenue.



# Our donors.

Thank you to the following individuals and organisations that have provided vital support over the past year, enabling Human Nature to help young people overcome adversity and thrive:

- Lisa Joel
- Belinda Seaton
- Flannery Foundation
- Seaton Foundation
- Aledal Foundation
- Foundation for Young Australians
- Hodges House
- George Lewin Foundation

“Our Flannery Foundation has been committed to supporting Human Nature since its inception and will continue to do so. We believe in the wonderful work they do with young people who have mental health issues. The fact that they are taken into nature on an empowering adventure experience is having such positive outcomes for our young people. The amazing experienced team is inspirational and well deserving of our continued support.”

Peggy Flannery, Flannery Foundation



# Grants received.

Thank you to the following organisations that have provided valuable grant funding to support our work:



# We thank you!

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to supporting and empowering young people over the past year. Your donations have made a genuine, meaningful and long-lasting impact on the lives of many young people who may have otherwise fallen through the cracks of the mental health support system. Your kindness and generosity has transformed lives, and has a positive impact that extends far beyond the individual young people that Human Nature serves.

The success of Human Nature is a collaborative effort, and we thank all our individual donors, corporate donors, anonymous donors and funding organisations for enabling us to continue to provide these essential programs.

# Expenses.

The people of Human Nature are our greatest resource and biggest expense. Almost three quarters of our annual expenditure is for the people who deliver our extraordinary services. This includes the thousands of hours of therapeutic care and mentoring provided by our staff, which is our core business.

The cost of materials and experiences that aid the work of our therapeutic team in adventure based therapy work comprised 15% of our annual expenditure. 11% of our expenditure over the last year went towards business management costs including fundraising and renting our office space.

# Our programs.

We offer a range of innovative nature-based programs that help young people access person-centred and trauma informed mental health support. With nature as our co-therapist, we observe powerful healing and reconnection that has wide reaching benefits:

**“... with longitudinal studies, as well as natural and controlled experiments, nature experience has been shown to positively affect various aspects of cognitive function, memory and attention, impulse inhibition, and children’s school performance, as well as imagination and creativity.”<sup>2</sup>**



# Recre8.

This is our signature three month adventure therapy program with a ten day therapeutic expedition as the focus. It provides a minimum of 150 hours of therapeutic support for each young person.

The Recre8 program has been changing lives through innovative adventure therapy for well over a decade. The expedition provides an unmatched opportunity to build therapeutic alliances and begin deep transformation for young people who are really struggling, followed by in-depth therapeutic support on their return.

“When young people experience true and genuine joy and laughter, they cannot be simultaneously dysregulated.”

