

Submission  
No 43

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF DRUG  
REHABILITATION SERVICES IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND  
REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Human Nature Adventure Therapy Ltd

**Date Received:** 18 July 2018

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Dear Greg,

I understand it may now be too late too late for my submission to be included in the findings for your report, but I would appreciate if there is any opportunity for it to be distributed to the Inquiry members and considered. In the absence of any guidelines for submission (they were no longer available on the website), I have provided what is essentially a proposal for Activ8 Life: an innovative early-intervention youth rehabilitation program - which is basically a natural extension of the work we are already doing in this space through our Recre8 Program (which acts as a proxy-rehab as we support many young people to address entrenched substance abuse whilst they are engaged in our program - [www.humannature.org.au](http://www.humannature.org.au)).

I have not prepared information outlining the absolute absence of any other drug and alcohol rehabilitation services for young people in our area, as I assume you are well familiar with that. If you would like further supporting information I am happy to provide it, but it is a given that there are no AOD rehabilitation services for young people in the Far North Coast NSW/Northern Rivers region (and hence no such representation at the Lismore hearing).

A simple case to exemplify this point would be:

- A 16 year old which a chronic and problematic cannabis addiction (smoking large amounts daily).
  - Significant detrimental impacts too their life path: deteriorating mental health, disengagement from school, unhealthy social connections.
  - Supported to have some recognition of the negative impacts on life - some motivation to change.
  - Multiple unsuccessful attempts to quit - extremely difficult as everyone they are spending time with are also using.
  - Currently the only way (in our region) that they can extract themselves from their situation and receive intensive clinical support to make changes is through participating in our Recre8 Bush Adventure Therapy Program.
- Our program currently operates purely on small grants, donations and minor contributions from supporting agencies. We can only support a very small number of young people and are limited in our capacity to grow and expand our offerings (despite a massive need).

The attached document is a proposal to pilot the Activ8 Life Program - an extension of our existing Recre8 Program such that it will serve more as a dedicated rehabilitation intervention. I thank you for taking the time to consider this exciting opportunity to not only fill the massive need for youth rehabilitation services in the Far North Coast, but also to demonstrate a much needed innovate approach to youth rehabilitation services which could transform the Youth AOD landscape across the state, and the country.

Please also take a look at our website, and feel free to get in touch if you'd like more information.

Warm regards,

Andy

Andy Hamilton  
Recre8 Program Manager/Psychologist  
Human Nature Adventure Therapy LTD

[www.humannature.net.au](http://www.humannature.net.au)

