



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# THANK YOU

TO ALL OF OUR DONORS, COMPETITORS AND VOLUNTEERS FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN 2023.

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# FROM THE CHAIR

**2023** was a year of beginnings and endings that saw us successfully launch a new event at Lake Macquarie – one that we are looking forward to growing into the future – and host our final Kokoda Legacy event, celebrating 100 years of Legacy.

A year that saw our Digital Detox Program continue to grow and develop to support safe use of technology, and our first KCYP trip to Borneo to explore Sandakan and Australian's rich and heartbreaking history there. A year of continued growth for our OTRT program, and a year that saw us host our final Kokoda Pathways program. **We are constantly reviewing and assessing the programs we offer** to ensure the best possible programs with targeted and measurable outcomes, and sometimes this means signing off on a program that no longer fits our framework.

Remembering the contribution our armed forces led to the refurbishment and relocation of the Vietnam Memorial at Kokoda Barracks Canungra. This was a significant project made possible by a huge amount of community support. If you are in the area, I encourage you to stop and visit.

## OUR TEAM

The KYF is supported by an extraordinary team across our 3 departments: Youth Services, Outdoor Education and Events- all backed by a Head Office team. Passionate about what we do, and committed to great outcomes, the success of the KYF is a reflection of the lengths everyone is prepared to go to, to ensure we continue to deliver high quality programs and events.

## OUR VALUES

Our values are simple:

**Courage:** To step outside your comfort zone and stand up for what's important.

**Endurance:** To stay the course, commit to the journey, and never give up.

**Mateship:** To act with integrity, embrace diversity and have each other's back.

**Sacrifice:** To serve a cause greater than yourself.

Engraved on 4 granite pillars at Isurava on the Kokoda Track, everything we do comes back to this. As an organisation, we regularly check in to make sure that we are continuing to live these values, and that we continue to **support our young people to be the best they can be.**

## OUR MISSION

Our mission remains steadfast, and it is simple: **Changing Lives through the Spirit of Kokoda.** That mission and our reach now embraces the four events that provide vital funding, and the thousands of competitors who head out on the trails, and each of our youth programs. I am enormously proud of these programs and the impact they have on our young people.

## OUR FUTURE

We're not standing still. Building on our base of 19 years of operating youth programs and the events that fund them, we are expanding our OTRT and Digital Detox Programs to reach even more young people. We are expanding our outdoor education programs to take full advantage of our two purpose-built properties.

We will continue to assess the success and fitness-for-purpose of all of our programs, as well as scanning the horizon for the next opportunity, always with our mission and our values to the fore.

The work we do would not be possible without the incredible commitment from our staff, our community of volunteers, our participants and the schools who support both our outdoor education programs and our events, and our Association members. **We appreciate every one of you, and look forward to seeing you again** – on the track, participating in one of our programs or at one of our outdoor education centres, living the Kokoda Spirit.



Kind regards,  
Lynley Mangin



KYF

# LIVING THE KOKODA SPIRIT

At the heart of everything we do lies the profound legacy of the Kokoda Campaign of WWII. Inspired by the bravery and fortitude of the Australian Diggers who overcame seemingly insurmountable odds, we embed the ethos of the 'Kokoda Spirit' in all our youth programs, events and outdoor education activities.

Our **Youth Programs** are guided by the principles of Courage, Endurance, Mateship, and Sacrifice, to mentor young individuals to embody these timeless values in their own lives. By drawing inspiration from the remarkable achievements of our forebears, we empower the youth to face life's challenges with resilience and determination.

Our **Kokoda Challenge** events are purposely challenging and require not only dedicated training but teamwork. Event participants are physically, mentally and emotionally pushed to their limits and will need every bit of courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice to be successful.

Our **Outdoor Education** experiences provide school students with an opportunity to experience Kokoda Spirit through challenging activities and team collaboration. Without access to technology, students are encouraged to disconnect and engage with their peers, push their comfort zones and develop gratitude for the freedoms we enjoy today.







**KOKODA**  
YOUTH PROGRAMS

# THE KOKODA CHALLENGE



**KOKODA**  
OUTDOOR  
EDUCATION



# KOKODA

# CHALLENGE EVENTS

## TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

The 2023 post-Covid event season was always going to be challenging after the huge success of the 2021 & 2022 campaigns, and with all borders open and international departures back in full flight, the gauntlet was thrown down and the event team took up the challenge.

