Cottage by the Sea
QUEENSCLIFF

June 2026

Adventure matters: Turning points for children experiencing vulnerabilities: the role of outdoor adventure

Summary of Report



A message from our CEO

At Cottage by the Sea, we see every day how powerful outdoor adventures can be for children experiencing vulnerability. With the chance to step outside their comfort zone, children build confidence, form meaningful connections and begin to see new possibilities for their future.

The research team led by Louise Paatsch, from Deakin University's Strategic Research Centre – Research for Educational Impact (REDI), produced this wonderful piece of research. I believe it confirms what we've long known – these experiences can be life-changing. Parents and teachers often tell us the same thing: the impact lasts well beyond the program itself. One teacher recently shared: "We can't teach the skills they learned at Cottage in a classroom." For some children, it's their first time seeing the ocean or stepping onto a boat. While it can feel daunting at first, these experiences help children challenge themselves, build resilience and grow in confidence. These moments of courage build confidence that stays with children long after the adventure ends.

I do believe there isn't anything more important than this. If you would like to read the full report you can download it here from: www.cottagebythesea/research-studies

Executive Summary

Thanks to the extensive research undertaken by Deakin University in the last three years, Cottage by the Sea (CBTS) has been able to better understand the short and long-term impacts that the Take a Break, REEF and Mentor Programs have had on children and young adults experiencing vulnerabilities.

In 2025, focusing mostly upon the Take a Break program a further qualitative case study approach was taken drawing on data generated through interviews with the school leaders, teachers, parents, Cottage by the Sea staff and importantly, past and recent program participants to understand in particular how outdoor adventure-based experiences provided by Cottage by the Sea serve as a pivotal turning point in helping children and young people overcome challenges, build resilience and cultivate hope for their future.

Three powerful themes: trust, risk-taking and hope

In studying the impact of our programs, three pivotal themes emerged: trust, risk-taking and hope.

The report found that trust emerges as a foundation; as children develop confidence in their peers, program leaders and most importantly – themselves – through supportive and challenging experiences. With this sense of security, they become more willing to take risks, stepping beyond their comfort zones, navigating uncertainty, and embracing challenges in a safe and supported environment. In turn, these moments of courage and achievement foster hope, as children begin to envision new possibilities for their future, inspired by their successes and personal growth.

The findings from this study illustrate how adventure-based experiences act as a catalyst for change and serve as turning points of children's growth, participation in outdoor adventure based activities fosters resilience, self belief and the capacity to aspire despite adversity. This became increasingly clear in the interviews conducted with the alumni who were now old enough to reflect back on their participation and the difference it had made to their lives more generally.

One participant captured this shift simply, but powerfully:

"I learnt that I got more in me than I thought… so I can do more things than I thought about."

– Take a Break participant

For many, these experiences are transformative. As one Cottage alumni reflected:

"What happened there [CBTS]…as a child you just want happiness and hope to actually do and be and say what you want…it's just nice that there are certain places [CBTS]…that can provide the tools to dream."

– Cottage Alumni



At a time when camps and adventure providers are navigating rising costs and broader sector pressures, the findings reinforce just how important these experiences remain for young people. While these challenges are significant, the findings in Deakin's report reinforce why access to adventure-based experiences remains so important.

A timely reminder of why adventure matters

This report is a strong validation of the work being done across Cottage by the Sea programs every day. It also serves as a reminder that for children experiencing vulnerability, opportunities for adventure are not "optional"– they are essential.

This is why we remain more committed than ever to enriching the lives of children and young people experiencing vulnerability by providing experiences that embrace fun and create opportunities for growth in environments that inspire.

Cottage by The Sea's journey began in 1890 and continues to offer impactful programs due to the incredible staff and level of community support it receives.

It is through this generosity of those who donate their time and money that ensures Cottage by the Sea can continue offering these incredible adventure-based programs which are proving to result in children and young adults feeling not only more capable and confident in their ability to influence their own future but the exciting opportunity to imagine possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances.

Thank you to the team for their extraordinary contribution

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