

OUTBUSH

ON COUNTRY

A young man wearing a blue and black baseball cap and a white shirt is seen from the side, looking out over a vast, green, hilly landscape. The landscape is covered in dense vegetation, and the colors are vibrant greens. The man is positioned in the lower left foreground, looking towards the right side of the frame.

**Proposal to build a comprehensive
model of on-country care for at-risk
Children and young people, including for
those with the highest levels of need**

**Achieving Wellbeing for Tasmanian Children and Youth
through on-country Bush Adventure Therapy**

A close-up photograph of several green fern leaves, showing their intricate, feathery structure. The leaves are vibrant green and are set against a dark, blurred background.



Building Child and Youth Wellbeing Out Bush On Country

"Tasmania offers one of the oldest living continuous cultures in the world. Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural workers provide deep cultural knowledge. This knowledge will be shared whilst immersed in ancient cultural landscapes. These types of experiences provide strong cultural connections, create feelings of individual and community belonging, and safe growth for young people".

Sharnie Read
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre


Out Bush On Country (OBOC) is an evidence-informed model of care for at-risk children and young people. Importantly, OBOC strongly aligns with the current foundational objectives of the Tasmanian Government's comprehensive, long term, whole of government strategy for child and youth wellbeing, as well as the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework.

The six interconnected domains of the Government's Framework are consistent with key outcomes and deliverables for OBOC participants.

It is clear in the list of existing Tasmanian Government initiatives in the strategy Discussion Paper that a significant service-gap exists for young Tasmanians in relation to opportunities for therapeutic on-country health and well-being.

Previously, Government delivered successful programs like Project Hahn, the Wilderness Program, and the Aboriginal Outdoor Recreation Program. Since establishment of Project Hahn in 1983, all of these programs have since been defunded by relevant Government agencies. It has now been 7 years since Government funding was available for a service of this kind in Tasmania.

A home-grown set of on-country bush adventure therapy interventions could be an integral component of the Tasmanian Government's Children and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. By supporting the health and well-being of at-risk Tasmanian children and young people who have survived severe early life adversities, OBOC could help Government achieve the objectives of its Strategy.



"My vision for Tasmania is that no matter where you live, no matter what your background is, no matter what your circumstances are - opportunities will be there and if you want to grasp those opportunities a better life will be within your reach".

The Tasmanian Premier

Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy Discussion Paper – Jan 2021

Out Bush On Country is a collaborative Tasmanian-made model of care for at-risk Tasmanians, including those who live with complex needs due to early life adversities.

Importantly, the proposed service model provides a focal point for the work of the Premier and five Tasmanian Ministers whose responsibilities span Treasury, Prevention of family violence, Aboriginal affairs, Human services, Housing, Mental health & wellbeing, Education & training, Disability services & Community development, Health, Youth justice, Justice, Corrections and Police.

Purpose: Provide pathways to Health, Healing and Participation for Tasmanian children, young people and families who need it most.

Problem: The cost of not providing effective therapy and healing for people who've experienced severe early life adversities includes untold human suffering, loss of individual and family productivity, and extensive fiscal burdens on healthcare and justice systems - all of which are cumulative over time.

Solution: Establish a comprehensive suite of evidence-informed culturally appropriate multimodal bush adventure therapy interventions as a focal point for collaborative service provision.

Recommendations: Adequate funding of the Out Bush On Country model of care offers a central means through which the Tasmanian Government can achieve wellbeing for at-risk Tasmanian children and young people.

A US study by **Gass et al** (2019) compared outcomes of a 90-day 'Outdoor Therapy Intervention' with 90 days of 'Treatment as Usual' (TAU) and 'No Treatment' (NT) for young people aged 13-17 years with comorbid mental health and substance use disorders. The study found that the outdoor intervention:

- achieved higher treatment completion rates than TAU
- cost significantly less than TAU
- achieved mental health improvements, longevity and societal benefits (such as improved worker productivity and lowered criminal justice activity)
- had a cost-benefit ratio of 60.4% higher than TAU and achieved an additional \$36,100 in societal benefits
- had greater capacity than TAU to address differing levels of readiness for change, most notably helping participants become ready to address substance abuse and other behaviours
- had 424% better treatment outcomes measured by the Youth Outcome Questionnaire
- overall was 259% better value than TAU, and
- put another way, the outdoor therapy intervention was 2.5 times more effective and 2 times less expensive.

