

**OPERATION FLINDERS**  
*ONE STEP AT A TIME*



## **Coordinator Handbook 2024**

## Acknowledgement of Country

Operation Flinders Foundation's Core Program takes place on Adnyamathanha Country and the office and warehouse are located on Kurna Country.

Operation Flinders Foundation acknowledges that the Adnyamathanha people are the traditional custodians of the Country on which we operate our Core Program, Yankaninna Station.

Operation Flinders Foundation recognises that 'Country' incorporates the land, water, and sky. It is also the blood, spirit, creation stories, teachings, and lore of Aboriginal people. We pay our respect to this connection, as well as to the Elders, past, present and emerging.

## Purpose

This handbook is intended to serve as both an introduction and a guide for the Operation Flinders' Core Program. It outlines what Operation Flinders needs from you in the lead-up to your allocated exercise to minimise the administrative burden, assists you in organising and preparing your teams, guides you through what we will provide as part of our Core Program, and what you can likely expect upon arriving at Yankaninna Station.

## Operation Flinders Mission

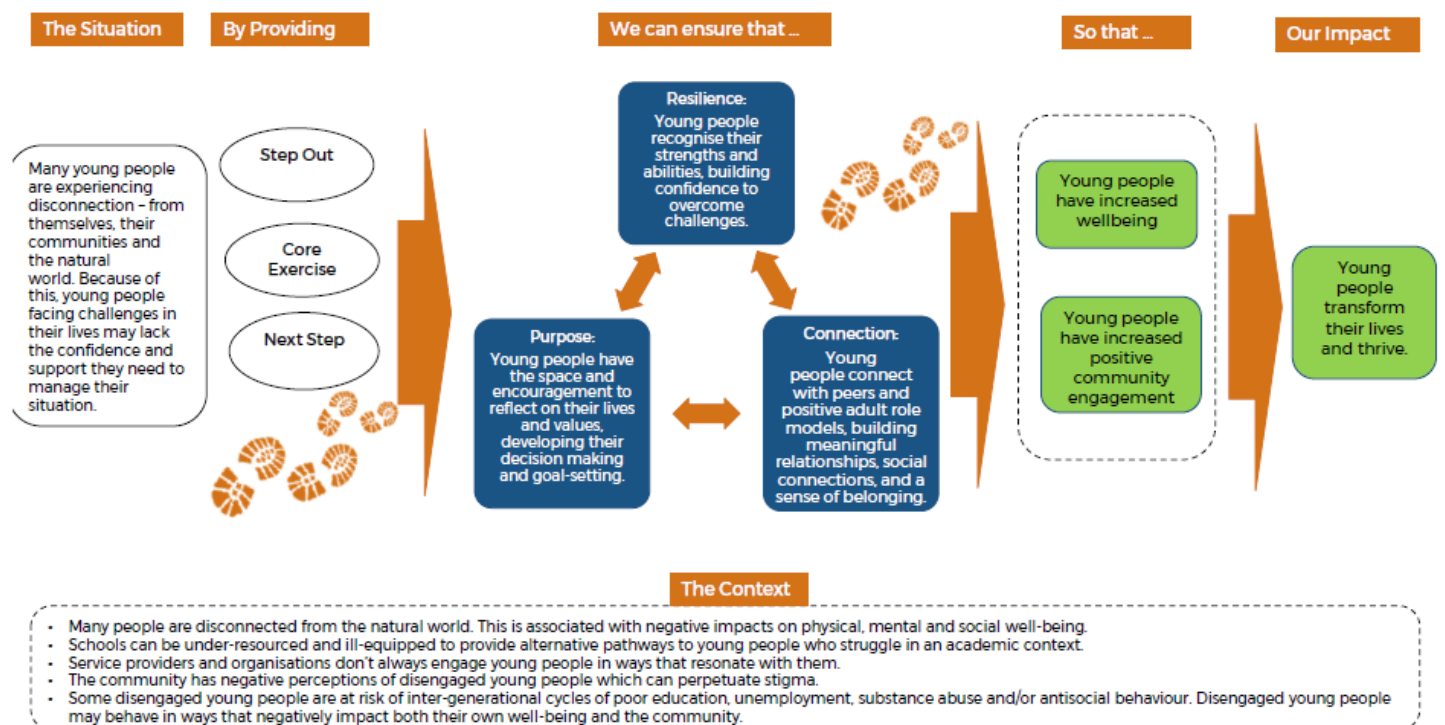
Creating opportunities for young people facing challenges through adventure therapy programs that provide demanding experiences, personal development and pathways to wellbeing and life success.

