



**REGENERATE**  
**EVALUATION:**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
FEBRUARY 2019







**Regenerate** supports the recovery of women who have survived family violence, and addresses the traumatic impacts of family violence using Bush Adventure Therapy (BAT). Regenerate offers regular therapeutic components from which women and their children can ‘choose their own adventure’. BAT components include: two-hour adventure sessions; whole-day adventures; overnight adventure camps, and one-to-one counselling. This exploratory evaluation found Regenerate supports recovery across nine domains, with greatest gains in areas of safety, mental health and wellbeing, empowerment and self-esteem. Results also indicate progress in the area of financial independence, a possible by-product of gains made in other areas.

While Bush Adventure Therapy (BAT) has been found to be effective for young people, adults and families, Regenerate is the first trial, anywhere in the world, of BAT as a therapeutic intervention with women survivors of family violence (FV).

The evidence-informed ‘Mechanisms of Change’ used within Regenerate include: 1) physical activities and use of adventure; 2) a therapeutic framework and counselling conversations; 3) a safe and supportive small group; and 4) contact with nature. It is the tailored combination of these mediums that offers survivors a group-based ‘environment of recovery’.

***This evaluation was exploratory and formative. A mix of research methods, data sources and standardised tools were used to evaluate the effects and effectiveness of Regenerate.***

A preliminary literature review identified suitable definitions of recovery, research frameworks, theories of change, and ‘common approaches’ known to be important in supporting recovery from FV. A range of suitable tools for measuring recovery progress were reviewed.

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach to measure progress towards program goals:

- Demonstration of the therapeutic benefits of BAT in support of women recovering from the traumatic impacts of FV, and where relevant, their children.
- Implementation of BAT activities from November 2017 to the present day, including the delivery of two-hour adventure sessions, whole-day adventures, overnight adventure camps and one-to-one counselling.

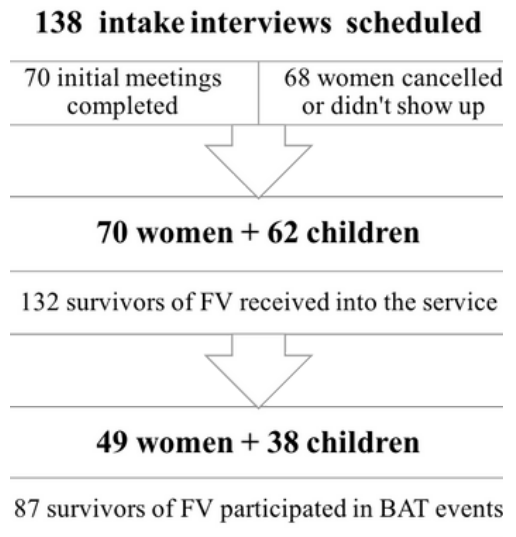


The sample for this evaluation included 138 women who were referred (or who referred themselves) to Regenerate between November 2017 and January 2019, and focused on the outcomes of 49 women and their 38 children who actively participated in therapeutic events during that time. The majority of evaluation findings relate to these 87 survivors of FV, who received a total of 3,673 hours of BAT during 14 months of program delivery to January 2019.

## Findings

As a demonstration project trialling the use of BAT as a therapeutic intervention with survivors of FV, Regenerate exceeded funded requirements, both in terms of program outputs and implementation of program activities.

From qualitative and quantitative research conducted across all program activities, Regenerate achieved strong recovery outcomes for participating women across all domains of recovery measured, with noteworthy outcomes in certain areas. Participants and their referring workers were highly satisfied with the service they received, and enthusiastic about the important role Regenerate had played in the recovery journey of 87 women and children.



***Regenerate delivered  
3,673 hours of tailored  
BAT services  
to 87 survivors of  
Family Violence  
for a Government  
investment of \$739,665***





## Regenerate Service Outputs

### Establishment and Promotion

- Established from July to October 2017, Regenerate was promoted to FV services in northern Melbourne from October to November 2017, and in full swing by December 2017.
- Since implementation, Regenerate has received referrals from 11 FV services and 5 self-referrals.
- During its first 14 months of implementation, Regenerate exceeded required program outputs by almost double.
- Due to funding insecurity, active promotion has ceased.
- Regenerate continues to receive a steady flow of referrals, and has a waitlist for BAT events.
- The program has received interest from FV service providers outside of northern metropolitan Melbourne, indicating demand for expansion.
- FV services in regional areas have expressed interest in replication of the program in their region.
- Regenerate continues to support all active participants, until cessation of funding.

