

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Rachael Kennedy, and I work as a Bush Adventure Therapy (BAT) Practitioner in the Blue Mountains, NSW. I support several clients who are funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). I have observed a consistent trend of clients requesting ongoing access to BAT services due to the significant benefits these supports provide.

It has come to my attention that Wilderness Therapy has been categorised as 'not value for money/not effective or beneficial,' without any detailed explanation to support this viewpoint. Based on my professional experience, I would like to offer the following observations on the benefits of BAT for my clients:

1. **Testing and Evaluation:** BAT provides a unique environment for testing, evaluating, and reviewing interventions developed by the clients' multidisciplinary team.
2. **Behavioural Insights:** Observing clients in a natural and unguarded setting yields valuable insights into their behaviour and functionality. I share these observations with other critical supports, including parents, carers, teachers, and health professionals, enabling a better understanding of the clients and improving their daily lives.
3. **Engagement in Therapy:** BAT effectively engages participants who are increasingly disengaged from school, socially isolated, addicted to screens, and challenging for their families to manage.
4. **Alignment with NDIS Goals:** The goals of BAT are clearly mapped to the participants' NDIS goals, ensuring that the therapy aligns with their overall plan.
5. **Outdoor-Based Health and Wellbeing Services:** These services offer a broader range of choices and control for participants with diverse needs. There is substantial and growing evidence supporting the efficacy of professionally facilitated, evidence-informed outdoor therapies for various target groups, particularly those who struggle to engage in traditional indoor or clinical settings.
6. **Therapeutic Approaches:** The use of nature as a metaphor, role-playing in safe and regulated environments, and other focused psychological strategies such as Solution-Focused Therapy, Strength-Based Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and mindfulness-integrated CBT are central to the success of BAT.
7. **Innovation in Support:** Listing Wilderness Therapy as ineffective may inadvertently limit innovation in supporting trauma-informed and effective bio-psycho-social outcomes for individuals with diverse needs.
8. **Empowerment and Independence:** Taking participants outdoors can be a 'least restrictive' and empowering approach, fostering independent self-regulation and increased independence in daily activities, including benefiting from the evidence-based advantages of nature for overall health and wellbeing.
9. **Health and Wellbeing Outcomes:** Evidence shows that outdoor experiences improve cardiovascular, respiratory, and immune health; enhance mobility, balance, sleep, mood, emotional regulation, and stress response; and contribute to better attention, concentration, problem-solving, and decision-making. These outcomes are particularly beneficial for persons with disabilities, who often face higher rates of physical and mental health challenges than the general population.

Thank you for your consideration towards these captured benefits of BAT.

Regards,

Rachael Kennedy
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