Cottage by the Sea

QUEENSCLIFF

August 2024

The Impact of Cottage by the Sea: From Ripples to Waves

Summary of Report





A Message from our CEO

I hope you enjoy reading this, our latest report: **The Impact of Cottage by the Sea: From Ripples to Waves**, as much as I did. The research team, led by Professor Louise Paatsch, from Deakin University's Strategic Research Centre – Research for Educational Impact (REDI), produced this wonderful piece of work. I believe it offers a beautiful insight into what we have known anecdotally for some time, reinforcing through research and data concepts that can be so difficult to articulate. Importantly, the findings of this study validate the life-changing impact of our programs and will allow us to develop and enhance them further.

If you would like to read the full report, you can download it here: www.cottagebythesea.com.au/research-studies

Here is a summary of the report and key findings, which I trust you will find insightful. Congratulations to the team from Deakin University and on behalf of the Cottage community, I express my gratitude for your hard work in understanding the medium- to long-term impacts of Cottage by the Sea.

Thank you,
Adam Wake – CEO, Cottage by the Sea

Executive Summary

In 2023, Cottage by the Sea invited Deakin University to conduct further research following on from the report **Cottage by the Sea: The Difference 'Take a Break' Makes** (Paatsch et al., 2023) that presented the short-term impacts of the Take a Break program. This new research project built on the previous report's recommendations and findings and focused on evidencing the medium- to long-term impacts of Cottage by the Sea programs from the perspective of the alumni and parents of children and young people who attended Take a Break, REEF, and Mentor programs, as well as an ex-principal, an ex-Cottage by the Sea board member, a director of a charitable foundation, teachers, and leadership from schools who had attended the Take a Break program for many years. In addition, views were also sought from students and their teachers and school leaders who had recently participated in the Take a Break program for the first time.

The definition of impact is discussed more fully in the report. What should be highlighted at the outset is the fact that Cottage by the Sea has a long history, stretching back to 1890, and it could only have continued to exist over this time due to the remarkable staff and level of community support it receives. This alone is a testament to its long-term, enduring impact. Cottage by the Sea inspires the generosity of the leadership and staff who plan and implement its programs, as well as those who donate their time and money to ensure that Cottage by the Sea meets its vision of providing high-quality programs to children and young people across the state of Victoria who are often living with high levels of disadvantage, trauma, and experiences of natural disasters such as bushfires and floods.

Participants in this research project were interviewed either in small groups or individually. Responses from these interviews produced the rich store of data that forms the bulk of the content of this report. Other archival materials made available to the research team have also been incorporated into the report, providing insights into the historical impact of Cottage by the Sea.

Summary of Key Findings

This summary of key findings draws from the various data sources to synthesise key insights into the medium- to long-term impacts of Cottage by the Sea on the lives of children and young people who attend their programs. Specifically, these insights are gathered from alumni spanning the years 1939 to 2023, an ex-principal, leaders, an ex-board member, as well as parents, principals, teachers, and students. These findings are presented in response to the following two research questions:

1. **What are the medium- to long-term impacts of Cottage by the Sea programs on children, young people, families, schools, and communities?**
2. **In what ways does participation in Cottage by the Sea programs enhance the lives of children and young people who attend?**

Findings from the analysis of these data identified four broad themes in relation to the medium- to long-term impacts and opportunities offered by Cottage by the Sea: (1) Fostering Fun and Enjoyment; (2) Building Relationships; (3) Providing a Safe Haven; and (4) (Re)Creating Happy Memories.

Any report seeking to analyse the impact/s of organisations such as Cottage by the Sea needs to identify and separate out themes to help make sense of what would otherwise be too complex to understand. However, what Cottage by the Sea does so well is to integrate these themes into an overall, coherent, and consistent experience for the participating children and young people. Time and again, those interviewed found it hard to point to a single aspect of the program that they felt left a major impact on their experience. Instead, the impact could only be understood once all aspects of the program were seen as working together, displaying the nature, breadth, and scope of the opportunities provided to those participating. It was these aspects that turned the ripple effects of Cottage by the Sea into the waves that often carried these children and young people through their lives.

The findings from this research provide compelling evidence of the medium- to long-term impact of Cottage by the Sea on the lives of the children and young people who attend, and the opportunities the organisation's programs provide. For those who attended Cottage by the Sea between 1939 and 2010, their reflections showed the ways in which their experiences at the Cottage changed their lives and led them to pathways they could never have imagined. For the young people who had attended the Take a Break program more recently, their experiences reflected the joy of trying and achieving new things, building resilience, and applying their newly found abilities to other contexts at school and at home.

Thank you to the team from Deakin University

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