



evolution, not revolution

RACQ Foundation's donation to Evolve is helping keep students affected by the January floods on the straight and narrow.

STORY DEB ECCLESTON



LOSING HIS MOTHER at a young age changed Jake's life forever. Over the next decade, his life spiralled out of control and his relationship with his once close family, especially his father, deteriorated due to Jake's drug addiction.

"It was tough growing up because I was really close to her," he said.

Jake was 18 years old when he made a decision that would change his life forever. He decided to join Evolve, a not-for-profit organisation that works with at risk and vulnerable young people who know there is a better path, but just don't know how to get there.

"My father told me about Evolve so I thought it wouldn't hurt to give it a go," Jake said. "It was one of the hardest decisions I've had to make, jumping out of my comfort zone and trying something new, though I was determined. Determined, for one, to rebuild my relationship with the family and also to get a clear head and new perspective on life."

Evolve helps young people recognise their value and build their sense of self through a series of innovative programs that are based on the philosophies of Narrative and Bush Adventure Therapy.

The organisation has two properties – Woodstock, at the base of Mount Tamborine, and Typo Station, in the foothills of Victoria's Alpine National Park – that provide a natural environment for young people to reflect on their lives.

"It's hard to say exactly how Evolve helped me through, but being out in the middle of nowhere for a bit over a week gave me a lot of time to think, find out who I am and what my values were," Jake said. "I came back from the program a changed young man."

With the assistance of the RACQ Foundation, Evolve will continue changing the lives of young people, particularly those recovering from the trauma of the floods that devastated the

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Lockyer Valley and Ipswich regions.

Evolve was one of 22 community groups and organisations across Queensland to receive a total of \$1.7 million in the first round of RACQ Foundation distributions.

Evolve CEO Paul Stolz said RACQ's donation of more than \$127,000 would go towards establishing a Flood Recovery Program to Lockyer Valley and Laidley high school students affected by the January floods.

"It means we are able to run a full program for 25 young people in the worst affected areas of Queensland," Mr Stolz said. "This will not only impact the young people, but also their schools, communities and families."

Evolve's program includes a 12 day hike through rugged national park, a challenge that not only teaches young people new skills, but creates a powerful environment in which they can explore and develop their goals and vision.

Following the hike, the youths spend a week at the station – either Woodstock or Typo – where they are encouraged to develop new skills and in doing so, build a sense of responsibility and respect for themselves and others.

The idea behind Evolve is to take youths considered 'at risk' and to put them on the path to a brighter future.

"They aren't bad kids," Mr Stolz said.

"The idea is to nip any problems in the bud to give the kids the best chance at a bright future."

There are several factors that determine whether a young person is considered 'at risk'. Discipline issues at school, depression, anxiety, poor family and social relationship and issues managing anger are all indicators that a young person could be veering off the rails.

Dealing with such issues early not only helps youths get back on track, but benefits the community as a whole, Mr Stolz said.

"It costs more than \$1000 a day to keep one young person in a juvenile justice facility, and almost \$500 a day to have one young person in supported accommodation," he said. "It costs just \$15 a day to show a young person how they can change their life to have a positive future."

RACQ External Relations general manager Paul Turner said with the RACQ Foundation's donation, Evolve would be able to continue helping young Queenslanders get their lives back on track.

"We're proud to help ensure this vital community service continues for residents of Ipswich and the Lockyer Valley," Mr Turner said.

www.evolve.org.au

IMAGE: EVOLVE CEO PAUL STOLZ.