



## *Evolving Lives*



## *Evolve: Working With Young People & Communities Going Through Hard Times*

Evolve offers programs tailored to groups of young people who have faced potentially traumatic experiences, and are vulnerable to negative mental health, substance abuse and disengagement from their schools and communities.

Our approach is unique, providing a therapeutic partnership developed with and directed by the young people, their schools, and their families.

Our method of joining *with* people to find hope and normalcy after going through hard times is distinctive in youth services. Using Narrative Therapy, which focuses on the person, not the problem, Evolve teams with young people, families, schools and communities to make sure strengths and resources can be rediscovered, built up and enhanced for long-term change from within.

Many of the young people who take part in our programs speak of numerous experiences of counselling that they've found 'unhelpful' and reinforce a sense of hopelessness and failure. Evolve is committed to using alternative means of engaging with, and responding to, the difficulties faced by young men and women – a group in our society who are widely understood to be often less suited to individual and talk-based therapies.

Our focus is not on the traumatic event but on the person, and their response to, and recovery from the event. Evolve's highly qualified staff have developed a model based on a sound and tested philosophy that works closely with young people to help them move towards hope, engagement and reconnection with their dreams.

# How & Why These Programs Work



While all our programs are designed in partnership with the young people and their communities, our Evolving Lives programs are based on over 20 years experience in the field of youth services. Our program models are all based on the practice of Narrative Therapy, a very respectful approach to trauma recovery, and use the latest research on the impact of natural disasters on communities to make sure our approach has the most positive impact possible.

The Evolving Lives programs are based on four elements:

- \* Working with young people away from familiar places which may reinforce negative feelings about who they are
- \* Creating places that are new and unfamiliar, both physically and emotionally
- \* Using special activities to enable young people to think, feel and experience themselves in a different, more positive way
- \* Deep and long-term relationships between our staff, the young people, their families, schools and communities



Evolve staff deliver these elements through regular sessions and excursions in the young people's schools and communities, at our remote rural properties, and in local wilderness areas. These can include group and individual counselling sessions, day excursions, volunteerism, active and creative pursuits, and family meetings, all designed to enable boys and girls to find and chase their hopes and dreams.



## Case Study: Yea High School Bushfire Recovery Program

Yea was one of many communities which felt significant impacts from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. After identifying the effects of trauma in many of their young, male students, Yea High School approached Evolve to develop a program which would take support and therapy to those in need, and apply an innovative approach. *"He needed something different, something that wasn't so focused on the fires."*

Working with the boys and staff, the program aimed at being a positive influence, not oriented toward 'fixing' or 'changing', and looking at the individual and their strengths, not the event itself. *"This program has been of significant, ongoing benefit to their [the boys'] well-being, mental health and personal development,"* observed Bruce Skewes, Assistant Principal at Yea High School.

The graphic on the left is powerful – one of our boys drew this to illustrate how much the 'fire stuff' consumed him previously (left), and now after the program (right). *"It's still in there, but it's right up the back; I'm in control of it now"* And what can he do now he's in control of it? *"I can do anything I want to."*