### Service Users

Since establishment, 87 participants have received 3,673 hours of therapeutic interventions across the four BAT components.

#### **The 49 women participants received:**

- 284 hours of weekly or fortnightly two-hour adventure sessions
- 432 hours of whole-day adventures
- 1,380 hours of overnight adventure camps (of two to three nights duration)
- 189 hours of one-to-one counselling sessions for participating women (in person or via phone)

#### **Their 38 child participants received:**

- 98 hours of weekly or fortnightly two-hour adventure sessions
- 234 hours of whole-day adventures
- 1,056 hours of overnight adventure camps (of two to three nights duration).

### Funded Targets

#### ***Year One (2017-2018) - Regenerate was funded to deliver:***

- 200 x participant BAT sessions (individual and group)
- 23 x whole-day and overnight BAT activities
- **a total of 174 participant days annually**

#### ***Year Two (2018-2019) - Regenerate was funded to deliver:***

- 15 x two-hour BAT group interventions
- 5 x four-hour BAT group interventions
- 10 x whole-day BAT group interventions
- 7 x overnight BAT camps (three or four days)
- **a total of 37 BAT events and 185 participant days annually**

#### ***Over the 14 month implementation period (Dec 2017 to Jan 2019) - Regenerate delivered the equivalent of:***

- 39 x two-hour BAT group interventions
- 16 x whole-day BAT group interventions
- 9 x overnight BAT camps (three or four days)
- 189 one-to-one counselling sessions
- **a total of 64 BAT events and 366 participant days.**



## Therapeutic Mechanisms of Recovery

As a Demonstration project trialling the use of BAT with survivors of FV, Regenerate mobilised four evidence-informed BAT 'Mechanisms of Change' (MoC) to support therapeutic recovery. It was theorised that these four mediums ameliorate biological,- psychological-, social- and ecological harms caused by FV experiences, and enhance wellbeing across these same domains:

- 1) physical activities and use of adventure
- 2) a therapeutic framework and counselling conversations
- 3) a safe and supportive small group, and
- 4) contact with nature.

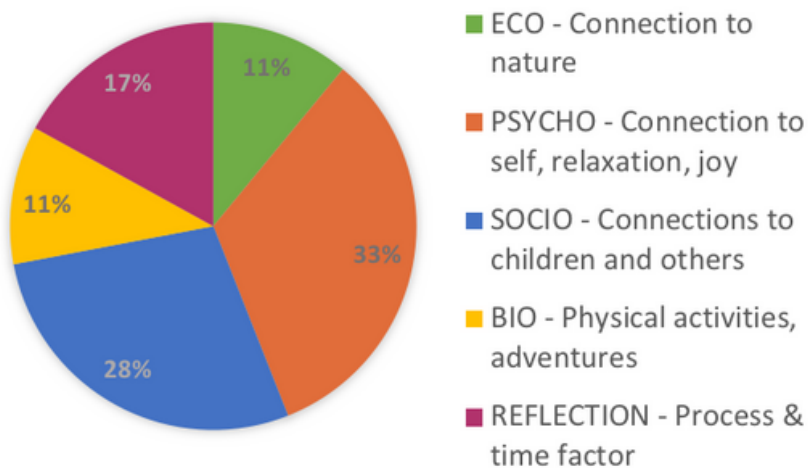
An analysis of the 'Participant Reflection Sheets' (PRS) administered after every BAT event since November 2017 (n=196) supports the importance of all four MoC at work within BAT's innovative therapeutic 'environment of recovery'. Within the PRS, women were asked to describe their "most important or favourite parts of the BAT event". The women's responses illuminated a possible fifth important MoC: 5) time for reflection and the emergence of personal insights.

The chart below shows the percentage of responses from women related to each of the five MoC.

**Thematic analysis (n=196) indicated the women's favourite parts of Regenerate were the positive feelings and sense of belonging gained through 'physical adventures in nature with others' and 'opportunities to reflect'.**

***"Something I'd like to taste this weekend... sweet. Something I'd like to hear this weekend...songs of many birds. Something I'd like to feel this weekend... to be energetic and rejuvenated. Something I'd like to smell this weekend... fresh air and mist. Something I'd like to see this weekend... a beautiful sight of animals in the bush"***  
(Participant 2018)

Participant Reported Means of Recovery





## Regenerate Recovery Outcomes

Thirty percent of Regenerate's 49 participating women (n=15) were interviewed in December 2018 to evaluate recovery outcomes attributable to the program, and to assess key mechanisms supportive of outcomes within Regenerate's service model. The semi structured interviews included qualitative questions about the women's recovery journey. Interviews also trialled the suitability of five validated tools: Empowerment Star, Australian Wellbeing Scale, Family Environment Scale, Nature Relatedness Scale, and Adventure Therapy Experience Scale.

