

## **Building better futures: The community-driven approach of Boys to the Bush for disengaged young men in rural communities.**

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### **Background:**

Young men in rural areas with higher adverse childhood experiences are often disengaged and at risk of poor life outcomes. They face significant challenges, including a lack of social capital, positive role models, and support. Their decisions to engage with or withdraw from their community are influenced by their perceptions of available resources, opportunities, and self-efficacy. Boys to the Bush (BttB), a community not-for-profit organisation, addresses these issues through formal mentorship, structured outdoor activities, and community engagement. BttB employs a community development model that focuses on fostering personal development, enhancing social capital, and improving coordination between community organisations and members to address risks faced by young men.

### **Approach:**

BttB focuses on preventative and early intervention strategies for disengaged young men in rural communities. Recognising the need for supportive adults and communities, BttB views all young men as valuable resources and assets, fostering a sense of belonging and helping them integrate more fully into their communities. The organisation offers a range of programs, including camps, school programs, formal mentoring, and community engagement activities.

### **Outcome:**

BttB has observed improved school attendance and behaviours, enhanced community engagement, and increased self-esteem among participants. The program also reduces risky behaviours, supports mental health, and expands educational and career pathways. Positive long-term impacts include higher employment rates and reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.

### **Innovation and Significance:**

BttB leverages the strengths of rural communities to support at-risk young men. Local businesses and community services are actively involved, creating partnerships that benefit both the participants and the broader community. Formal mentors, employed to facilitate the program activities, play a crucial role in guiding and supporting the young men. This approach not only aids in the personal growth of the participants but also strengthens the community as a whole.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

No interests to disclose