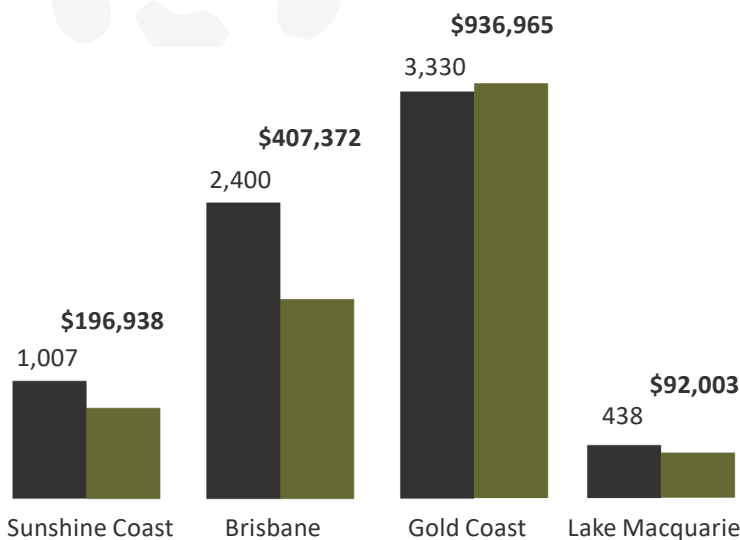
Our aim was to build on the success of previous years, and to make sure that we could deliver an outstanding positive experience for all our competitors, supporters, and volunteers. We also welcomed Ben onto the Events Team as the Schools and Volunteer Coordinator.

The Sunshine Coast Challenge was into its second year, the Brisbane Challenge missed selling out by 200 participants and we are proud to report that the Gold Coast event sold out for the third year in a row.

We also introduced the Lake Macquarie Challenge for good measure, and revisited Kokoda Legacy to help celebrate Legacy Australia's 100th anniversary, again donating 50% of the proceedings to Legacy Gold Coast.

So, even though the fundraising total figures were down on the previous year, did the event team deliver on their promise? I believe we did, successfully running five Kokoda Challenge events.

We also gained a new team member just in time for Lake Macquarie, welcoming Tara as our new Event Liaison Officer.



## MESSAGE FROM OUR EVENTS MANAGER

When I joined the Kokoda Youth Foundation in March 2021, I was unsure of the true challenge that lay ahead, but what I did know is that I wanted to make sure that the Foundation's traditions and expectations were upheld. I also set myself my own challenge, by aiming to improve the logistic footprints where the Kokoda Challenge events are held.


When I look back on 2023, it fills me with immense pride, knowing that we met our goals by delivering five events for the Kokoda Youth Foundation, from the Sunshine Coast down to Lake Macquarie.

I'm proud of the hard work that all the staff and volunteers put in to make the events so amazing and I appreciate the support and guidance I have been given along the way. It has been demonstrated that, as a team, we can achieve great things together.

**Andy Haynes | Events Manager**





A photograph of two hikers on a trail at sunset. The hiker in the foreground is a woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a blue and red athletic top, dark leggings, and a backpack. She is using a trekking pole and looking towards the right. The hiker in the background is a man with dark hair, wearing a dark shirt and shorts, also looking towards the right. They are walking on a grassy trail next to a wire fence. The sky is filled with soft, golden light from the setting sun, with some clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and adventurous.

## WHAT'S AHEAD?

### 2024:

For 2024, our aim is to increase the Kokoda Challenge participant numbers and fundraising totals across all events. As a team, we have been actively business-building since November last year.

**SUNSHINE COAST:** 20th April, Kenilworth and the Imbil State Forest 1.

**BRISBANE:** 1st June, Brookfield and the D'Aguiar Forest.

**GOLD COAST:** 13-14th July, Gold Coast Hinterland and the Nerang National Forest.

**LAKE MACQUARIE:** 12th October, Lake Macquarie, Cooranbong and the Olney State Forest.

### 2025:

**SYDNEY:** October (move Lake Macquarie to September) Royal National Park Sutherland Shire.

Introduce the second Pinnacle Event 30km Gold Coast 48km Lake Macquarie and 96km Sydney.

Introduce "Twin Peaks" by completing both 96km Gold Coast and Sydney.

Discussions with the Head Ranger at the Royal National Parks have been very positive and hopefully I will have an answer to report soon; they have never had a big event like ours track through the National Park.

Negotiations with the Sutherland Shire Council have just commenced, they are excited by the prospect but require more details.







# UNVEILING THE KOKODA SPIRIT

## TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

In the early morning hours, amidst the steep hills of the Gold Coast hinterland, a united team of four souls traversed the gruelling 96km Kokoda Challenge track, etching in their memories a unique experience of camaraderie, fortitude and self-discovery. Laila, a member of this companionable quartet, recounts their journey.

“Over the weekend, my team members and I completed the Gold Coast 96km Kokoda Challenge in 26 hours and 46 minutes,” Laila reminisces. “I was holding back the tears as we crossed the finishing line... a united team of four who had just done a very hard thing.”

For Laila and her team mates, the objective was clear: to conquer the Kokoda Challenge as a cohesive unit, honouring the spirit forged on the hallowed Kokoda Track in 1942.

Reflecting on the arduous journey, Laila contemplates the transformative impact of the experience. “Whatever I write about the experience will be a watered-down version of the real thing,” she says. “I’m pretty sure it has changed me in some indescribable way.”