Social Ventures Australia (2019) conducted economic analysis to determine the societal benefits associated with investment in early intervention for children impacted by maltreatment.

SVA found investment in targeted early intervention now, over a 10-year period, can save \$1.6 billion in the child protection and out-of-home care system alone and prevent 1,200 children a year from entering out-of-home care. The report concluded this equates to a \$2 saving for each \$1 invested.

Severe early life adversities such as abuse, neglect, family violence, parental mental illness and poverty have profound impacts on neurobiological, psychological and social development, with extensive direct and indirect impacts on families, communities and society.

Early developmental impacts carry over into adulthood, where issues can be compounded and entrenched into lifelong adverse outcomes, such as chronic physical, mental and relational health difficulties (Perry et al. 1995).

Children involved in Australian Child protection and safety services tend to have lower literacy and numeracy levels and higher rates of homelessness and justice involvement, leading to relatively poor health, participation and economic outcomes throughout their life.

In Australia, the estimated fiscal burden of not providing adequate therapy and healing for this target group is estimated to be \$7.7billion (Taylor & DeBortoli 2008).

"Bush Adventure Therapy has the potential to benefit vulnerable children in OOHc placements and help their healing journey"

Anagha Jayakar
Community
Paediatrician, Tasmania

Childhood trauma researcher Dr Bessel van der Kolk (2005) found the achievement of healing for those who've experienced severe early life adversities requires bio-psycho-social therapeutic interventions that provide:

- direct experiences of safety and competence
- opportunities for coping with traumatic re-enactments in positive ways
- a physical experience of mastery
- feelings of being calm and in charge
- being able to engage in focused efforts to accomplish goals, and
- neutral fun tasks and physical games.

Neurodevelopmental researcher and theorist Dr Bruce Perry (1994) found the therapeutic priorities for this target group should span four areas:

1. Think - Encourage abstract thought through humour, language, arts and games
2. Feel - Facilitate socio-emotional growth through teams, win-lose experiences, turn-taking and sharing
3. Act - Incorporate somatic-sensory integration through large motor skills, fine motor skills and music
4. Live - Establish state regulation through rhythmic, patterned sensory input (auditory, tactile, motor) and attuned and responsive caregiving.

Perry stated that therapy for children and young people who've experienced severe early life adversities should start with simple rhythmic and repetitive activities that help regulate the brainstem before moving to more conventional talking therapies.

A study by **Gillis, Gass & Russell (2008)** compared outcomes for young people engaging in antisocial and criminal behaviours aged 8 to 18 who participated in 3 different styles of intervention. From their analysis of archival program data for 15,311 young males, they found that the trajectories of those who participated in therapeutic outdoor interventions resulted in significantly lower rates of re-arrest at one, two and three years after release compared with the other forms of treatment.

While all 3 different styles of intervention included strategies like sharing household responsibilities, cleaning and cooking, setting group and individual goals, schoolwork, adventure activities, and evaluating group and individual goals, the key components of the style of intervention that reduced recidivism included:

- group process and experiential learning
- tailored adventure experiences built incrementally through properly sequenced activities
- activities that required skills such as patience, listening, seeing another's point of view, leading, following, planning, and experiencing consequences for actions, and
- psychoeducational content 'framed' around youth issues, enabling clients to experience the activity as a metaphor for problem behaviours.



"Through on-country connection participants will have a venue to understand and develop a sense of cultural identity".

Sharnie Read
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

On-country bush adventure therapy experiences combine four intentional therapeutic mechanisms to achieve health, healing and participation:

1. **Biological mechanisms** – physical activity & experiential adventures
2. **Psychological mechanisms** – emotional safety & intentional conversations
3. **Social mechanisms** – small group social relationships & effective teamwork
4. **Ecological mechanisms** – guided immersion in ancient cultural landscapes/bush.

A Home Grown Tasmanian Solution

The Out Bush On Country Technical Advisory group has been meeting fortnightly since 19 October 2020 to design a comprehensive model of care for at-risk children and young people, with built-in benefits for families and the Tasmanian community.