### Defining Recovery: *"I am strong, I am worthy"*

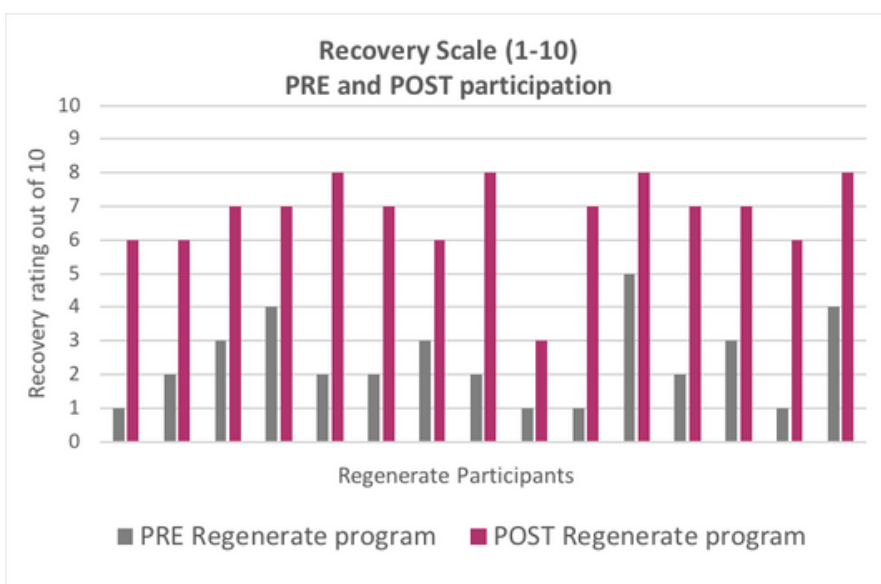
Analysis of 'Participant Reflection Sheets' (n=196) demonstrates that weekly or fortnightly adventure sessions encourage women to take time out from their everyday stresses, help them to connect with others, and create space for enjoyment and relaxation in nature, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and overwhelm. Whole-day adventures and overnight camps produce positive feelings (joy, fun), relaxation (connection to inner self), sense of belonging (connection to others) and space for deeper reflection (personal insights), as well as opportunities for one-to-one counselling conversations. Semi structured interviews with participants found that 29% of women identified Regenerate as their most important form of social support of any kind.

*"I am strong. I am worthy. I want to fight to help give women empowerment like you have all done for me. I will do great things, inspired by Regenerate"*  
(Participant 2018)

### Supporting Recovery: *"Exhale the past and inhale the future"*

Women were asked retrospectively (Post-/Pre-) how they would rate their recovery progress *before* they were involved in the Regenerate program (Time point 1) and *since* participating in Regenerate (Time point 2). For both time points, women rated their recovery on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was 'Just starting out', and 10 was 'Well on my way'. All 15 participants reported progress of between 2 to 6 points on the scale, with a mean increase of 4 points.

*"[My] favourite thing about the event was the walk and the scenery. I feel refreshed, feel stronger, and confident inside"*  
(Participant 2018)





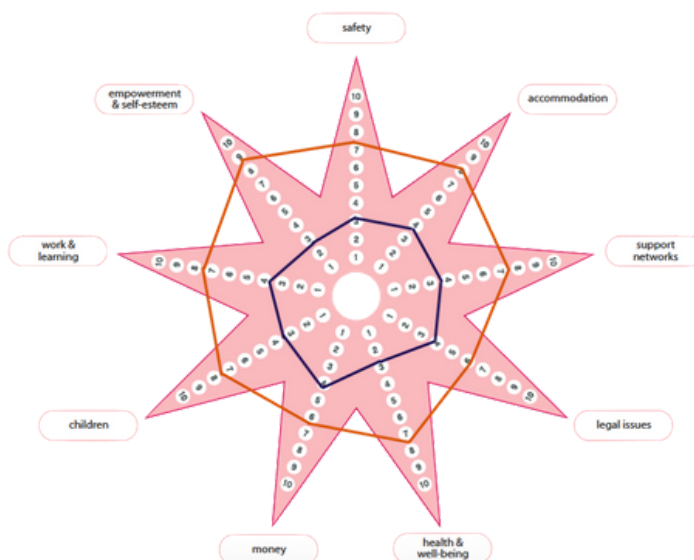
## Empowering Independence: “If mentally I feel better, then I can progress in all areas of life...”