Beyond the physical challenges, Laila reflects on the complexities of teamwork: on navigating the nuances of compromise and cohesion among disparate personalities. “The physical part was very hard, but I think the hardest for me was the ‘team’ part,” she admits. “Things get messy in teams.”

Throughout the rigorous training regimen leading up to the challenge, Laila and her team mates forged a bond grounded in shared adversity and unwavering mutual support. Amidst the relentless hills and rugged terrain, they discovered the essence of mateship and resilience. “We all naturally enjoyed each other’s company and we compromised... and then compromised some more,” Laila says. “And when the going got tough, we stuck together as a team.”

Recalling the physical exertion and mental fatigue, Laila reflects on the personal revelations that this singular challenge can deliver. “That walk changed me. The training as well. I learned so much about myself and it will take some time to process it properly,” she reflects. “I know that I’m good on my own... efficient, accurate, and logical. But doing something truly as a team and helping each other when something is hard... is bloody amazing.”

In the wake of their triumphant crossing of the finish line, Laila and her teammates are enveloped in a tapestry of emotions—gratitude, camaraderie, and profound transformation.

“I sucked the tears back in and we walked over the grass to the finishing line, where we crossed it together. The soldiers standing at attention, the cheering, the congratulations that boomed over the loudspeakers, shouting our team’s name... the tears were there. I sucked them down again”, remarked Laila.

As Laila bids farewell to her Kokoda Challenge experience, she carries with her not only the memories of their epic journey but also the enduring lessons of courage, compassion, and camaraderie. Amidst the relentless terrain, they discovered the true essence of the Kokoda spirit—an indomitable force that binds hearts and souls in a shared pursuit of triumph and transformation.

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*WITH SPIRITS HIGH AND A TRIUMPHANT GRIN, DAVID RELAYED THE NEWS: UNITY COLLEGE HAD NOT ONLY ACCOMPLISHED THEIR GOAL BUT SURPASSED IT, BEATING THEIR TIME BY A FULL HOUR AND 4 MINUTES..*

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# KOKODA

# YOUTH PROGRAMS

## **KOKODA YOUTH PROGRAMS - THE DOORWAY TO RESILIENCE, GROWTH AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

For the Youth Program Department, 2023 will be remembered not just for its challenges, but for the resilience and adaptability showcased by our team. The year began with a significant transition as Joel Finnis bid farewell to the Foundation in February. His departure undoubtedly left a void, but the return of Stacey Ogilvie, our former Youth Services Manager, infused renewed energy and direction into our endeavors.

## **YOUTH PROGRAMS THRIVE AMID CHANGE**

Despite the initial turbulence, the Kokoda Youth Programs embarked on a journey of success and impact. The fourth instalment of the Digital Detox Program (DDP) kicked off the year in January with a resounding success, hosting a full cohort of 24 participants at Kokoda Park. Feedback poured in from both participants and parents, affirming the program's value in rejuvenating familial bonds and fostering personal growth. Buoyed by this response, we continued to refine and expand the program, ensuring its delivery during every school holiday period and hosting a special Sunshine Coast Digital Detox Program at Kenilworth. A big shout out to our DDP Coordinator, Chris Emert, who recruits, manages and delivers the DDP with incredible passion, commitment and belief in the educating young people on the impact of technology overuse.

Additionally, our Kokoda Pathways Program (KPP) continued to make strides in empowering youth. Participants from Keebra Park State High School were carefully selected and guided through mentorship, receiving invaluable insights into resume building, vocational training, and confidence building. Their testimonials stand as a testament to the program's effectiveness in shaping resilience and providing adventure, however, it became evident as the year progressed that the KPP and its specific focus on employment alignment was not being met and it was decided by the Foundation that the 2023 KPP would be our last.

## **EXPANDING HORIZONS: ON THE RIGHT TRACK**

2023 saw the fruition of our efforts in securing Commonwealth Government support for the On The Right Track program. With the Safer Communities Fund grant, we were able to extend our reach and impact, delivering the crucial early intervention programs to young teens in four regional schools – Laidley, Rosewood, Beaudesert and Boonah. This program delivery saw the appointment of four new OTRT Coordinators under Keith Debnam's management.

The year would be marked with learning curves and triumphs as Keith and his team navigated the challenges of delivering the program simultaneously to various schools all with different levels of support from our aligned partners within the Queensland Police Service and the Qld Education.

The Kokoda Challenge Event and the OTRT Peak Experience were pivotal experiences for all involved, providing our participants the opportunities to showcase their increased resilience, accountability, and courage. Graduation ceremonies in October across four regional schools celebrated the achievements of our selected students, marking a new chapter in their journey towards success.