Importantly, the **Advisory Group** has central involvement from Tasmanian Aboriginal knowledge holders, cultural practitioners, Elders, and community members, reflecting whole-of community support.

Since its first meeting, the **Advisory Group** has grown to include 45 experts from sectors that include Child safety, Out of home care, Supported accommodation, Kinship & Foster care, Paediatrics, Primary Health, Mental Health, Alcohol & other drugs, Education & training, Police, Youth justice, and more.

The voluntary contributions to this project by so many experts are testament to the level of need and the level of community support for this service model.

Advisory Group members have drawn on research and practice wisdom to refine six model components:

- On country & cultural leadership
- Family, kin, carer & community
- Individualised therapeutic care
- Education, training & employment
- Evaluation & clinical outcomes, and
- Referral pathways & service integration.

The client pathway through **Out Bush On Country** involves options and choices from a year-round 'calendar' of bush adventure therapy events and programs. Voluntary participation is built through a series of engaging taster experiences leading to readiness for more challenging experiences. Programmed sequences of Bush Adventure Therapy events build confidence and resilience. Based on clinical assessment of need and suitability, individual young people may choose to step into the **Pivot Program**.

Within Out Bush, the Pivot Program is for young people who've survived severe early life adversities and who will benefit from intensive targeted bio-psycho-socio-ecological support to build health, healing and participation.

Anticipated outcomes for young people:

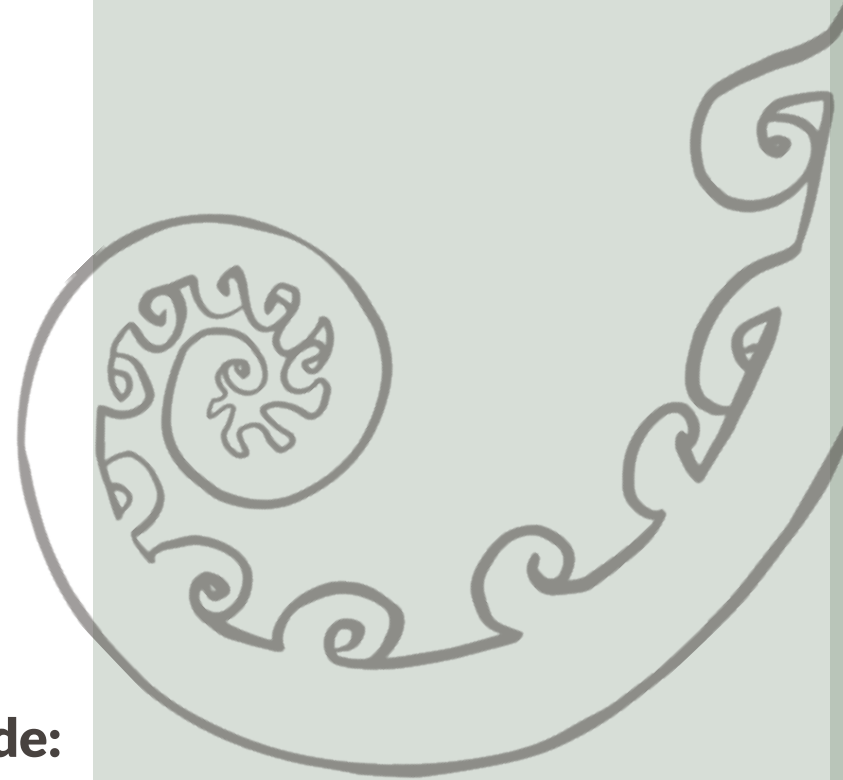
- Physical fitness & health
- Mental health & wellbeing
- Emotional regulation & distress tolerance
- Social responsibility & healthy behaviours
- Personal agency, purpose & resilience
- Family therapy & healing
- Connection to country, culture and community
- Individual training & employment pathway
- Continued secure relationship with OBOC
- Leadership and employment opportunities.