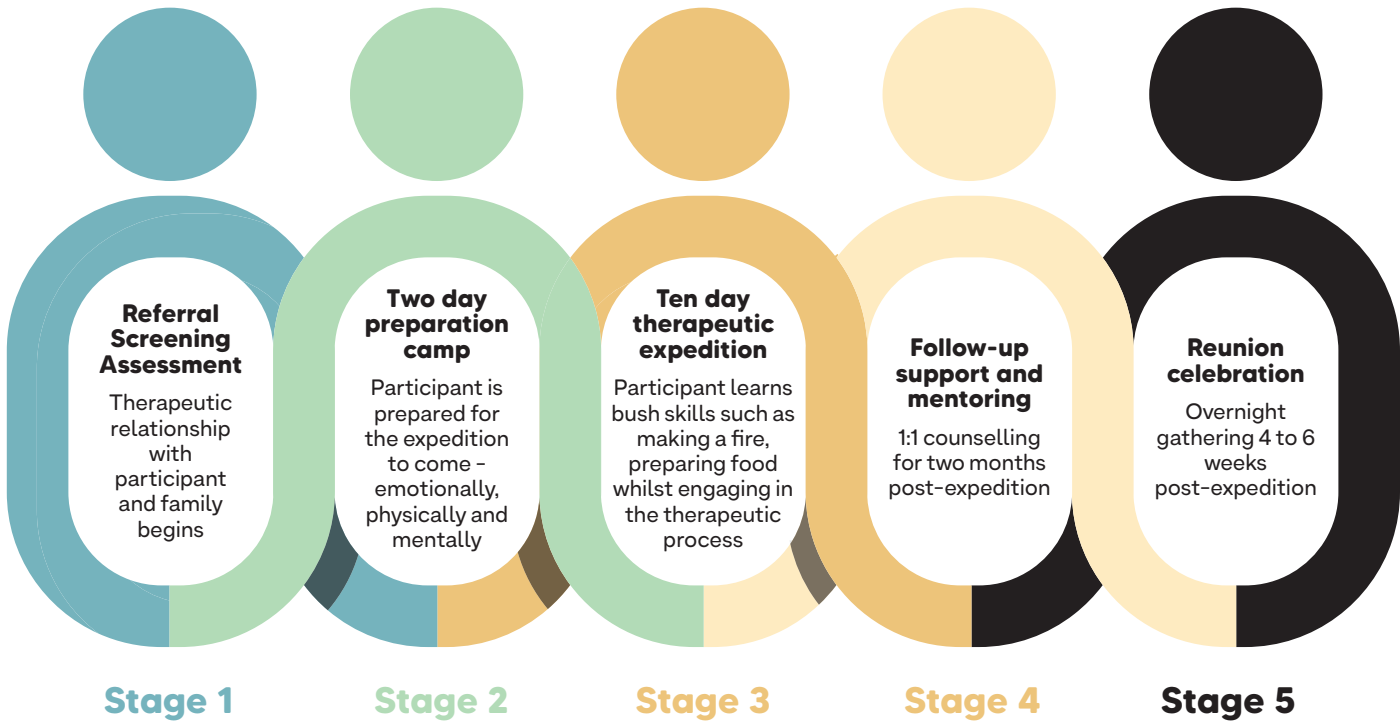
Monique Vanderham,  
Adventure Therapist  
(Clinical Psychologist)

“My relationship with nature has been largely impacted by Recre8. Before the expedition I took my surroundings for granted and didn’t take opportunities to be thankful for the AMAZING place we call home. I’ve learnt how to come back to centre using nature, even if that is just standing outside and waiting for my feelings to pass.”

Recre8 participant

“At the prep camp on the second day we went bush bashing to get to a beach ... this was very unexpected, it instantly showed me that it was no ordinary camp, allowing us to take on responsibility, indulge in curiosity and adventure whilst being trusted in finding our own path. There was no right or wrong way! In hindsight ... stepping out of the box of conventional therapy, reinventing what a client therapist relationship looks like. It is very liberating yet challenging in its own way!”

Recre8 participant



## Key stages of the Recre8 program.

We have developed a suite of programs to wrap around young people and complement the Recre8 program, creating opportunities to reach many more young people through diverse and resilient offerings that meet them wherever they are in their healing, growth and wellbeing.





# Sam's Recre8 journey.

Sam\* had a particularly difficult time joining the Recre8 program. They had tried to participate a year before, but life was too chaotic and messy to be able to commit. This time – even though they were still spiralling on a path of addiction and self-destructive behaviours – they had made up their mind that it was time, and nothing was going to stop them. They were doing their HSC this year, and knew that unless they made some drastic changes they were not going to be able to follow their dreams ... sometimes it even felt like they weren't going to make it through the week.

They missed several of the preparation sessions with the therapeutic team, but the team persisted and managed to get them ready with the basics to attend the Preparation Camp. Despite attempts to cut back on their daily drug and alcohol use beforehand, the camp was the first time they had been sober for more than a day or two for as long as they could remember. It was hard – a lot of stuff came up, and they 'lost it' more than a few times – but with support from the team and the other young people they made it through, more determined than ever to do what it takes to heal and change direction.

Of course it wasn't so easy, and by the time the expedition came around things had gotten even messier. The withdrawals over the first few days were intense, but being deeply immersed in nature, having good caring support and being on a busy and adventurous expedition helped this stage a lot. As the cravings and physical pain started to slowly ease, something else emerged – the feelings and memories of long buried, but never forgotten, old wounds – the 'skeletons in the closet' that they had been running from for so long. They were always there, always haunting, and for all their hard work trying to escape and obliterate these painful emotions (leaving a trail of destruction along the way), they had never relented. But now here they were, and whilst sometimes it felt unbearable, they finally had the

support they needed to navigate this treacherous internal terrain – terrain that made the arduous hiking expedition going on in parallel, feel like a breeze! Witnessed and supported by the ocean, the trees, the animals, the stars, the fire, the therapists and their peers, they day-by-day, night-by-night shed layers of old turmoil, absorbed hope and found strength. They would no longer be defined by the abuse they had endured as a child. They had had enough of those old tools of escape that had somehow helped them to survive, but at the same time had stripped them of life, of light, of integrity, and of dreams.