# KOKODA

# YOUTH PROGRAMS

## A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: KOKODA CHALLENGE YOUTH PROGRAM

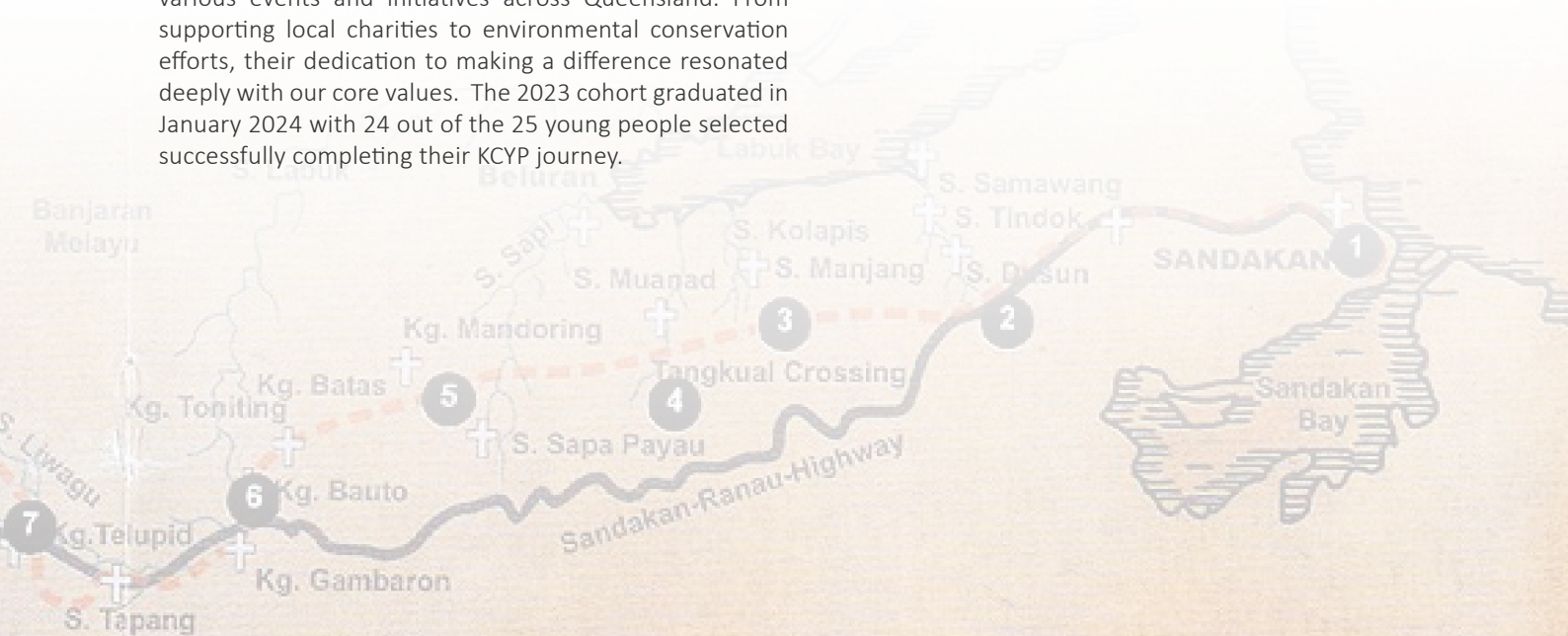
In 2023, the Kokoda Challenge Youth Program ventured beyond international borders for the first time since 2019, with the Brisbane and Gold Coast branches undertaking their peak experience in Borneo for the Sandakan Memorial March. This was not merely a trek; it was a transformative odyssey steeped in historical significance. The cultural aspect of the Bornean locals was also spell binding resulting not only in the adventure of a lifetime but a powerful and genuine life changing experience for our 2024 Kokoda Kids.

The new peak experience and substantial advancements in the KCYP programming, coupled with incredible volunteer leaders resulted in a cohort who achieved some of the most significant advances in terms personal growth and development. The cohesion of the Leadership team between both branches was powerful and this ensured a seamless delivery of the program with terrific results in the 96km Kokoda Challenge and a harmonious peak experience.

As the year progressed, our Kks and Leaders continued to make waves in community service, participating in various events and initiatives across Queensland. From supporting local charities to environmental conservation efforts, their dedication to making a difference resonated deeply with our core values. The 2023 cohort graduated in January 2024 with 24 out of the 25 young people selected successfully completing their KCYP journey.

## A NEW CHAPTER: LOOKING AHEAD

As we reflect on the trials and triumphs of 2023, we stand poised on the threshold of a new chapter in 2024 with the appointment of Ange Debnam to the Youth Services Manager role. With unwavering determination and a steadfast commitment to our mission, the Kokoda Foundation marches forward, guided by the spirit of resilience, growth, and community impact.



SANDAKAN - RANAU DEATH MARCH ROUTE, Aug 18, 2005

1. Mile 8 POW Camp - Sandakan Memorial Park
2. Kg. Dusun, Pertanian Beluran
3. Forestry Dept Beluran
4. Tangkual Crossing at Kg. Muanad
5. Ulu Sapi
6. Kg. Liningkung, Batu
7. Kg. Telupid
8. Kg. Miruru
9. Kg. Penginatan
10. Kg. Muruk - Kg. Marakau - POW Camp Ranau







# FINDING STRENGTHS

Racheal Green, mother of Teleaha Mahoney, says the impact of her daughter Teleaha's participation in the 2023 On The Right Track program, run in conjunction with Beaudesert State High School, has been profound. "The turnaround was phenomenal."