Through our programs, Operation Flinders' aims to improve young peoples' sense of resilience, sense of purpose and connection with other.

## Theory of Change

We've recently invested in developing a Social Impact Measurement framework supported by our Theory of Change to better understand the impact of our programs on individuals, schools/agencies and the broader community.

### Operation Flinders Theory of Change



## Exercise Overview

The Operation Flinders Core Program, known as an Exercise, is a unique adventure therapy program taking part in the remote Northern Flinders Ranges, approximately 600km from Adelaide. It is intended to provide a new experience for young people, acting as a circuit breaker intended to increase resilience, purpose and connection so that they can improve their wellbeing, tackle the challenges of life and become positive contributing members of their community.

The exercise comprises of 10 individual teams, from various schools and agencies from across South Australia and Australia more broadly. Teams are inserted into the field at Yankaninna over three days - Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and leaving 8 days later. In that time, they participate in several different activities, including either abseil or high ropes, and walk up to 100km over steep and difficult terrain. Food and water are pre-supplied at each campsite, meaning there is minimal interaction from people outside of the team.

There is a large volunteer presence at our base camp, which young people will not see but adults will. The volunteers play a critical role in leading and supporting the exercise. They include:

- A command team that is responsible for the overall conduct of the exercise, including day-to-day operations and incident response and management.
- A base crew, responsible for resourcing for teams, cooks for people at base and several other roles vital to the successful completion of the exercise.

## Key Contacts

<b>Operation Flinders – Edwardstown HQ</b> (for all General Enquiries)	08 8245 2666 12 Angus Ave, Edwardstown SA 5039
<b>Operation Flinders – Yankaninna Station</b> (only available during an Exercise)	08 8648 4817 Umberatana Rd, Yankaninna SA 5731

Name	Role	Email	Key Responsibilities
<b>Simone Parise-Jones</b>	Programs Administrator	<a href="mailto:sparise-jones@operationflinders.org">sparise-jones@operationflinders.org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>*YOUR PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT*</b></li> <li>• Team Information</li> <li>• Exercise Paperwork &amp; Documentation</li> </ul>
<b>Nick Atkin</b>	Programs & Development Manager	<a href="mailto:natkin@operationflinders.org">natkin@operationflinders.org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Rationale and Planning</li> </ul>
<b>Brendan Raets</b>	People & Systems Manager	<a href="mailto:braets@operationflinders.org">braets@operationflinders.org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operation Flinders Volunteers (Field Leaders)</li> <li>• Complaints and Feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Ben Trewren</b>	Safety & Quality Manager	<a href="mailto:btrewren@operationflinders.org">btrewren@operationflinders.org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety Concerns</li> <li>• Risk Management</li> </ul>
<b>Tabby Ryan</b>	Youth Programs Manager	<a href="mailto:tryan@operationflinders.org">tryan@operationflinders.org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Next Step Program - post-exercise opportunities for participants</li> <li>• Duke of Edinburgh Award</li> </ul>

For more information on the broader Staff & Governance team at Operation Flinders – [click here](#).

## Online Portal

We have established a Schools/Agency Portal which is accessed via the Operation Flinders website. The portal contains all documentation relevant to Schools/Agencies including:

- Coordinator Handbook
- Support Staff Handbook
- Packing List
- Risk Register

- Planning Checklist
- Parent/Caregiver Letter
- Video
- Participant Slideshow (incl Video)
- Driver Information

Please Note: Forms to be completed will be emailed to the School/Agency Coordinator independently as they are setup specifically for your School/Agency. If you have any issues with the documentation to be completed, please email the Programs Administrator.



## Coordinator Preparation

The School/Agency Coordinator plays an essential role in achieving positive outcomes for the young people through appropriate participant and support staff selection, clear communication with young people and parents/caregivers and regularly liaising with Op Flinders personnel. All these aspects will be covered below in more detail.

### Participant Selection

We are continuously working towards offering the most inclusive and accessible program that we can. We are especially interested in supporting young people from challenging, marginalised and/or vulnerable environments.

#### At a minimum, participants must be:

- Between 13 and 18 years of age.
- Physically capable and prepared to undertake a challenging 8-day hiking expedition.
- Willing to take part in the program voluntarily.