Now it was time to pick up new tools, and as they embarked on the sailing section of the expedition their focus was on practicing self-regulating – navigating the tumultuous seas of their inner world learning to stay present during the waves of agonising emotion, riding the ripples of hurt inflicted over the years. Learning to find stillness and stay present in the calm after the storms, where before the mirror of the motionless ocean can soothe the soul one must learn to accept, forgive and love what is reflected from within. And last but not least, learning to channel the winds for change to make best use of what the elements bestow to navigate life's challenges and chart a steady course towards healing and growth.

Sam emerged from the Recre8 expedition feeling vulnerable but strong, apprehensive yet optimistic, and most importantly unwaveringly committed to not only their own healing path, but to a life dedicated to supporting others emerging from the shackles of childhood trauma to flourish. Sam came into themselves and realised for the first time how life can really be away from what's in front of you and what you're given in childhood. Sam now continues with their life away from addiction, and instead has found their artistic nature with guitar and poetry. They continue their therapeutic journey with Human Nature through regular Activ8 sessions as they traverse ongoing family challenges and the trials and tribulations of life in the lead up to their final HSC exams.

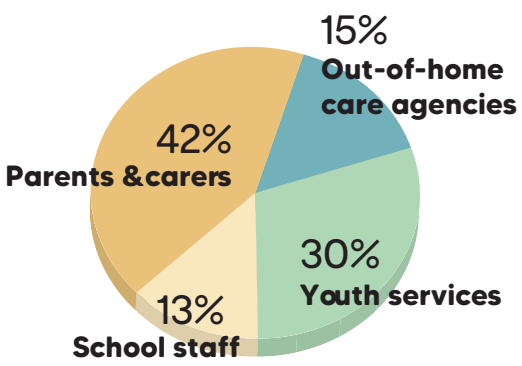
\*name changed.

# Activ8.

Activ8 is an outreach, therapeutic service of individual and small group sessions between a young person and a team comprising a Psychologist and Therapeutic mentor. This program provides access care for young people who find a clinical indoor therapy room encounter too uncomfortable.

We launched Activ8 in October 2020. Priority was given to the 12 young men who returned from Recre8 that month and needed more ongoing support to process their trauma and integrate their Recre8 experience. Referrals steadily flowed and the service has now worked with 58 young people.

The sources of referrals are from:





# Elev8.

For young people who have already participated in our programs, the Elev8 Program offers an opportunity to stay connected with Human Nature and remain supported through new challenges that can emerge during their mental health journey.

Through collaboration with the eight young people from our Youth Leadership Committee, we receive feedback and suggestions which actively inform our program design and implementation. With a focus on youth leadership, skill-development and increased confidence, participants engage in challenging but rewarding recreational activities such as horse-riding or bush survival workshops, within a supportive and encouraging environment and alongside a familiar team of Therapeutic Mentors and Social Workers.

## Elev8 also supports young people to take the next steps in their lives.

Two Elev8 participants were also supported by Human Nature to attend Trauma Informed Adventure Therapy Training sessions with our staff to further their careers in this field.

Another way the Elev8 program supports young people is through The Brenda Wraight Women's Empowerment Scholarship which was awarded for the first time in 2021.. Four young women from the Elev8 program applied and were recipients of the inaugural scholarship. They were funded for practical supports such as a laptop for year 12, transport support and training in hospitality to increase financial independence, a well designed chair for university study, and training in youth mental health first aid to support a career as a youth worker.