Rachael and her partner had been very concerned about Teleaha's lack of self-confidence. "She was reserved, with low self-esteem. We used to tell her she was good, but it would go in one ear and out the other." Racheal says that this changed as the program progressed, with Teleaha starting to contribute to the group rather than sitting on the sidelines. "She has come out of her shell; she has started to back herself."

The effects are also evident in other ways, as Teleaha's grades have improved and, while she previously was too filled with self-doubt to think about the future with confidence, she is now looking at career pathways.

Teleaha's parents had always believed that she had a skill for supporting others. During the program, it became obvious that this was one of her strengths. During the toughest part of the Kokoda Challenge, Teleaha and one other member were the ones who kept the group focussed

and urged them onwards. This ability has been transferred into a new environment this year, with Teleaha enrolled in the school rugby league academy, and "thriving". Racheal says that Teleaha is supporting her team members, and the discipline instilled during OTRT training is helping her with aspects of her new sport.

Rachael nominates the Focus Sessions as the most meaningful part of the program. She used them as a way to initiate conversations with Teleaha. "Afterwards, she would debrief with me. I would ask her what they covered, and then ask her opinion. It was a good way of having a discussion." Racheal says this experience improved communication within the family, including improving connections with Teleaha. "Somewhere along the track, she realised that family is important."

Racheal appreciates the commitment of the program staff. "The OTRT staff went over and beyond to support Teleaha. They were open all the way."

Nowadays, if Teleaha has doubts, her parents remind her of what she has achieved. They tell her "You know your mind is strong enough, you can back yourself."

“

TELEAHA'S GRADES HAVE IMPROVED AND, WHILE PREVIOUSLY SHE WAS TOO FILLED WITH SELF-DOUBT TO THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE, SHE IS NOW LOOKING AT CAREER PATHWAYS.

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# KOKODA

# OUTDOOR EDUCATION

## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT: OUTDOOR EDUCATION


It is hard to believe we are at the end of 2023 already; this year has flown by, as time does when you are having fun! 2023 was a year of consolidation for the Outdoor Education department, but also full of change and growth.

Early 2023 saw the purchase of Kokoda Park at Thornton, by the Kokoda Youth Foundation, which set the tone for growth and expansion, and this carried over to all sectors of the Outdoor Education department. Both facilities are at the age where they require a little TLC, and not an insignificant amount of time and effort was spent on deep maintenance and upgrades to existing infrastructure and the property in general. We were extremely fortunate to welcome Craig (Camp Kokoda) and Greg (Kokoda Park) on board, both very talented tradesmen, and we certainly would not have been able to achieve the level of renewal we have without them.

In 2023 we hosted 3600 students across our two facilities and made some significant changes to the instructor/student ratios. Considering the difficulty in attracting staff in the recent past, due to the pandemic and general instructor shortage, this was a gamble, but I am happy to report it was a very successful change and we managed to secure some fantastic instructors to whom we are, as always, very appreciative. This year also set the tone for our plans moving forward; it is always important to do the groundwork, articulate reasons for change clearly and garner the support of those who are implementing it on the ground. It is very encouraging to see the enthusiasm and commitment from our instructor cohort for these ideas, and there are some exciting times ahead for program delivery.







Kokoda Outdoor Education bases our programs around our values of Courage, Endurance, Mateship and Sacrifice as well as the outcomes desired by the school (leadership, resilience, teamwork, communication, confidence – to name a few). To achieve these, we have incorporated a few new activities into the mix, which serve to broaden the range of challenges to include some which are not based at height and some which are more cerebral in nature. We have a brand-new challenge course, which includes physical and thinking challenges, a new gully/rock-hopping activity with a canyon crossing, and we have reinvigorated activities like the Giant’s Ladder and Leap of Faith. We have also included some changes to our expedition program for those schools seeking a greater challenge for their students, these include Mt May, Mt Barney summit and Montserrat lookout.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those schools who have trusted us with their students and the delivery of an outdoor education camp. Without them we would not be able to spread the “Kokoda Spirit” and introduce our future generations to the possibilities of their potential, but, more importantly, we would not be providing support to the fantastic work the Kokoda Youth Foundation are doing through their programs.

We are looking forward to continuing our growth into 2024, retaining the momentum of this past year and hosting all the wonderful schools and students who will be visiting us. See you all at camp!

**Justin Gregor | Outdoor Education Manager**



# KOKODA OUTDOOR EDUCATION

## ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE

*TO LIVE IS TO CHANGE, TO LIVE WELL IS TO CHANGE OFTEN*

St John Henry Newman

For many years now, our college has been involved in the year-long program delivered to all our Year 9 students, guided by caring school mentors alongside significant adult mentors and the St Patrick's College community, who call our Year 9 gentlemen to embrace change.