Built-in benefits for family members include:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Opportunities for healing
- Increased productivity and income generation

Anticipated societal outcomes:

- Increased educational attainment
- Increased employment
- Increased individual and family productivity
- Decreased healthcare costs
- Decreased justice involvement



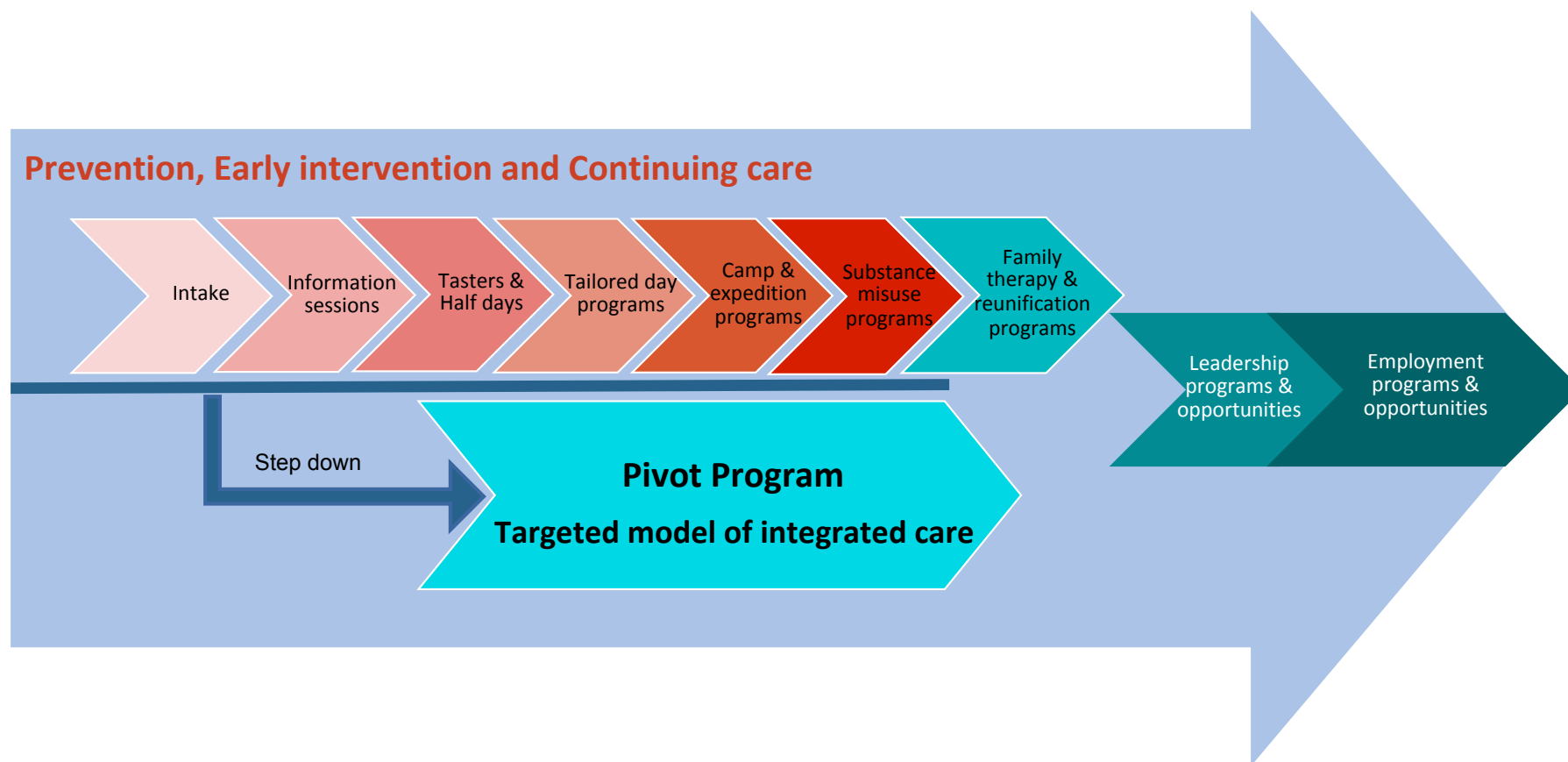
On-country Bush Adventure Therapy Experiences