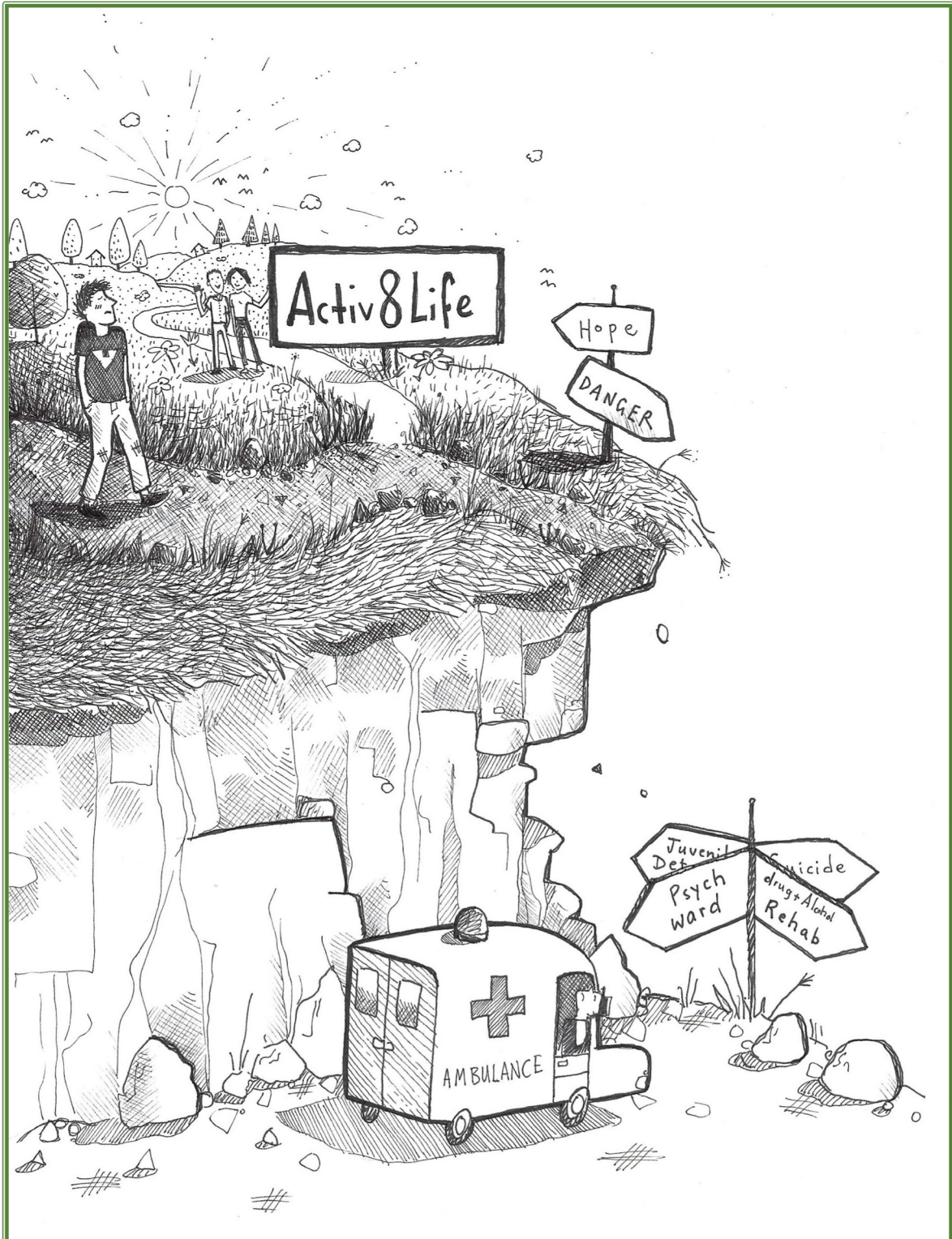
Human Nature  
Adventure Therapy





# Activ8 Life

An Early-Intervention Program for At-Risk Young People



# Activ8 Life: An Early-Intervention Program for Vulnerable Young People

*They were like any average family: mum, dad, and three kids. Mel was the middle child. When she was 12, tragedy struck when her dad suddenly died from an unexpected illness. Everything fell apart. Whilst her mother turned to alcohol and other forms of escapism, Mel deteriorated emotionally and psychologically. At 16 she had become disengaged, chronically depressed and socially isolated. Efforts by school counsellors and psychologists to support and stabilise her, had been futile at best. Where previously she had been described as a joyous and sweet natured young woman, a gifted dancer and very personable, Mel was now withdrawn and dark, abusing drugs, and prone to depths of sorrow that impelled her to slash herself horrendously, and even talk of suicide. The school support team were doing all they could, Mel's mum was doing all she could, but it all seemed to no avail. It was frustrating for everyone that the level of intensive engagement and support that Mel needed simply couldn't be provided in a way that made sense to her. No one wanted a 'the bottom of the cliff' psychiatric admission to be the only remaining option. But what else is*

## **Introducing Activ8 Life:**

If you talk to any school staff or professionals who work with young people, they will point you toward the kids that keep them awake at night – the ones that seem destined for disaster. They know when a young person is 'going off the rails' and is on a potentially catastrophic path. Families, and even the young people themselves, see the writing on the wall. They fear what's coming, they know help is needed - but there is a massive hole in what is available to young Australians to help turn things around before disaster strikes. Even when we've identified early on that a young person is on a slippery slope, there are few options between the 'soft option' of counselling, and the 'hard approaches' of institutionalised care: psychiatric units, juvenile detention, and 'last-chance' drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres - the proverbial 'ambulances at the bottom of the cliff'. By current estimates, 1 in 5 young people meet the criteria for serious mental health issues – with many of these 'self-medicating' through drug and alcohol use. Of all those identified as needing support, many refuse to engage, or drop-out after the first session when offered conventional clinical consultations. If they fall through this net, what else is there to redirect them from the cliff edge?

From its success in delivering the Recr8 Bush Adventure Therapy Program, Human Nature Adventure Therapy Ltd (HNAT) is preparing to pilot 'Activ8 Life': a unique 12-month deep early-intervention clinical program designed to profoundly engage young people and initiate the process to stabilise, reset and redirect negative life trajectories towards a positive and inspired life path. It involves a comprehensive strategy of transformational therapeutic work and provides wrap-around psychosocial and family support services by mental health professionals. HNAT will pilot three complete trial programs as a robust foundation to launch a dedicated centre and an established model to be made broadly available to those Australians who need it most.