Over three years ago it became apparent that our main rite-of-passage ritual, which was the solo 'abyss' experienced on camp, needed to be led by a new camp provider. It was here that fate collided, and we met Camp Kokoda.

It was wonderful to take the rite-of-passage again year after year with Camp Kokoda. The highlight was the Solo Abyss, which was an opportunity for each young man to extend his resilience, being responsible for making his own shelter, for writing a letter to his Year 9 self and spending time with his own 'chief' solely until the morning.

The Abyss is centred around significant challenges to demonstrate that each student can deal with major obstacles in life now and in the future. The Year 9 Camp provided our students with a variety of challenging activities. The 'Chief Within' themed camp incorporated the idea that 'true chief' within must be embraced on the journey so we have true courage beyond school walls.

Over the four days, both students and staff are immersed in the following:

1. **Personal Growth:** Camp Kokoda provides an environment for students to challenge themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, fostering personal growth and resilience.
2. **Teamwork:** Through activities such as ropes courses, team-building exercises and group challenges, students learn the importance of cooperation, communication and teamwork.

3. **Leadership Development:** The camp offers opportunities for students to step into leadership roles, whether it's leading a group through an activity or supporting peers in overcoming obstacles.
4. **Self-Confidence:** Successfully navigating challenging activities boosts students' self-confidence and belief in their abilities, empowering them to tackle future challenges with courage and determination.
5. **Resilience Building:** Facing and overcoming obstacles during the camp helps students develop resilience, teaching them to bounce back from setbacks and persevere in the face of adversity.
6. **Connection with Nature:** Immersion in the natural environment during the camp fosters an appreciation for nature and promotes mental well-being, offering a break from the pressures of modern life.
7. **Character Development:** The camp experience helps students develop qualities such as courage, perseverance, adaptability, and empathy, shaping them into well-rounded individuals.
8. **Memorable Experiences:** Camp Kokoda provides students with unforgettable memories and shared experiences, that strengthen bonds with peers and create lasting friendships.
9. **Preparation for Life Challenges:** The camp's focus on overcoming significant challenges prepares students for the obstacles they may encounter, both in their academic pursuits and in their personal lives beyond school.

**Kate Mulvihill.**





## STUDENT'S REPORT

Camp Kokoda was an incredible journey that taught me so much, both physically and emotionally. It was definitely challenging physically – we trekked through dense forests and climbed some really steep hills. But you know what? Every tough moment made me realise just how strong I am mentally. It's like, when you're faced with something hard and you push through it, you come out on the other side feeling like you can take on anything.

Emotionally, Camp Kokoda was a bit of a rollercoaster, but in the best way possible. Being out in nature was so peaceful, and it gave me this whole new appreciation for the world around me. There's something about being surrounded by trees and mountains that just makes you feel so alive. And the people I met there – we all became a lot closer. We went through everything together, from the toughest challenges to the most hilarious moments.

What I enjoyed the most about Camp Kokoda was that feeling of accomplishment after overcoming something really hard. Like, when you finally reach the top of a hill you've been climbing for what feels like forever, or when you help a friend through a tough moment – those little victories mean everything. They show you just how much you're capable of, and it's the best feeling in the world.

Camp Kokoda wasn't just an adventure for me – it was a journey of self-discovery. I learned so much about myself and what I'm capable of, and I made memories that I'll cherish forever. It showed me that I'm stronger and braver than I ever thought possible, and that's something I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

**Carter Purcell**



# REMEMBERING THE BRAVERY

## THE SANDAKAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS IN BORNEO DURING WWII

As a nation that strives to preserve the legacy of the sacrifices made during World War II, it's crucial to remember the bravery and resilience of the Australian soldiers who were involved in the tragic events of the Sandakan Prisoners of War (POW) camps in Borneo. The story of these soldiers is one of courage, endurance, and the ultimate sacrifice in the face of unimaginable hardships.

During World War II, after the fall of Singapore in 1942, thousands of Australian and British soldiers, as well as local civilians, were captured by the Japanese forces. Many of these prisoners were held in the Sandakan POW camps in Borneo. The POW camps were a crucible of suffering, with inmates facing excruciating conditions, forced labour, meagre rations, and relentless cruelty from their Japanese captors. Disease ran rampant, with illnesses such as malaria and dysentery claiming countless lives.

The most harrowing chapter of the Sandakan story is undoubtedly the series of forced marches known as the Sandakan Death Marches. In 1945, as Allied forces closed in on Borneo, the Japanese decided to move the remaining prisoners from Sandakan to Ranau, a journey of over 260 kilometres through dense jungle terrain. Stripped of dignity and hope, they endured starvation, beatings, and sheer exhaustion. The death toll soared as bodies littered the jungle trails, and those who faltered faced ruthless execution. Of the estimated 2428 allied POWs captured and held in Sandakan from 1942 to 1945, only 6 survived.