## Some of the activities our young people have enjoyed over the last year:



3 day Storytelling Workshop



Bush Survival Skills day



Warrior Women self defence workshops



8 week Waves of Wellness Therapeutic Surfing program



Ebike riding in national parks



Forest and beach horse riding



Peer Suicide prevention training

**“I’ve realised that I need to continue looking out for my mental health, and I’ve found that I’m not alone, that I can talk to others if I need it.”**

**Elev8 participant, workshop feedback**

**“I’m happier, and I have more energy and confidence about telling my story.”**

**“I’ve realised that I need to continue looking out for my mental health, and I’ve found that I’m not alone, that I can talk to others if I need to.”**

**“I am able to speak more vulnerably to others and can see the benefits of that, as well as being in nature with friends.”**



# Journey of a young person.

## Leela.

Leela is a 15 year old Aboriginal girl who was referred to Human Nature by her mother as a last resort after disengaging from traditional mental health care. She had suffered complex trauma which contributed to self-harming behaviour, suicidal ideation, anxiety, cannabis addiction, low school attendance and struggles with family relationships. Leela's life was at risk and she was running out of options.

### One-on-one therapy sessions

We welcomed Leela into the Activ8 program where she saw a Psychologist weekly for three months. During their sessions, Leela and her Psychologist worked together in a variety of environments, changing routines to respond to Leela's needs and wishes.

Over time, Leela's emotional awareness and regulation improved, along with her analytical and social skills such as boundary setting and assertive communication. Her level of self-validation, self-acceptance, self-compassion and self-esteem all grew as she learned skills to recover from, and live with, her history of trauma.

### Family mediation and Recre8

In addition to the one-on-one sessions, we helped Leela participate in family mediation sessions to learn how to advocate for her needs in the family. She also participated in the Recre8 program, where she worked with her Psychologist and a Therapeutic Mentor alternately each fortnight for three months. As her mental health and coping strategies improved, she saw the Psychologist monthly for a check-in and continued to receive support from the mentor fortnightly for another two months.

### From surviving to thriving

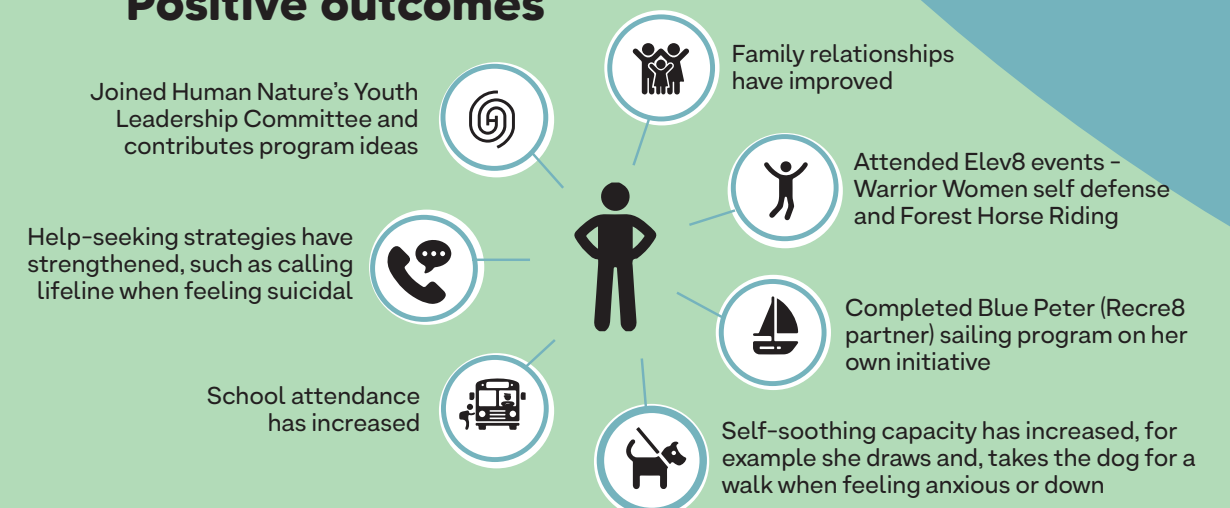
Today, Leela attends groups and activities through the Elev8 program, where she continues to work on development opportunities with the support of the team at Human Nature. Accessing mental health support that responded to her needs has enabled Leela to develop strategies to overcome the trauma that was putting her life at risk. The benefits of the hard work that Leela put in are far reaching, impacting her now and into the future, and extending to her family unit, her local community, her school and employment opportunities.