## **Organisational Governance:**

Human Nature Adventure Therapy Ltd is governed by six high-level Board of Directors, including the former chair of the Audit Committee of the Reserve Bank of Australia. The Board oversees three permanent staff, two consultant therapists, a team of five rotating volunteers, and active partnership arrangements with FSG, The Buttery Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre, Social Futures (Headspace), One Health Organisation, Outward Bound Australia, and Blue Peter Sea School. The company utilises the TAGS – Australian Governance Framework and System, which ensures that the practices of the Board and its' staff are consistent with principles of good corporate governance, each of which are underpinned by comprehensive policies, procedures, measures of success and other operational tools and documents. The functions of the board are set out in the Board charter, and are consistent with the company Constitution. Review of our detailed risk management practices and internal controls is a key responsibility of the Board, with the support of the Audit and Risk Committee. Audited financial statements have been completed and are available on request.

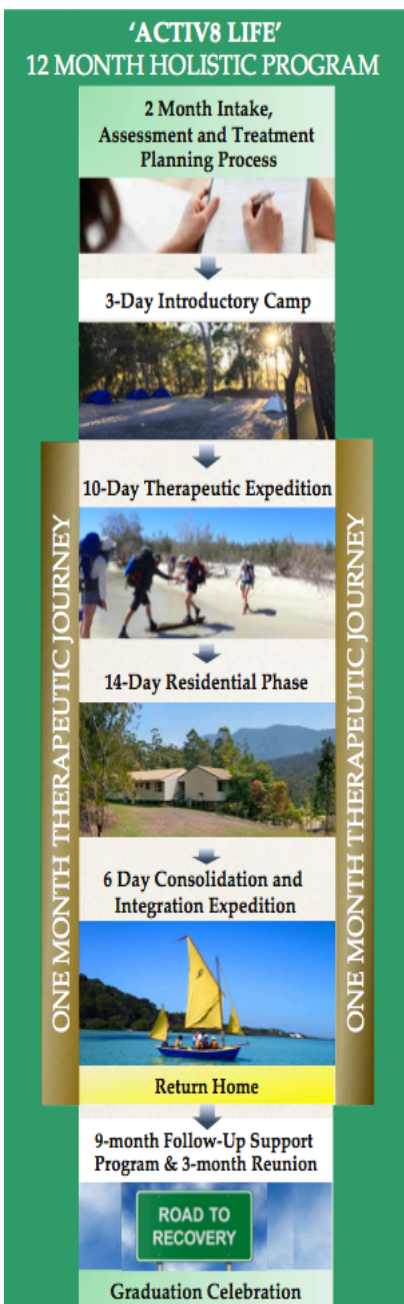
## **Organisational Strategy:**

Human Nature Adventure Therapy is strategically driven to provide innovative and effective evidence-based interventions for young people disengaged from existing AOD and mental health services before they become deeply entrenched in chronic addiction, mental illness, criminal or antisocial behaviour, family breakdown, school refusal and social isolation. Activ8 Life is a significant extension of our current and successful Recre8 Program. It is a comprehensive response to a clearly identified unmet community need and has been developed with direct feedback from young people, families, our partners and our referral network of community service organisations. Our intention is to pilot this innovative intervention to demonstrate it's efficacy in altering the life trajectory of at-risk and vulnerable young people. Following a thorough evaluation we intend to develop a tested program model effective for intervening early with targeted high-risk young people Australia wide.

**Strategic Objectives:** Key HNAT strategic objectives augmented by the 'Activ8 Life' program include:

- Focus on **early-intervention** and the provision of '**deep impact**' nature-based Adventure Therapy programs that attract **high levels of engagement** and encourage taking **personal responsibility** for change processes.
- **Scale and replicate our program impact** such that more young Australians benefit from what we offer: *We are piloting a model that would ultimately become a permanent centre with ongoing revolving programs, and will support the establishment of similar programs Australia wide.*
- Strengthen **wrap-around family support** and **community engagement**: *By expanding parental education and therapeutic support services we better support youth, and strengthen family cohesion.*
- Increase **collaboration** for collective impact and to leverage existing resources in the community: *There is widespread community support for this program, and numerous services are excited about being involved, including two of the larger NGO players in the region FSG and Social Futures. They are keen to support Activ8 Life with in-kind contributions which will substantially enhance the support available to young people and their families. Beyond this we have a **wide network of key services and agencies** who are ready to mobilise around this program. Our allies include schools, local Magistrates, Indigenous services, Foster Care agencies, Headspace: Adolescent Mental Health centres, youth services and local councils. Support letters are available upon request.*

**Program Outcomes:**



**Two-Month Introductory/Preparatory Stage**

**Intake/Assessment:** Targeting and selection of 'best-fit' participants, engagement with them, their families, schools and community supports. Comprehensive assessment process.