#### Young people experiencing one or more of the below circumstances are suitable for Operation Flinders:

- Significant family dysfunction (including inadequate parental supervision and discipline).
- Commencement of association with a peer group with anti-social attitudes.
- Early involvement (not active dependency) with alcohol and/or drug use.
- Significant childhood trauma.
- Recent disengagement from education, training and/or employment or at immediate risk of disengagement.
- Anti-social behaviour, including community offending.
- Previous school/agency referral to one of more support services.
- Social and/or economic disadvantage.
- Struggling to find purpose and/or meaning in fulfilling their potential.

#### Unfortunately, some young people are not suitable for Operation Flinders. Exclusion criteria include:

- Active psychosis or a mental health diagnosis requiring hospitalisation.
- Substance (alcohol, tobacco and/or drug) dependency requiring a medically supervised 'detox' or withdrawal program.
- Physical health circumstances where their safety would be compromised through involvement.
- Active suicidal ideation or self-harming in a serious manner.
- Forced to attend under Court or Supervision Orders.
- Requiring a substitute for temporary housing/accommodation.
- Being of no fixed address and without the support of a parent or carer.

We strongly encourage you, where possible, to look to build a culture within your school/agency where young people seek to opt into this experience because they can see the potential value it has to improve their circumstances, rather than feel like they are being punished or pushed into doing it because of their circumstances.

If there is any doubt about the suitability of a young person for the program, Operation Flinders can provide guidance and advice.

### Team Selection

As well as individual participant selection, consideration must be given to team dynamics. While Operation Flinders Field Leaders will be able to achieve results with almost any group of young people, making appropriate choices on who is included in the team early on can make life much easier.

- Young people should be of a similar age and year level where practical, as having a wide age gap can lead to individuals being isolated.
- If a mixed-gender team is selected, it is ideal to have an even split as much as possible.

- It is important to be mindful of existing relationships and potential animosities – while the program is designed to overcome such hurdles, and participants often behave much differently outside of the school environment, some grudges run too deep.
- It is highly recommended that the team consists of 10 participants (or as close to as possible) to build team dynamics and to maximise the opportunities and benefits of the program. Please consider having a few young people on ‘stand-by’ as it is common for young people to opt-out for various reasons.

Experiences tell us that involving your Support Staff (of which you may be one) along with other key staff at your school/agency in the selection process is valuable to gathering multiple perspectives and understandings of the young people.



## Support Staff Selection

As well as participant selection, we strongly encourage consideration of the Support Staff to accompany the participants. Support Staff play a critical role, not just throughout the Exercise, but especially in the months post-exercise as the participants seek to make sense of their experience and will look to trusted figures throughout this transition.

Support Staff, where possible, should:

- Be known to some/all of the participants and have a positive and healthy relationship with them.
- Have an interest in the participants, and a desire to want to see them embrace transformative change in their lives.
- Be up for the challenge of an exercise themselves. The exercise is about the participants and while we don't expect support staff to be invincible, we do request that the focus remains on the participant's experience.

*Refer to the Support Staff Handbook for further information.*

## Documentation Requirements

As with any program as demanding as Operation Flinders, there is a significant amount of documentation to ensure we can provide the safest experience while ensuring that risks are appropriately mitigated. Furthermore, it assists both you and us in capturing information to assess participant and program outcomes via our Social Impact Measurement framework.

Pre-Exercise documentation requirements for every **Participant** includes:

- Participant Survey (Pre-Exercise) - completed by the Participant.
- Participant Medical Disclosure - completed by participant's Parents/Caregivers.
- Parent / Caregiver Consent - completed by participant's Parents/Caregivers.
- School / Referrer Observation Scale (Pre-Exercise) - completed by referring School/Agency Coordinator (or delegated staff member).

Pre-Exercise documentation requirements for every **Support Staff** includes:

- Support Staff Information Form – completed by Support Staff
- Support Staff Medical Disclosure – completed by Support Staff

We have 50 teams per year, equating to approximately 500 young people and 2500 individual forms, meaning we are unable to follow up on each individual (and their forms). We rely on you as the school/agency coordinator to ensure all the documentation for your school/agency is completed and submitted.