We are **proud of Leela, and thankful to our donors** who have provided the funds that have enabled her to access the support she required to overcome the result of complex trauma. The impact of these donations will continue to be felt for the rest of Leela's life.

## Leela's Journey.



### Positive outcomes





# Feel the difference.

## Leela felt the difference by working with Human Nature.

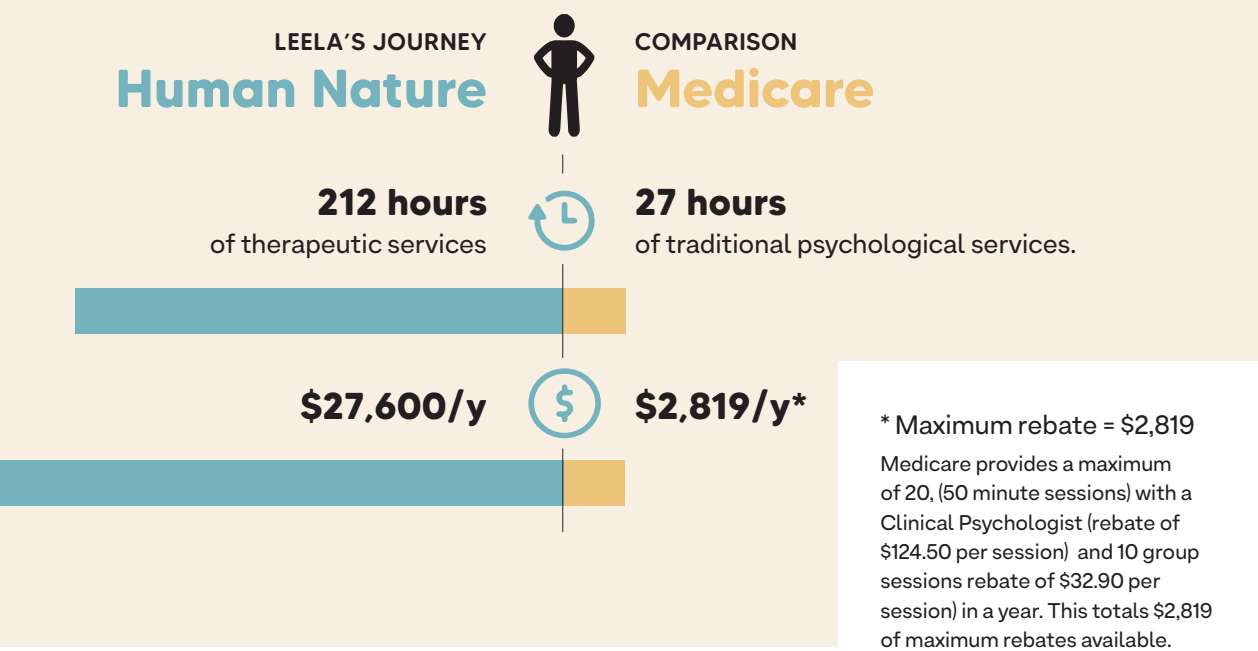
Leela accessed around 212 hours of therapeutic services from Human Nature during 2020/21. Without Human Nature, Leela would only have been able to access a maximum of 27 hours of traditional psychological services funded by Medicare via a mental health care plan.

This would have attracted a maximum rebate of **\$2,819**. and, it is likely that Leela would have had significant out-of-pocket costs which makes this option untenable for many young people like her.

Even if she had been able to find a Psychologist who worked for the bulk billing rate, the cost of the 212 hours of therapy that Leela received from Human Nature would be **\$27,600** for the year.

**Human Nature makes sure it uses Medicare whenever possible to offset the cost of the service, and Philanthropists step in to fund the difference - which in Leila's case would be \$24,800.**

With the support of funding provided by our donors, Human Nature was able to work with 58 young people with needs just like Leila's, providing an estimated **\$1.4 million** worth of therapeutic mental health services.



## Cost is never a barrier!

To access traditional psychological care, there is almost always a significant out-of-pocket expense, particularly when the level of support required exceeds the number of sessions funded by Medicare. When young people access services with Human Nature, cost is not a barrier. They receive a tailored and effective service with out-of-pocket expenses matching what they can afford to contribute.