**Preparatory Work:** Developing 'buy-in', building therapeutic alliances, Motivational Interviewing, preparing for adventurous activities.

**Introductory Camp:** Mini expedition 'practice run', forming therapeutic group, setting intentions, deeper assessment in peer-group, 'real-life' settings. Stress-testing and safety preparation.

**One-Month Intensive Bush Adventure Therapy Stage**

**10-day Therapeutic Expedition:** Hiking & canoeing through the wilderness of the Upper Clarence River region supported by our highly experienced team of clinicians, Outdoor Instructors and Youth Workers. The full nature immersion allows for a clean break from habits, technology & toxic family/social environments, whilst uncovering and addressing mental, behavioural and lifestyle issues in a safe, supportive group setting.

**14-day Residential Phase:** The group will move directly to a remote wilderness lodge where we will deepen therapeutic work around identified issues, and begin to catalyse and embed changes using evidence-based clinical support and immersive nature based-activities. Through Experiential-Learning (consciously learning through lived experience) old habits will be broken and new neural pathways will be formed to support physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing. Family therapy sessions will occur here.

**6-day Consolidation and Integration Expedition:** Hiking and Sailing around Moreton Island and surrounds, with a focus on integrating learnings into a clear action plan, and preparing for re-entry into everyday life. Also an adventurous reward igniting a positive and inspired mindframe to carry forward into the challenges to come. Concluding with a family/community celebration.

**Nine-month Follow-Up Support Stage**

**Follow-up Support:** Comprehensive clinical and therapeutic mentoring support alongside family therapy and community integration. Initially concentrated to ground and enact life changes and to support through hurdles and hiccups, moving to reinforcement and maintenance phases encouraging connection to broader community supports.

**Reunion Camp:** Re-immersion in nature and therapeutic group environment. Witnessed review of recovery progress supporting accountability for declared change-goals.

**Graduation Celebration:** Witnessing and acknowledgement of achievements and the direct experience of being valued, appreciated and supported by the community. A pinnacle of the program and a rare 'rite of passage' celebration which serves to deeply consolidate accomplishments which will then be reinforced by community supports.

Activ8 Life is a 12-month early-intervention program which utilises the well-researched and evidence-based Bush Adventure Therapy model as a basis for highly effective therapeutic work. It is delivered by mental health and rehabilitation professionals, for vulnerable young people who otherwise tend to be difficult to engage in conventional support approaches. Each program works intensively with ten to twelve 16-to-19-year-olds who may exhibit signs of mental illness, substance abuse, behavioural problems or social dysfunction - and is designed for deep impact on the young person, their families and communities.

**Key elements of our therapeutic model :** ⊗ *trauma-informed care* ⊗ *intensive and immersive* ⊗ *evidence-based practices* ⊗ *narrative therapy* ⊗ *real-life group dynamics*, ⊗ *flexible and tailored to emerging problems* ⊗ *youth centred approach* ⊗ *long-term provision of follow-up care* ⊗ *therapeutic engagement of family and community throughout*.

**Program Impact, Measurement and Evaluation:**

**Program Impact:**

Significant impacts of the Elev8 Life program will be identified as *tangible improvements in quality-of-life and positive life benchmarks including family cohesion, healthy lifestyles, good mental health, positive relationships, strong support networks, involvement in meaningful activities and ongoing motivation for positive change*. Naturally we would expect a parallel reduction in *the harms young people are doing do to themselves, others and society*. Key quantifiable domains include self-harm, violence, substance use, school participation, family conflict, and antisocial and criminal behaviour. The cycle of trans-generational trauma is interrupted, laying down the foundations to creating healthy and happy families and communities for future generations.