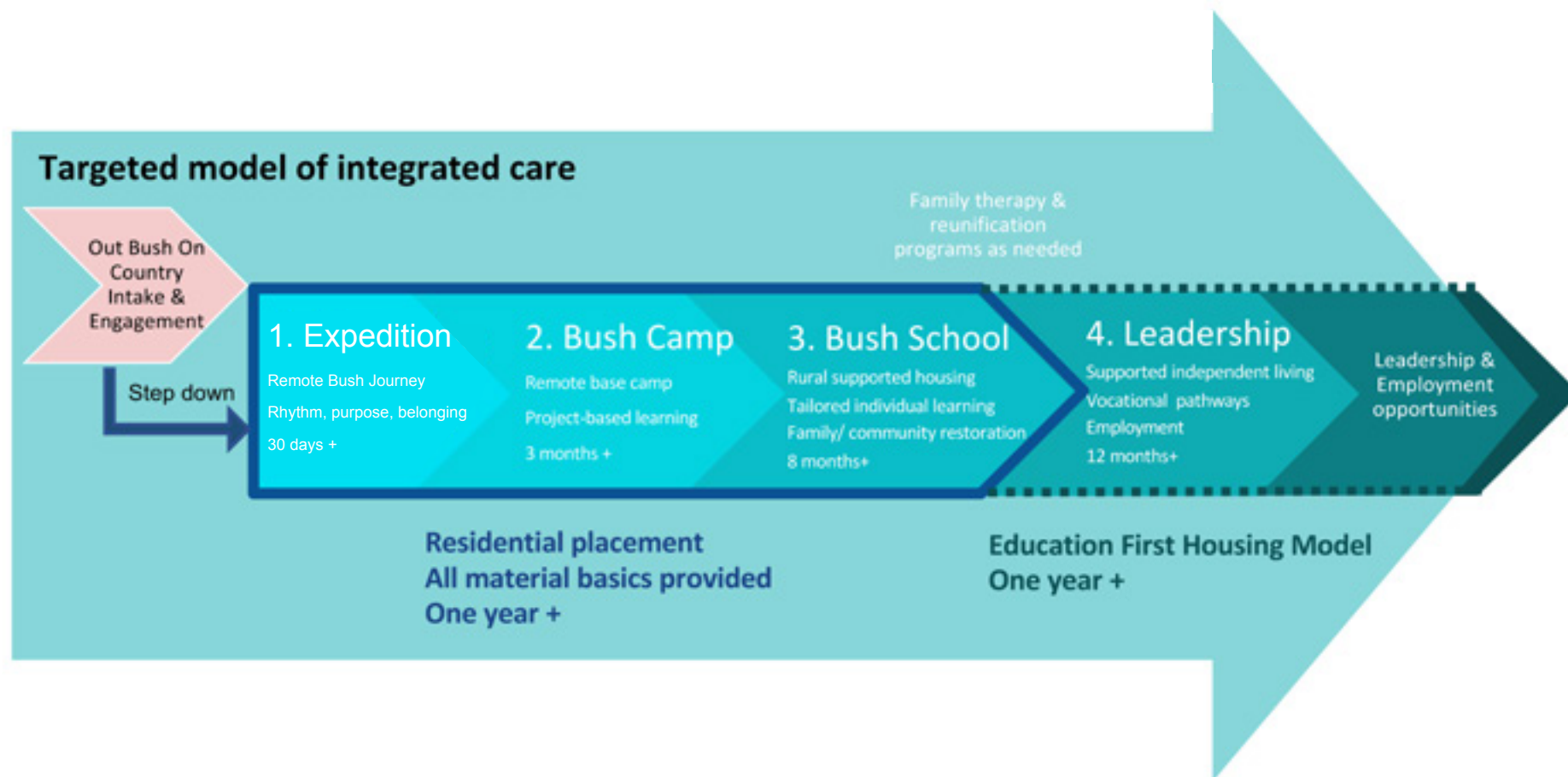
The Out Bush On Country model of care includes two parts that each rely on the other:

1. A year-round program of **Bush Adventure Therapy** events for at-risk children, young people and families that provides tailored care plans and client pathways through prevention, early intervention and continuing care.
2. A step-down targeted intervention for young people with complex needs who are in need of more intensive support to achieve health, healing and participation - the **Pivot Program**.

1. Client pathway through Out Bush On Country for at-risk Tasmanians



2. Pivot Placement & Leadership Program for highest levels of need





The Pivot Program provides a series of therapeutic interventions to:

- a. build physical, mental and social health,
- b. provide healing from early life adversities, and
- c. increase capacity for participation in education, training and employment.