Amidst the horrors, Australian soldiers from the esteemed Australian Imperial Force (AIF) stood resolute. Despite the spectre of death looming over them, they displayed unwavering courage and solidarity, offering support to their fellow captives and refusing to succumb to despair. Their resilience in the face of overwhelming adversity stands as a testament to the indomitable human spirit.

The legacy of the Australian soldiers who were involved in the Sandakan POW camps lives on through remembrance ceremonies, memorials, and historical records but it is story that only a few know well enough. Their sacrifice serves as a reminder of the horrors of war and the importance of honouring those who gave their lives in service to their country.

As we reflect on the events of World War II, it's essential to pay tribute to the Australian soldiers who were involved in the Sandakan POW camps in Borneo. Their bravery and resilience in the face of unimaginable suffering serve as a testament to the enduring values of courage and sacrifice.

Lest we forget their sacrifice and the lessons learned from this dark chapter in history.





# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

## ROSEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Sargeant Travis Ehrich is the Officer in Charge at Rosewood Police Station and in 2023 participated in the On The Right Track program run in conjunction with Rosewood State High School.

Sargeant Ehrich was impressed by the results he saw both during and after the program.

“I saw a massive growth in their confidence and leadership skills and things like that. Just in the Rosewood community, I started seeing the kids from the Kokoda programme engaged in frontline working roles where they hadn’t done that prior, so even that is a massive step in giving them the confidence to go out and actually get part time jobs and contribute back to the community.”

While some of the participants were outgoing, others were more withdrawn. “A number of the kids that were in the programme were so timid they wouldn’t even make eye contact with the Kokoda leaders or myself in the first couple of weeks.” However, he says, the program soon had a positive effect, “After a couple of weeks of just being out on the trails with them, walking and slowly getting to know them, they really started to come out of their shell and they started to show their real personalities.”





It wasn't just confidence which was improved through participation, but an enthusiasm for fitness and for engagement with other adults. "I noticed that almost all of the Kokoda kids, after the programme had finished, then volunteered to sign up for the Blue Edge programme." The effect was even spread to other students. "They dragged in a few other friends who weren't involved in Kokoda, and they all participated."

Sargeant Travis saw similar benefits for his staff. "I have two other officers who are really keen after they saw my experience. They wanted to get involved this year."

"And actually, it's good for my officers as well; it gives them a break from the road. I've committed to rostering my staff member for that one day a week, every week, for him to get out and bushwalk for his own fitness and the good benefits for mental health that we have to consider for our staff as well."

"It was made very aware to the community in the Community Service portion of the programme for the second part of the 12-week period after the hikes had been concluded. That was good and was fairly visible in the community with the kids sort of giving back."

"There hasn't been any other programme or activity that we've done that has generated so much positive feedback from our community."

"Just seeing the growth and that resilience in those kids was amazing."





# CANUNGRA VIETNAM MEMORIAL PROJECT

## RELOCATION OF THE CANUNGRA VIETNAM MEMORIAL AT KOKODA BARRACKS

After two years of limited access, the Canungra Vietnam Memorial is now open to veterans, families and the local community, following six months of dedicated volunteer work and community collaboration to relocate this poignant monument.

Previously situated within the confines of the Kokoda Barracks in Canungra — the very place where all Vietnam soldiers were trained before being deployed — the Vietnam Memorial has been moved to the front gates of the barracks to allow access to the wider public.

The original memorial site was constructed in the year 2000 by veteran volunteers and community members, however heightened security measures restricted public access and ongoing maintenance of the original site, leading to the need for relocation.

Thanks to the leadership of Doug Henderson from the Kokoda Youth Foundation, as well as a collaborative committee and generous support from various organisations, the memorial has found a new, more accessible home.

“The Land Warfare Centre, once known as the Jungle Training Centre, holds deep-seated memories for us Vietnam veterans” says Doug, a veteran from 6RAR. “This project pays tribute to the sacrifices and resilience of everyone tied to the Vietnam War, recognising their sheer courage and unwavering strength.”

Integral to this significant project has been the tireless dedication of volunteers, who wholeheartedly believe in the significance of this memorial. Volunteers from various backgrounds, including veterans’ families, local community members and passionate individuals, lent their time, expertise and commitment to ensure this relocation became a reality.

The new design, by architect Tony Battams of Choice Homes, maintains the essence of the original while offering a refreshed landscape which pays homage to the Vietnam War, symbolised by the iconic Long Tan Cross into which the memorial is shaped. At the heart of the site stands a life-sized bronze statue of a Vietnam soldier: an evocative addition funded by the Commonwealth Government’s Saluting Their Service grant program.

After a year-long effort, the relocated site was opened on Friday December 1st 2023, marking a significant moment for the Kokoda Youth Foundation and the community. This updated memorial commemorates the sacrifices of our veterans and their families while serving as an educational legacy for future generations. Included in this new design are information tables detailing the historical significance of the Vietnam War and its connections to the Land Warfare Centre, enriching visitors’ experiences.