Elev8 Life participants' lives will be improved by the proposed program in the following measurable ways:

Internal Outcomes	External Outcomes	Community/Society Outcomes
↑ Self-awareness/self-regulation	↑ School/work participation	↑ Community benefit of healthy well-functioning youth and families
↑ Social-awareness/social-regulation	↑ Healthy family dynamics	↑ Social and fiscal productivity through thriving youth
↑ Self-confidence/self-esteem	↑ Social connectedness	↓ Impact of destructive behaviours
↑ Social skills & leadership capacity	↑ Prosocial behaviours	↓ Cost to society from institutionalised care needs: psychiatric hospitalisation, residential rehabilitation and detention/imprisonment.
↑ Self-discipline	↑ Independent living skills	
↑ Resilience & emotional intelligence	↓ Risk to self and others from antisocial/illegal/violent behaviours	
↓ Mental illness symptoms	↓ Substance abuse	
↓ Emotional disturbance	↓ Self-harm and suicidality	
↓ Personal suffering		

**Pillars of Impact:** The Activ8 Life Program addresses the weaknesses in current approaches for at-risk and vulnerable young people disengaged from, and not responding adequately to, existing psycho-social support services, by delivering:

- **Effective Engagement:** our programs are appealing to young people which naturally enables supports full participation and strong therapeutic alliances based on *earned trust and genuine relationships*.
- **'Real life' Clinical Assessment:** Initial information gathered from the young person, carers and support workers, is enhanced by 'real-world/real-time' evidence gleaned from natural/incidental therapeutic conversations and observation of the young person's behaviours in diverse social contexts to provide *a far richer understanding of issues and needs*.
- **Resetting Entrenched Patterns:** Unhealthy physical, mental and emotional patterns are reset by strong guidance and support in a novel setting. Essential conditions for wellbeing and optimal mental health can be seamlessly learned, practiced and reinforced. New healthy habits repeatedly applied change the brain for the better – literally creating new neural pathways.
- **Optimal Change Motivation** - Lasting change cannot occur unless there is both desire for change and *ownership of the change process*. The expedition components of the program are extremely effective in *inspiring the desire for change*. Triumphs result in a profound experience of *feeling activated, alive, and accomplished*. Through guided reflection and reinforcement of achievements a sustained motivation for change is realised.
- **Lived Experience of Change** – The direct experience of the achievement of success as a result of one's own efforts supports participants develop a strong internal locus-of-control', i.e. 'my efforts make a difference in my life'. The felt sense of this is enhanced with practice and skilled therapeutic guidance supporting greater insight and self-awareness. Tried and tested changes have a far greater lasting impact on everyday life.

Greater Charitable Foundation funding will allow us to deliver three complete pilot Activ8 Life programs and demonstrate an established and validated program model to be made broadly available to those who need it most.

**Measurement & Evaluation:** We have recently commenced a new impact assessment and program evaluation project to develop an innovative measurement framework and evidence base for our Recre8 Program, which will be extended to the Activ8 Life Program. We have engaged with a professional M&E team to develop a robust impact measurement framework which has a focus on data collection accuracy and reporting quality. The approach is built on an Inter-Heuristic Research Design which is an action-oriented research approach that is based on an ongoing live feedback loop back into our programs to support continuous improvement of both delivery and measurement. Interviews with stakeholders (participants, carers/parents, referring agencies, school youth counsellors/principals) form the backbone of our M&E framework, and occur 4 times during the program life-cycle, including 9 months and 18 months after completion, to capture longer-term changes. This complements our in-house evaluative methods of pre and post program Life Effectiveness Questionnaires and clinical psychological assessments, which generates substantial quantifiable and comparative data.

### **Manager & Employee Skills and Experience:**

The program team comprises multi-disciplinary and cross-organisational specialists in youth and family mental health and community support. The team includes clinical Psychologists, youth drug and alcohol counsellors, Adventure Therapists, Senior Outdoor Instructors, Family Support Counsellors and Program Evaluation specialists. The Program team is lead by, our Clinical Director, Andy Hamilton, an Adolescent Psychologist with 15 years' experience working with at-risk, traumatized and vulnerable young people in the mental health, drug and alcohol education and justice fields. He has been head clinician and program manager of the Recre8 Bush Adventure Therapy Program for the past eight years, which he now operates as director of Human Nature Adventure Therapy. He is ably supported by an experienced Business and Operations Management team. Our partnership base with well-respected organisation such as FSG, Social Futures, The Buttery, Outward Bound Australia, and One Health Organisation, strengthens the program delivery and outcome realisation capacity of the program.

### **Support and Collaboration:**

Human Nature Adventure Therapy is seeking support and collaboration to deliver three pilot Activ8 Life Programs. The program will be a profound step forward in intervention support for vulnerable and at-risk young people.

Interest in supporting the launch of this incredible program should be directed to the Director, Andy Hamilton.