This evaluation trialled use of a standardised tool called the ‘Empowerment Star’ (ES) to assess recovery from FV in nine areas:

1. Safety, 2. Health and wellbeing,
3. Empowerment and self esteem, 4. Children,
5. Support networks, 6. Financial situation,
7. Accommodation, 8. Legal issues, and
9. Work and learning.

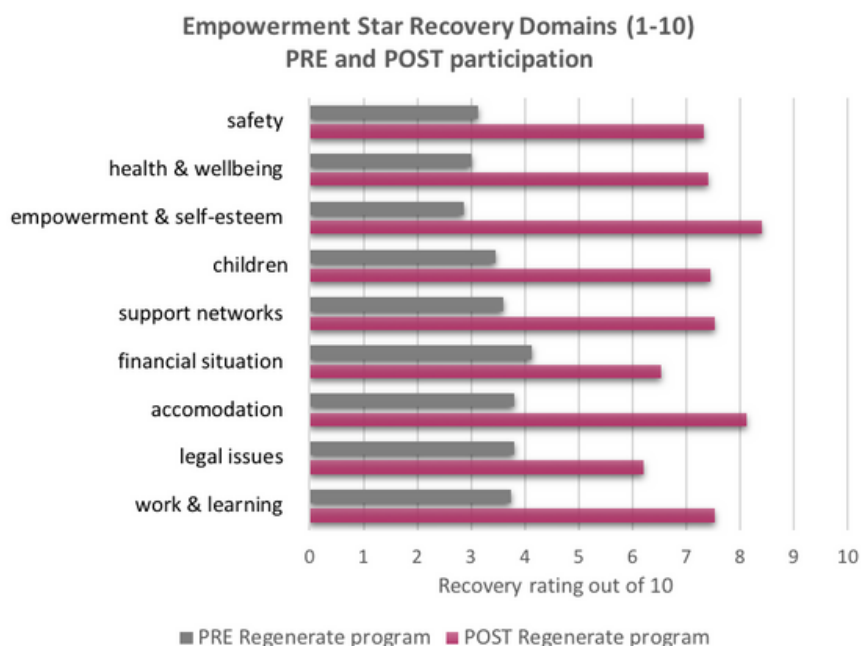
The ES is underpinned by the assumption that ‘empowerment and a life free from abuse is a possible and realistic goal for all women who have experienced FV’. This tool was administered retrospectively (Post-/Pre-) (n=15) to rate where the womens’ point of recovery was *before* involvement in the Regenerate program (Time point 1) and *since* participating in Regenerate (Time point 2) in relation to each domain. The Star and Table show group averages. Results demonstrate strong recovery progress in all areas, with greatest gains made in Health & wellbeing and Empowerment & self-esteem.

**“Besides the help in case management, finances and the legal support by lawyers, the mental wellbeing is the most important of all. Because if mentally I feel better, then I can progress in all areas of life”**  
(Participant 2018)



Mean Empowerment Star Results for  
Participating Women  
Blue = PRE, Red = POST

**“Regen reminded me of not who I was defined by Family Violence, but reminds me 'who actually I am', or I was before. I honestly say that Regen was the one that put me straight back on my track”** (Participant 2018)