Achieving wellbeing for Tasmanian children and young people who need it most

With strong Aboriginal cultural wisdom and tailored use of Bush Adventure Therapy practices, **Out Bush On Country** can provide Tasmanian children, young people and families with opportunities for a better life...

Being loved and safe

Through the provision of safe, caring adults who will be in their lives for a long time, participants experience improvements in mental and emotional health, and are readied to reconnect with their family in new ways:

- I know what feeling safe feels like
- I can cope with difficult feelings
- I'm able to calm myself down

Being healthy

Through participation in physical activity and challenging adventures, participants experience improvements in physical and mental health:

- I feel physically fit and strong
- I feel mentally stronger
- I love spending time in nature/bush

Participating

Through involvement in small group relationships, participants grow in self-confidence and personal agency:

- I can get along with others
- I can resolve conflict when tensions comes up
- I can make decisions that will improve my life

Having material basics

Through the provision of adequate food, water, shelter, and other necessities, participants can think beyond the basics:

- I eat healthy food
- I get enough sleep at night
- I can work towards having what I want

Learning

Through the provision of hands-on learning and incremental successes, participants gain confidence to learn and grow:

- I like learning and growing
- I can participate in education and training

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

Through on-country connections, participants develop an understanding of cultural knowledge and history, and learn to read country and identify heritage in ways that provide a deep sense of belonging. Participants develop an understanding of place, both on the island and within the community, including drilling down to a sense of belonging in family:

- I have people to talk to about important things
- I feel I belong

Recommendations

The Out Bush On Country Project Team encourages the Tasmanian Government to help create a better life for at-risk Tasmanian children and young people by building their wellbeing.

The 45 specialists contributing to the **Out Bush On Country Technical Advisory Group** have offered research, evidence, technical knowledge and practice wisdom to design an effective and appropriate model of care for this target group – a program model that is already offering a focal point for cross-service collaboration.

Tasmania has all the ingredients it needs to successfully achieve these aspirations:

- Strong Aboriginal cultural wisdom
- Wild natural country
- Supportive services & service systems
- Cross-disciplinary practice wisdom
- Best available research & evidence
- Experienced bush adventure therapy practitioners
- Opportunities for local, rural & remote adventures
- A professional community that cares for all community members.

Putting Child and Youth Wellbeing at the heart of Policy

Discussion Paper Question #38: Short-term structures

Establish a whole of government approach to the provision of therapy and healing for Tasmanian children and youth who've experienced severe early life adversities

- Effective service delivery for this cohort will require cross-departmental information sharing and collaboration.
- We ask that The Premier gains active participation from Ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs, Human services, Housing, Mental health & wellbeing, Education & training, Disability services & Community development, Health, Youth justice, Justice, and Corrections and Police in designing the Child & Youth Strategy.

Discussion Paper Question #39: Longer-term structures

Investigate longer-term cost savings available to Treasury from early intervention with this target group

- Effective investment in this cohort will require economic analysis to determine individual and societal benefits associated with the proposed model.
- We ask that the Tasmanian Government invest in a Business Plan with detailed cost-benefit analysis to identify likely longer-term savings to Treasury should a model like Out Bush On Country be implemented.