# What connecting with Human Nature means to me.

## Vivani.

Going on the Recre8 expedition as a 15 year old in 2018 was my first experience of a Human Nature program and it changed my life. It was a turning point that helped me realise I could leave an unsafe home, start to deal with the trauma I had experienced and grow in a consistent and supportive environment.

Human Nature makes therapy more accessible. Although many appointments are held in nature, even when I had sessions at their office I felt more comfortable than I had at other services. It is welcoming and I feel like I belong there. The staff are friendly, there is nice art on the walls and there are things to play with when a session gets intense.

I have done the Recre8, Elev8 and Activ8 programs and like that they're not one-size-fits-all. There were different therapy options available depending on what I needed, and my opinion mattered, like when deciding where and when sessions would be held. The whole journey with Human Nature is different from other experiences. There are less barriers and stigma to accessing support, and such a supportive community to work with.

One of my favourite things about Human Nature is the safe relationship that forms between the staff and young people, and the wider community of Human Nature. Connecting with Human Nature has helped me form long-

term friendships with other young people who have done the Recre8 expedition and other programs. This is because the programs help to foster deep connections with my peers through providing an environment where we feel safe to talk about things that we normally wouldn't.

Connecting with Human Nature has given me a sense of belonging to a safe community. My confidence has grown and I know myself better now - I'm able to recognise what I feel and need each day and feel more positive about my future.

**"At Human Nature, I feel valued. The therapists create a safe and healing space where every part of me can exist. It has changed my life for the better."**



# Where challenge meets change.

Five years on, Human Nature has grown bigger and better. We wanted a brand that reflected how far we have come, that matched our vision for the future of the organisation and that could help position us as experts in the youth mental health sector, allowing us to expand our influence and grow our footprint.

We established a brand council to lead the project that included board members, internal staff and a member of our Youth Leadership Council, resulting in a creative brief going out to a longlist of local and national agencies for response. We were lucky enough to get a number of really high calibre agencies to come back with their approach and from that short list selected Frost\* Collective.

Frost\* deploy a human-centric approach to build brands based on deep insight into human experience, something that immediately felt like the right fit for Human Nature. With the very best of their strategic and creative teams leading the way, they took us through a six week process, including desk research, stakeholder workshops and 1:1 interviews before presenting back to the internal project team for feedback and then going on to develop the concepts and final execution of our new brand framework.

Frost\*collective

At the centre of that framework is the brand idea of **Transformative Alliance**. This brand idea, along with a refreshed set of values and our new brand identity, guides how we communicate and interact with our audiences, building awareness of Human Nature and the important work we do with young people in order that we can continue to meet the demand for our programs.

We want to extend a big thank you to Frost\* Collective for their work in developing the refreshed Human Nature brand, which has received really great feedback from across the organisation, its stakeholders and most importantly the young people that we work with, and for their generous in-kind gift of close to \$24,000 in time and expertise.



WHERE CHALLENGE MEETS CHANGE

# What's next?

**Our vision – a world where young people triumph over adversity and thrive.**

Our challenge is to build a sustainable organisation, so that Human Nature can continue to connect with the young people who will most benefit from our support. Ultimately, we want to expand our impact so that every young person who needs our kind of support can access it.

For Human Nature to continue to expand our services, we need to address our sustainability on many levels.

We are grateful to have secure accommodation, thanks to the generous support of Lisa Joel, who is a major supporter and who has stepped in and provided access to our new home in Ballina. This move has provided us with a space to grow and develop our services in new ways. Having a home is a key foundation for the work we do and the growth we want.

Improving our sustainability is a challenge... but with your help now, we can be more independent in the future!