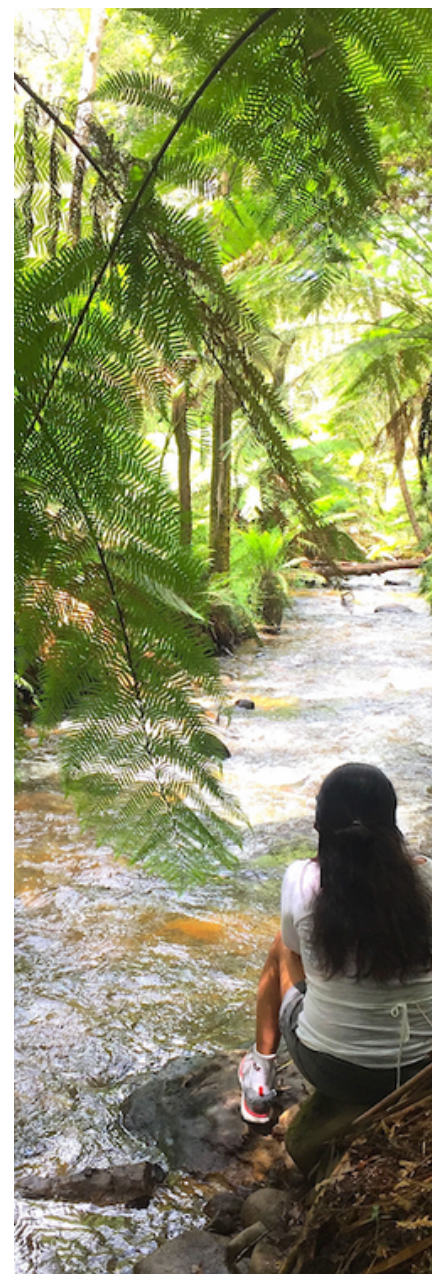
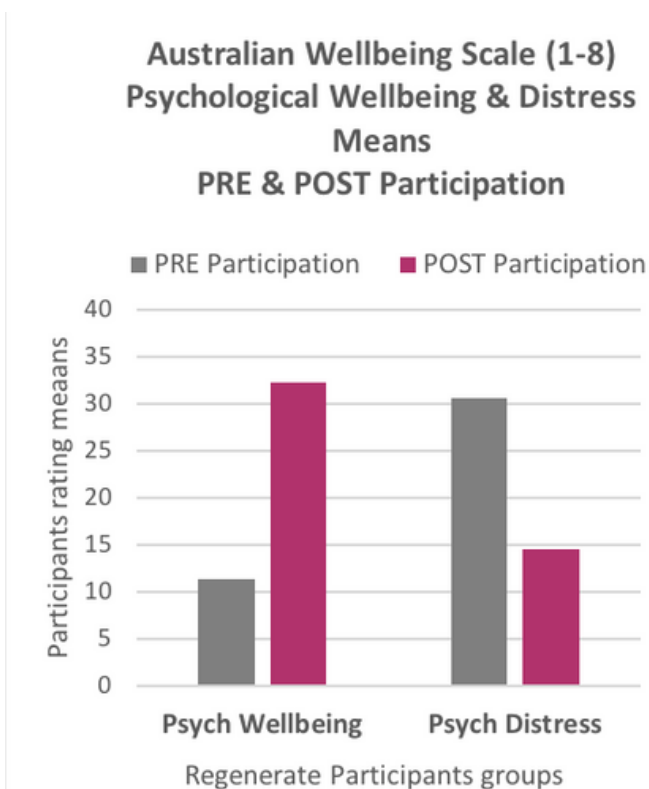




## Improving Wellbeing: *“Paying attention to the rhythm of life...”*

The Australian Wellbeing Scale (AWS) was used to measure levels of psychological wellbeing and psychological distress the women experienced *before* starting at Regenerate and *since* participating (at the time of the interview). The AWS asks a series of questions, to which women chose a number between 1 and 8, where 1 is 'False' and 8 is 'True'. A standard process was followed to assign overall scores to rate participant's levels of wellbeing and distress. As seen in the figures below, both factors showed marked improvement for all participants. Self-reported levels of subjective wellbeing prior to participation were low (mean of 11) and much higher since participation (mean of 32). All women showed marked decreases in levels of psychological distress between the two time points (mean score of 30 before Regenerate and 14 at the time of interviews).

*“There should be more experiential therapies. I take away the importance of tuning in and paying attention to the rhythm of life”* (Participant 2018)



*“I am here to learn and actually do. Actually focus on the ‘doing’ instead of the ‘talking’. I’ll take everything I learn here for [and use it] in my real life”*  
 (Participant 2018)



## Good for children:

*“If I am self confident, my kids also will be better...”*

One of the unique characteristics of Regenerate is the involvement of children in the program. While this evaluation did not gather information directly from children, interviews with mothers indicated their children had benefited both directly from their own involvement, and indirectly through their mother’s involvement. The most commonly cited recovery outcomes for children from the perspectives of their mothers were:

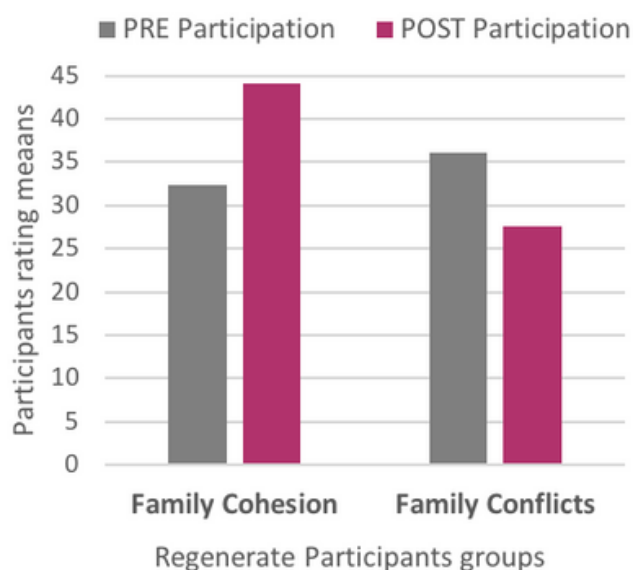
- development of healthy connections with other children and adults
- stronger relationships with mothers, and with siblings, and greater family cohesion
- reduction in conflicts with mothers and siblings
- a better understanding of the causes of violence within family relationships
- helping to prevent FV in the next generation.

*“The main difference - what people do not realise - is that for us, for me, as a survivor of FV, my mental health needs to be nurtured and protected, to be better, to stay well connected with self confidence. If I am self confident, my kids also will be better, and then we all will be safe, and can manage our life better”* (Participant 2018)

*“To build relations and trust with my kids, together again, it was a blessing. We reunited... we were surrounded by lovely people who did not ask any questions, just were holding the space for us, it is so good!”* (Participant 2018)

The evaluation trialled use of the Family Environment Scale (FES), a validated measure to assess progress in areas of family cohesion and family conflict. The FES scale provides 18 statements about families, and for each statement participants choose a number between 1 and 7, where 1 is 'True' and 7 is 'False'. During interviews, women were asked about their family life *before* starting at Regenerate and *since* participating. Results clearly indicate that since participating in Regenerate, levels of family cooperation and cohesion had increased and levels of family conflict had declined.

**Family Environment Scale (1-7)  
Family Cohesion & Conflicts Means  
PRE & POST Participation**



**Regenerate provides a holistic ‘environment of recovery’. Five Mechanisms of Change at work within Regenerate multiply the benefits of counselling. Women are encouraged to access these recovery-promoting mediums outside of the program and into the future, thereby playing a role in preventing future harms.**



## Working together:

*"Regenerate is something that inspires and lifts up the week of my clients"*

Regenerate was promoted in northern metropolitan Melbourne and has received referrals from 11 FV services along with 5 self-referrals. Its holistic approach, combined with its warm integration into the wider suite of FV services enables Regenerate to provide a much-needed boost in the recovery journey of participants.

**Regenerate offers survivors opportunities for safe social connections, greater physical and mental health, new family experiences, and a dose of empowerment that helps move women from 'survive' towards 'thrive'.**

By nurturing personal strengths and belief in self, participating women receive an injection of self-esteem, which energises their journey towards independence and longer-term wellbeing, potentially reducing levels of need for longer-term services.

*"Thanks so much for all the thoughtful time and energy that goes in to the Regenerate program, it is a valuable program that assists us as Family Services Workers when we are looking for supports in the community that are not in buildings and mean someone stands in line, then sits in a chair which may or may not help them. Regenerate is something that inspires and lifts up the week of my clients. The excursion adventures take people to places they could not normally go, with the support and the structure of the group is nothing short of exciting for my clients" (Referring worker 2018)*

Informal feedback provided to Regenerate staff by referring FV workers underlines the value wider workers place on Regenerate's role in their clients' recovery.

Staff have received numerous requests for:

- referral of women outside of the funded region
- specialised BAT events in other regions
- BAT events for existing 'groups' of survivors supported by other services.



