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# Striving Deadly: Extending psychosocial care for young people with burn scars in North Queensland

Initiative Type

Model of Care

Status

Deliver

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## Summary

Striving Deadly is a therapeutic outdoor adventure initiative for survivors of burn injury, which provides an extension of psychosocial care for children beyond the boundaries of the Townsville

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University Hospital (TUH) walls. Therapeutic goals of the program include: access to peer support, challenge by choice experiences, and to build resilience through self-reflection. Striving Deadly was conceptualised on the model of Camp Oz, a burns camp delivered annually for 12 years by the Queensland Children's Hospital and Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) Bornhoffen in South East Queensland (SEQ). Learnings from the delivery of Camp Oz were contextualised to accommodate the specific needs of running the program in North Queensland. Research indicates that young people with burns are at an increased risk of manifesting negative life trajectories during adolescence. This has the potential to impact on many aspects of their life including psychological well-being, engagement in education and career and even social contributions. Despite extensive involvement by hospital staff through follow up care, many children with burns experience considerable ongoing physical, social and emotional challenges that impact their engagement in their everyday occupations. Striving Deadly provides an opportunity to consider these impacts in a community-based environment through engagement in outdoor adventure alongside their peers. In recognition of the high proportion of indigenous participants, Striving Deadly was named by Trevor Prior, TUH's Cultural Practice Coordinator with the aim of facilitating cultural safety within the program. It was chosen to acknowledge that the children were striving to be 'deadly' or a 'better version' of themselves. The camp began with a smoking ceremony to welcome the children and start them on their healing journey.

#### Key dates

Jan 2020

Dec 2021

#### Implementation sites

North Queensland

#### Partnerships

Townsville University Hospital, Queensland Children's Hospital, PCYC Bornhoffen Leadership Centre

## Key Contacts

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## **Aim**

To extend psycho-social care to this vulnerable population with the aim of improving their self-perception and self-acceptance post-burn injury, and encouraging them to have goals and hopes for themselves despite their visible scarring. It will bring children together who face similar psych-social challenges away from the sterile clinical environment.

## **Benefits**

Well-designed outdoor adventure interventions can support and expand hospital and community-based psychosocial interventions for young people with health conditions. Based on the success of the 2020 'Striving Deadly' program, the Children's Hospital Foundation have secured funding for FY21/22. The impact of COVID-19 in late 2021 has resulted in the next Striving Deadly being planned for early-mid 2022, with extension to include young people with other traumatic injuries. The partnership with SEQ providers has built in contingencies for expanding the capacity of local providers as partners in North Queensland, to assist with the delivery of the outdoor experiences and build sustainability for the program.

## **Background**

Research indicates that young people with burns are at an increased risk of manifesting negative life trajectories during adolescence. This has the potential to impact on many aspects of their life including long-term psychological well-being, engagement in education and career and even social contributions. A proportion of children who sustain burn injuries will experience long term impacts on their emotional well-being, self-esteem, and willingness to engage with social interactions or maintain

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social connectivity. Care for young people post burn injury is often focussed on the physical manifestations of the injury. Support for long term psycho-social consequences is often provided at community-based services. Those services are often difficult to access in indigenous communities and rural and remote locations.

## **Solutions Implemented**

Eight children aged between eight and 15 attended the Striving Deadly burns camp in November 2020 at Paluma. Four children identified as indigenous. All of these children had experienced their acute trauma journeys at TUH and were identified as having difficulty reintegrating with their families, peers or communities. Children were given the opportunity to undertake challenges by choice in activities such as rock hopping through creeks, kayaking, high and low ropes courses. All participants were encouraged to work together as a team to overcome obstacles and support each other to achieve individual goals. These opportunities were designed to develop self-esteem, self-acceptance and social relationships, in a supported environment that recognizes the impact of their burn injury and scarring. Cultural safety was supported in the program through the name 'Striving Deadly' and through the support of dedicated Indigenous Liaison Officers, who attended camp and provided crucial support to not only indigenous children attending the camp but all children as they undertook the adventure challenges.

## **Evaluation and Results**

Interviews and surveys with young people and their caregivers, as well as staff participants. Raw data was analysed deductively and inductively to report themes. All the young people indicated that Striving Deadly benefited their psychological, social or physical well-being and that afterwards they felt that their burn scar did not define who they are. There was in fact an improvement in body image. 87 per cent of participants reported they would return. The children saw the camp as part of their journey to continue with the treatment.

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