Following the Exercise, there will be a further two forms:

- Participant Survey (2 months post-Exercise) - completed by the Participant.
- School / Referrer Observation Scale (2 months post-Exercise) - completed by referring School/Agency Coordinator (or delegated staff member).

*Your support in ensuring all forms (both pre and post exercise) are completed in a timely manner is greatly appreciated.*

If you'd like to know more about our Social Impact Measurement framework, including a look at our dashboard which conveys outcomes aligned to our theory of change, please contact our Programs Administrator to organise a time to take you through this resource.

## Document Distribution

All forms are to be completed using our online form software, *JotForm* - this enables us to instantly process the information collected and to filter and screen as required.

The links and deadlines for the forms will be sent to you separately by the Programs Administrator.

You can copy links and email them to parents and young people as required. We understand that internet access may be a barrier to some participants and their parents/caregivers. As a last resort, please let us know if you require any hard-copy forms.

**Note: Failure to submit forms by the due date may impact a young person's and/or your team's ability to participate in the program. We will assist where possible but cannot guarantee that extensions will be granted.**

*A Pre-Exercise Planning Checklist is included at the end of this handbook.*

## Requesting a Financial Contribution

Operation Flinders receives approximately 25% of its overall funding from the State Government to support the 500 young people (50 teams) who participate on an Operation Flinders exercise each year. The remaining 75% to fund the programs are raised through corporate donations, Local Government and Service Clubs (such as Rotary & Lions), fundraising events, philanthropic Trusts & Foundations, membership, and general donations.

We kindly request that Schools and Agencies who take part in an Exercise to fundraise for Operation Flinders as part of the nomination process. The cost to field a team of 10 young people from your school or agency is over \$47,000. The funds raised for your team will go a long way and ensure we can continue our work into the future.

There is no set target to fundraise, and we will not be determining places on Exercise based on how much your team is able to raise. All we ask is that you try and engage the school community in the process. We understand the school year can be busy. We do ask schools to fundraise and transfer funds to the Foundation prior to the Exercise you are taking part in.

Some teams choose to include their entire school community, not just their students in their fundraising. In 2023, schools held quiz nights, casual clothes days, an Operation Flinders Colour Challenge (supported by our volunteers) or sold Moonbeam's Coffee to parents. There are no restrictions on what you choose to do!

Some teams are partly funded by community groups, corporate donations, and private donations. Currently, no team is fully funded by these sources, which means the Foundation covers the remaining balance. For example, your local council may donate \$10,000 for your team, meaning the Foundation funds the remaining \$37,000.

## Yankaninna Station

The Exercise area on Yankaninna Station on Adnyamathanha Country is approximately 600km north of Adelaide, with the last 50km of the journey after your final stop at Leigh Creek/Copley being on dirt roads.

You can view the location of Yankaninna Station on Google Maps here - <https://maps.app.goo.gl/gkRxdpXUTMKWiDFNA>



## Transport

You are required to organise transportation for your school/agency team to and from Yankaninna Station.

Most 12 or 21 seat buses will have no issues accessing the area, but if you are using a hire company, it is best to let them know – especially about the final 50km on dirt road. If you are using a school bus and have any concerns, please contact us for advice.

**You should plan to arrive at Yankaninna Station around 1 pm on Day 1.** Depending on your location, this may mean a very early start to ensure you can safely undertake the long journey. We aim to have you depart Yankaninna Station by 8 am on Day 8 to allow you plenty of daylight to get back to your location.

Operation Flinders is pleased to be able to provide accommodation for drivers after the team has been dropped off and the night before picking them up again at the Copley Caravan Park. This is to ensure driver fatigue is well-managed. If you require accommodation to be booked at Copley, please let the Programs Administrator know and we will take care of the booking for you.

It is recommended schools arrange for a separate driver (to the support staff) to pick teams up where possible, as staff walking on the Exercise will be quite tired on the drive home.

*Travel and Driver Instruction, covering aspects such as appropriate routes and rest areas/public toilets is included at the end of this handbook.*

## Food & Water Provisions

Food and water are provided from dinner on the day of arrival (Day 1) through to a packed lunch which is provided to take on the bus for the home journey on Day 8.

Whilst in the field, food is provided as rationed provisions (shelf-stable food) for a 24-hour period to be shared across the entire team of Participants, Support Staff and the Operation Flinders Field Leaders. In most instances, dinner and breakfast will not need to be carried each day, but snacks and lunch will. This may alter however depending on the Team Leaders plans for each day (eg. dinner may be carried for a Night Hike).