**There is more that is required to shore up our future. We need:**

- Sustainable funding** built on multiple fundraising streams so that changes in the circumstances of any single sector or donor won't spell disaster for Human Nature. We are working hard on doing this, but it will take time and, until then, we are grateful for the ongoing support of our current donors and grantmakers.
- Sustainable staffing** so that the Human's of Human Nature can have the confidence to stay connected with us for the long term. Offering staff security of employment allows them the financial security to do this good work and provides us with the ability to provide continuity of support by highly skilled professionals with specialised training in adventure therapy
- Sustainable partnerships** - with like-minded commercial businesses who want to have a positive impact in the community by helping us to meet our goals, supporting us along our sustainability journey.
- Sustainable systems** so that we can continue to be agile and work efficiently and transparently. Key to this is collecting and collating data to demonstrate our impact and continuously measure and improve the therapeutic services we provide.
- Sustainable connections** with other organisations who work with young people so that we avoid duplication and can support each other's efforts.



# Our service delivery partners.

We are grateful to our service delivery partners – local adventure operators that support the work of Human Nature:





# How you can help!

## Sponsor a Human.

You can ensure that we have the best Humans in our team to deliver life changing support to young people delivered where they need it most.

You can help us recruit and retain highly skilled professionals to work in our team by sponsoring a therapist to work at Human Nature. **An ongoing monthly commitment of \$5,000-\$7,000** will allow us to build a sustainable team to work with young people and change their lives.

The Human that you invest in will have an ongoing connection with your organisation and can help you feel the difference that your contribution makes. We have Deductible Gift recipient status, so all gifts are tax deductible. Contact our CEO, Sharyn White [sharyn@humannature.org.au](mailto:sharyn@humannature.org.au) to discuss how you can help.

## Make an impact by helping us build our independence.

If you, or your organisation, wants to have a lasting impact by working in partnership with us, invest in building our independence and help us implement the building blocks we need for our future. **Provide us with access to the minds that will help our dream** of helping more young people triumph over adversity and thrive, become a reality.

Perhaps you have in-house expertise that we could benefit from, such as business, corporate, legal or HR services that can be supplemented with funding facilitators to guide us through the development of roadmaps to a more

independent funding future. Contact our CEO, Sharyn White [sharyn@humannature.org.au](mailto:sharyn@humannature.org.au) to discuss how you can help.

## Sponsor a therapeutic adventure experience.

We use adventure and the outdoors as a key component of our therapeutic process and all of our adventures have therapy built-in.

By providing young people with transformative experiences with our therapists beside them, they build an alliance with our team and begin to forge connections with other young people with lived experience.

**Your donation of \$2,000** will let us take a group of young people on a therapeutic adventure such as horse riding, e-biking or whale watching.

## Provide a young person with access to free therapeutic support.

Young people show up for sessions with our team and we make every session count.

We provide intensive, highly tailored services for young people who have been unable to engage with office-based therapy. But this doesn't come cheaply - it costs us \$250 for each Activ8 session.

### Each \$250 you donate will fund a session.

Typically, each young person gets weekly or fortnightly sessions in the beginning, so regular monthly giving of \$500-\$1,000 dollars can change a life. A monthly gift of \$20 allows us to deliver another Activ8 session to a young person in need.

## Every dollar counts.

We are grateful for all the support we receive and put every donation to good use. **Regular monthly donations give us a reliable source of funding** that means that we can plan with confidence. Your contribution can help us with transport costs so young people can get to an activity, regardless of where they live, access to equipment that will allow them to participate in outdoor experiences or art supplies to allow them to work with therapists and express their own Human Nature. Give what you can and we will make sure it makes a difference.

## Fundraise for us.

If you, your school, sports club or service club wants to help us by fundraising for us, we would love to hear from you.

We can help you create a connection for our cause by coming to speak about our programs and we can help make the process of receiving donations and providing receipts easier for you. Why not host a walk in nature or another event to have fun and raise money. Our team would love to work with you to help your community feel connected to our community. Contact [connect@humannature.org.au](mailto:connect@humannature.org.au)

**Human Nature is a Registered Charity so, all donations greater than \$2 are tax deductible.**

Your generosity directly helps disadvantaged young people access the mental health support they desperately need. It helps them connect with themselves, nature, friends, family and their role and purpose in the world. By donating to Human Nature you are enabling young people to access programs that have the power to change the course of their lives.





**“Any human being who is self actualised and reaching their potential is going to be a benefit to society. The more people that get close to that at a young age, the better it is for the community. The ripple effect goes to their friendship group, family and engaging in employment.”**

**Monique Vanderham**  
**Adventure Therapist**  
(Clinical Psychologist)