Knowing we are making a difference

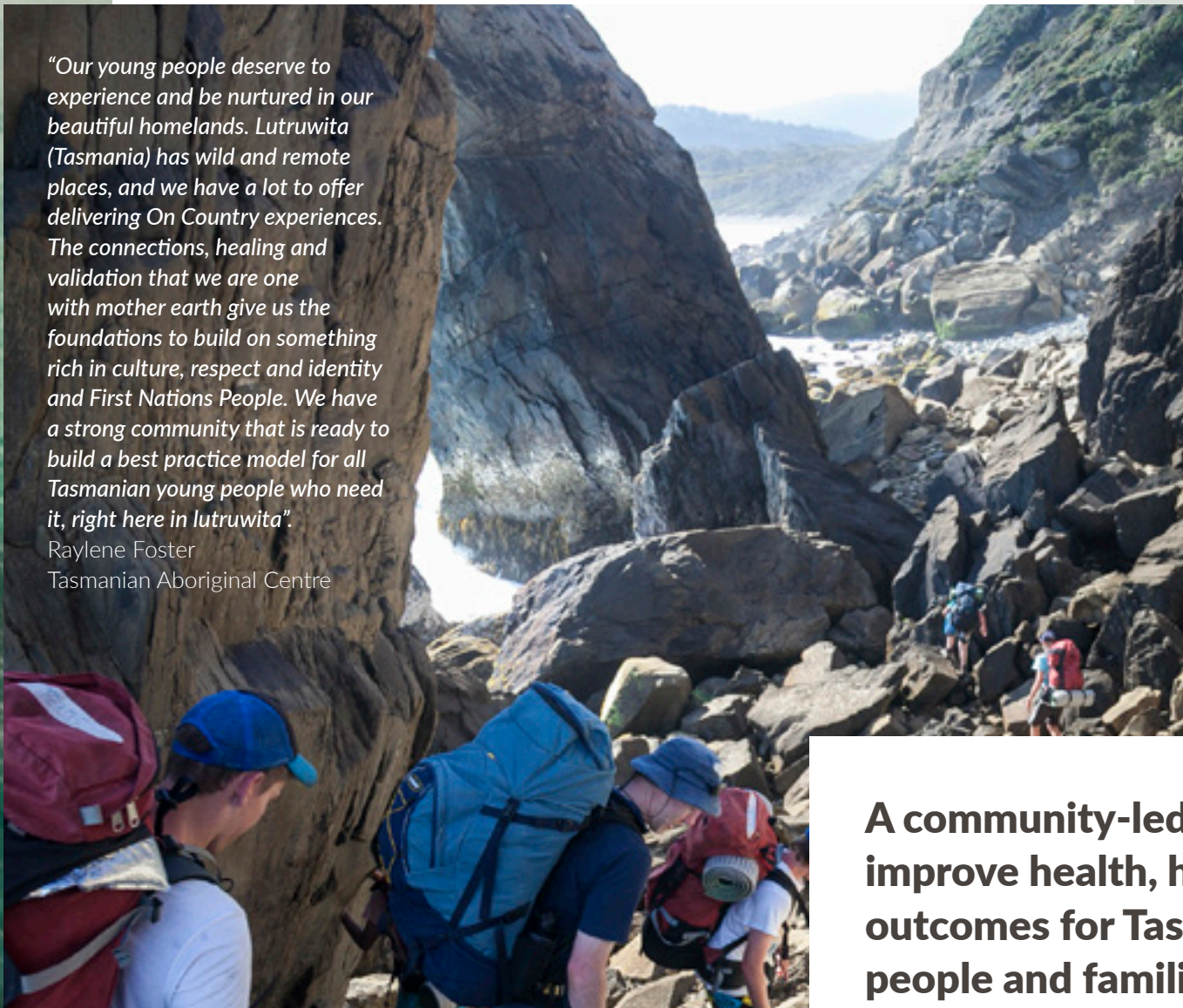
Discussion Paper Question #48: Other models to achieve wellbeing outcomes

Invest in the establishment of on-country Bush Adventure Therapy interventions for this target group in Tasmania

- Effective implementation of a comprehensive model of care in Tasmania will require financial support for establishment of a scalable service model.
- We ask that the Government support Tasmania and recognise Tasmanian capacity to deliver a best practice model of care by investing in on-country Bush Adventure Therapy workforce development and cross-service integration.

"Our young people deserve to experience and be nurtured in our beautiful homelands. Lutruwita (Tasmania) has wild and remote places, and we have a lot to offer delivering On Country experiences. The connections, healing and validation that we are one with mother earth give us the foundations to build on something rich in culture, respect and identity and First Nations People. We have a strong community that is ready to build a best practice model for all Tasmanian young people who need it, right here in lutruwita".

Raylene Foster
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre



A community-led model of care to improve health, healing and participation outcomes for Tasmanian children, young people and families with complex needs:

<https://adventureworks.org.au/outbush/>

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Thank you!

Out Bush On Country is a partnership led by Adventure Works Australia Ltd, Dooloomai Youth Project Inc and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. Designed and supported by 45 specialists through the 'Out Bush On Country Technical Advisory Group', the Out Bush model of care is surrounded by a caring and committed community of professionals.