## Dietary Requirements

Operation Flinders can accommodate most dietary requirements in the field, given sufficient notice. If you are aware of a young person (or support staffer) with a dietary requirement, please raise it as early as possible with the Programs Administrator so appropriate food can be organised and made available.

Your early advice and assistance in providing detailed information and guidance regarding every person's dietary requirements is critical. We are more than happy to work with you on developing a safe menu specific to outlined needs. Food is sourced from Adelaide, and it is incredibly difficult to adapt to new information once a team is in the field due to the remoteness of Yankaninna Station.

## Boots

Feet are by far the most important part of the body for physically completing the walk. Working with your young people to ensure they have appropriate footwear and undertake a few important measures to look after their feet can minimise their chances of suffering from blisters and other discomfort.

Please take the time to ensure every participant has access to a pair of hiking boots – we recommend against runners, training shoes and work boots.

If you're taking responsibility for sourcing hiking boots for the young people or can communicate with the people who are sourcing their boots - a good rule of thumb is to have hiking boots that are half a size bigger than street shoes, too big is better than too small. This provides a little extra space in the boot to prevent them from causing compression on the feet after they swell from walking.

One of our best tips is to please try to ensure all the young people are fitted out with boots and walking in them sooner rather than later. Boots need to be worn in so that they can start loosening and conforming to your feet (preventing pain and blisters). If possible, please allow the participants the opportunity to wear them around school or at least encourage them to wear the boots around home to ensure they are comfortable during the walk.

At Operation Flinders, we are pleased to be able to offer a reimbursement of up to \$200 per participant (with a School Card) for the cost of hiking boots. If you have participants who would like to redeem this reimbursement, please collect their receipts, and send them to our Programs Administrator via email, along with a simple invoice on school letterhead.

Along with boots, socks that are thick and comfortable are necessary. There are a variety of cheap options available from Kmart, Target & Big W that would be suitable.



## Changes To Team

It is not uncommon for last-minute changes to occur before an exercise. For example, young people deciding not to attend, transportation and driver changes, as well as Support Staff changes. If these, or any other changes impact your team, please contact the Programs Administrator as early as possible so we can work with you to find a suitable solution.

## Chain of Communication

Please encourage your Support Staff from passing any new/updated information along through your allocated Field Leaders as this critical information is often lost/misunderstood. For all critical information (like participant information, dietary, medical etc.), ensure this is communicated with the Programs Administrator directly who then is responsible for the information being passed through to all relevant people involved with Operation Flinders.

## Team Updates on Exercise

Recently, we've implemented tools so that schools/agencies and parents/guardians can stay updated on your team's progress throughout an Exercise.

The first includes photo updates of the Team's progress which is shared via Operation Flinders Social Media pages. We do our best to provide as many updates as possible within the confines of trying to capture images in a remote outback setting where teams are significantly distanced apart throughout Yankaninna Station.

The second is access to a tracking link of how your team is moving/progressing throughout Yankaninna Station. This tracking update comes from the GPS unit that each Field Leader carries. This tracking link will be made available to you (as the coordinator) and it is then at your discretion who you choose to share this link with (eg. Parent/Guardians, School/Agency community members etc.)

## Follow Up Activities

It is important that the success of the team and individuals is celebrated in their community to engage the support of the parents/guardians and other significant people in their lives. Please start to think about ways to encourage the participants to take responsibility for organising a celebration and who will be invited. The Program Administrator will be in contact to assist with planning and organising a suitable date and location.

At the celebration, Operation Flinders will present certificates that may be recognised as SACE points (ensure a copy of this certificate is given to your school/agency SACE coordinator) for immediate registration.

If the students also wish to count their Operation Flinders exercise as a Duke of Edinburgh Award expedition, our Youth Programs Manager is also our Duke of Edinburgh Coordinator and can assist in organising this. When the award is completed, it counts as additional SACE points for the participant.

Participants who wish to be part of our Next Step Program (post-exercise) will be invited to join at your celebration. This consists of numerous events, activities and trips available throughout the year. This is the pathway for them to become a Peer Group Mentor on a future exercise with another school/agency by attending training weekends throughout the year if they wish to pursue that opportunity.

For more information on the Next Step Program, visit <https://operationflinders.org.au/peer-group-mentor/> or speak with our Youth Programs Manager.