

'Evolve' at Typo Station works with young men across Victoria who might be considered 'at-risk' for a variety of reasons – educational disengagement, antisocial/criminal behaviour in the community, mental health concerns, the presence of anger and abusive power relationships in their lives, and significantly low motivation amongst others.

At "Typo Station", a remote rural property in the foothills of the Alpine National Park in north-east Victoria, Narrative ideas are being used to inform bush-based therapeutic work with at-risk and disadvantaged young men, and provide the basis for a long-term follow-up support program that is giving young men the space to open up and explore the new identities and ways to interact with the world around them.

build self-esteem without past associations to failure. It is on the foundation of these significant and tangible achievements that Evolve workers use Narrative approaches to help explore other experiences of achievement and success and begin to redress the dominant stories that have, over time, taken up much of the emotional and mental space in which these young men live their lives.

The Station represents an opportunity to begin to renegotiate identities and explore new options and possibilities. Wonderings about what 'could be' provide the basis for an outreach support role that extends for a two-year follow-up period beyond the initial bush-based residential. Through regular community visits to homes, schools and workplaces, and ongoing telephone support, the



A BUSHY TALE

FROM CAMPFIRE TO COMMUNITY

In addition to this program Evolve at Typo Station is constructing a new suite of programs that will launch in 2008 that will provide young people with additional opportunities in leadership and personal development, educational re-engagement and employment pathways. These new programs will also be built on Narrative practice, to allow young people to explore the context relevant to them both personally and educationally and build new opportunities based on this exploration.

The applied and experiential activities of the four-and-a-half week residential program for young men, undertaken voluntarily and highlighted by a nine day wilderness hike and ten days in pioneer-style blacksmithing and joinery workshops, aim to provide the young men with a space to learn and

Evolve community support workers, Andy Umbers and Merri Greenwood, build on these growing Narratives of success and achievement to explore possibilities for further skill development, achievement and positive decision-making in the localised context of the young men's lives.

In the process of thickening new and preferred identities, and maintaining a connection to the positive experiences at Typo Station, Andy and Merri are also engaging in therapeutic letter writing to program participants, which has provoked a very positive response from the young men receiving them.

Here is an excerpt from a recent therapeutic letter, highlighting the invitation to new ways of being:

Wednesday September 26, 2007

Dear Steven,

It was really brave and strong of you to call me up on the phone last week after your suspension from school. It is not always easy to talk about those sort of things, especially when we are feeling frustrated or upset.

We spoke a lot about the frustrations you had felt that day at school. You told me that you were frustrated with how things had happened and that it had resulted in another suspension for you. I could really tell from your voice and words that you were upset with a few different things.

I wondered early in our conversation about what you might have been most frustrated about. And then you told me - "I am most frustrated with myself". I asked you how this felt for you and you told me that "I have let myself down, again."

I asked you about your time at school since Typo, and whether you thought there had been more positive or negative things in this time. You told me that there were heaps more positive things. When I asked you who was responsible for these positive things, you said "Me."

What is the effect of knowing that you are in control of yourself? What does it get you thinking?

When we chatted more about what school was like before Typo, you told me that frustration and anger were real highlights of that time. But since you have returned to school, although you've had a couple of rough days, you have told me about some real changes you have felt within yourself and your ability to get along and try and get the most out of school. You said to me that you feel stronger and more in control of yourself, and that you can take more responsibility for yourself.

Who else might have noticed these changes in you, Steven? What would these people say about the Steven of old and the new Steven, as you have described it? How would they compare the changes? As positive changes?

You have made some really big efforts. You told me how proud you felt about being able to walk away from fights and mix more with the other students at school. These are big achievements, but maybe not altogether surprising. Who do you know that would not be surprised that you were able to accomplish these things?

You mentioned to me that you have been able to be "strong and not get sucked in to other kids annoying" you. What happens to frustration when you are feeling stronger and in control?

I know that you are making a huge effort to make school a better place for you. This was clear to me in the words you said about feeling upset about how Ms Watson might have felt when you spoke to her in a way that you described as wrong.

What would it take for Ms Watto to know how upset you were with what happened at school? How would she get to know this? It sounds to me like it is really important to you to prove something to her and some other teachers.

You told me something else on the phone that was really amazing to hear. You said that the feeling of having a great day is "addictive and just makes me want to have more of them". That sounds like an incredible feeling for you. Knowing that feeling of having a really good day at school, what possibilities might that open up for you? What sort of future can you look forward to at school, that perhaps frustration and anger may have blinded you to in the past?

I have asked a lot of questions in this letter, mate. They all just come from some thoughts I had after our chat on the phone. I am not sure if these questions will be useful or not for you, but they may give you some things to think about before you head back to school next week.

I wish you the best of luck in making more efforts towards positive changes. But, then again, given your honesty and the responsibility you are taking for yourself, maybe luck has got nothing to do with it!!

I will speak to you soon,

Andy from Typo Station