***Not only are survivors receiving therapeutic support by trained counsellors, they are experiencing adventurous physical activity and contact with nature led by trained BAT practitioners and the added benefits of authentic peer friendships.***



## Conclusions

***Regenerate has successfully trialled a new and innovative way of supporting the therapeutic recovery of women who have experienced family violence, and their children.***

- During its first 14 months of implementation, Regenerate exceeded required program outputs by almost double.
- Recovery outcomes achieved through the first 14 months of service delivery are positive and encouraging.
- Results indicated progress across nine domains of recovery, in particular in areas of self-esteem and confidence.
- Participants reported increases in general health and psychological wellbeing, and decreases in psychological distress.
- The option of involving children was unique and important for mothers.
- When children were involved in the intervention, their mothers reported positive outcomes for themselves, their children, and the whole family unit.
- Even though fellow participants did not know any details of their FV history, peer support found within the group BAT experiences provided participants with a sense of connection, understanding and support.
- By empowering women, participants felt more able to reclaim control of their own lives and seek a better future for themselves and their family.
- Regenerate may help prevent further harms for women and their children.
- The Empowerment Star offers a useful reflection tool with the women, and an appropriate recovery outcome tool.
- While we cannot definitively conclude that Regenerate was the cause of recovery progress made, the program was almost certainly a contributor to gains made.
- Regenerate is valued by other service providers within the FV service landscape.
- It is considered an effective adjunct to other forms of treatment and support, and a valuable stand-alone treatment.
- Should Regenerate be refunded, this evaluation will be built on with a more sophisticated research design, to improve the strength of evidence in relation to effectiveness.

## Cost and Benefits

- Areas of program development and improvement were identified, and cost efficiencies found.
- A recent cost-benefit analysis found that Regenerate can sustainably deliver 50 BAT events and 275 participant days, or approximately 3,125 hours of therapeutic support at an annual investment of \$655,000 by the Victorian Government.
- This amounts to a \$40,000 cost reduction on current funding based on program efficiencies found to date.

***By continuing to fund Regenerate's therapeutic calendar of BAT events, the Victorian Government will actively strengthen and empower some 100 women and children survivors of family violence annually. At \$200 per therapeutic hour, Regenerate offers a cost-effective way to achieve multiple recommendations made within the the Royal Commission into Family Violence.***



***“Besides the help in case management, finances and the legal support by lawyers, mental wellbeing is the most important of all! Because if mentally I feel better, then I can progress in all areas of life”***  
(Participant 2018)

*“Each of my clients has spoken highly of the fun, happy feeling that came out of being at the program with other women and having that fun time to look forward to. My clients understand that the group is therapeutic and are looking for that support. One of my clients recently had to leave the program to move locations and was very sad to say goodbye to the program, which has been incredible nurturing on her journey of recovery. My other client has been dealing with so much lately, with health and other issues, and has not been able to attend for some weeks and is so disappointed to miss out, but appreciates that Regenerate staff keep her in the program and keep contact, and there is no sense that my client will be excluded for not being able to attend at present. This sensitivity and support has been wonderful for my client, to know that her inability to attend at times is no disadvantage to her. Overall, my clients have felt honoured and held by the Regenerate program, and I cannot wait to make my next referral! Thanks so much for all the thoughtful time and energy that goes in to the Regenerate program, it is a valuable program that assists us as Family Services Workers when we are looking for supports in the community that are not in buildings and mean someone stands in line, then sits in a chair which may or may not help them. Regenerate is something that inspires and lifts up the week of my clients. The excursion adventures take people to places they could not normally go, with the support and the structure of the group is nothing short of exciting for my clients. I cannot thank you enough for the Regenerate program.”*  
**(Naomi Pullen, Family Services Case Worker)**

## Evaluation Report prepared by

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**Amanda Smith** - Founder and facilitator of BAT programs within a Queensland homelessness service. Over 18 years experience in social work, trauma recovery and FV. Lecturer in the School of Social Work at Griffith University with a research focus on the therapeutic impact of BAT on recovery. Currently pursuing the development of a BAT post graduate course in the School of Social Work and Human Services, Griffith University.

**Dr Anita Pryor** - Tasmanian-based director of Adventure Works Pty Ltd, an organisation that supports Bush Adventure Therapy practice, research and practitioner training. Over 20 years experience in Bush Adventure Therapy research, evaluation and policy. Convener of the Eighth International Adventure Therapy Conference, Sydney 2018.



**REGENERATE** is delivered by Adventure Works Australia in collaboration with the Good Samaritan Inn. Funded by Family Safety Victoria of the Victorian Government's Department of Health and Human Services, Regenerate is a demonstration project designed to meet recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, including to 'expand the depth of therapeutic interventions available to victims/survivors of family violence' and to 'strengthen the sector's capability in delivering effective therapeutic interventions'.