“It is wonderful that we have been able to continue and add to the good work of veterans from 23 years ago by bringing this memorial back into public access and with a few additional items that will ensure the story of the Vietnam war is shared for generations to come.” said Graham Gordon, secretary of Runaway Bay RSL and committee member of the Relocation Project.

This achievement is the result of remarkable collaboration and support from entities such as RSL Queensland, Coast 2 Coast Earthmoving, STA Consulting Engineers, Axis Surveys and Australian Lawn Concepts, and local RSL sub-branches, plus the numerous volunteers (special mention to Association members Nathan and Todd Little and Barney and Leigh Bartlett) who generously contributed time, resources and expertise.









# VOLUNTEERS OF THE MONTH

## CRAIG SHARP

Craig joined us last year when our Events Manager, Andy, bumped into him along the track just days before an event. Craig said that he was doing the 48km course that weekend but still planned on walking 10-15km everyday until the event. Andy asked Craig if he would like to join us for track marking, and the rest is history!

Craig has become a very passionate member of our volunteer community. At every Kokoda Challenge event this year, he has helped us track mark, set up the event village, sweep teams, and also spread the word about our cause.



## NATHAN LITTLE

Anyone who has had the pleasure of meeting Nathan will know why he is a deserving recipient of this award. Not only did Nathan complete The Kokoda Challenge Pinnacle last year, both he and his brother Todd would stay behind after they crossed the finish line to hand out dog tags and to cheer on other teams.

Nathan has also been a volunteer leader for our KCYP program for the past 9 months, which includes weekly training hikes, community service, completing the Gold Coast 96km Kokoda Challenge, and doing the Sandakan Memorial March, all while mentoring local youth!

If this was not enough, Nathan has also been a key volunteer in assisting the Foundation with the Canungra Vietnam Memorial relocation project at Kokoda Barracks.



## KATELYN BEVIS

Katelyn has been a part of the Kokoda Youth Foundation for several years, starting with completing the Kokoda Challenge Youth Program back in 2017, which included hiking the Kokoda Track in PNG.

We are very thankful for all of Katelyn's hard work and support at the Kokoda Challenge events. Katelyn usually keeps to herself at the events, quietly helping out with whatever needs doing. She is always willing to give anything a go and tackle any task thrown her way.

But believe us when we say, her hard work does not go unnoticed! The events team wishes to give a massive shout-out to Katelyn: this year alone, she has volunteered at every event! That's from the Sunshine Coast, all the way down to Lake Macquarie – what a legend!



## JASON SANDS

You might recognise Jason as the Gold Coast Kokoda Challenge checkpoint 11 captain. Each year Jason creates a theme for his checkpoint! Last year it was Halloween-themed.

Jason competed in the 96km in 2018 and vowed never to do it again – he has volunteered at every event since! He can run a checkpoint single-handed and sometimes has used this skill in the wee hours of the morning at CP 11.

We can't thank Jason enough for always encouraging our teams to keep going no matter how much they're hurting, and for supporting us at each event for many years!





# VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

## DR BARRY OLIVER

Dr. Barry is the co-founder of our Digital Detox Program, which the Foundation has been providing to the community since April 2022. This program, which Barry developed along with our Youth Services Manager, has since positively impacted the lives of nearly 100 adolescents and their families.

Dr. Barry brings a strong background in economics, research, psychology and positive mental health to this program at a time where technology use – and overuse – is pervasive in society. Barry volunteers no less than 8 BIG days every school holiday to deliver this incredible program alongside our youth workers.

He also volunteers a huge amount of time to other great not-for-profits. Truly, he is unique!



## ADAM TURNER

Adam's French-made bugle originally belonged to his grandfather, who served in the Middle East, Ceylon, and the infamous Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea. It is a cherished family heirloom passed down through generations. We are honoured to have Adam play at each of our events and continue the legacy of his grandfather.

He intends to pass the bugle on to his daughters, and one day teach them to play.



## ANTHONY BEVIS

Congratulations to Anthony, who was awarded the 2023 Volunteer of the Year Daryl Todd Award.

Anthony has donated hundreds of hours to support our Kokoda Challenge events each year. At every KC event for the past 3 years (including the new Lake Macquarie event last year), Anthony takes annual leave from work to be part of the setup and pack-down crew, whilst also running our entire logistics throughout the event day or weekend. He manages the pack-up and set-down of checkpoints, as well as ensuring water is at each checkpoint and is always fully stocked.

Anthony is motivated to donate his time after having his two daughters complete the KCYP in 2016 and in 2018. He understands the impact the KYF youth programs have on young people's lives, and these Kokoda Challenge events are also an opportunity for both daughters, Katelyn and Emily, to come back and assist their father – creating a special bond through supporting community.

It is hard to spot Anthony at a KC Event, as he avoids the limelight (as well as photos) and quietly gets about doing the tasks required without any fuss. Anthony truly epitomises the Kokoda Spirit, and the Kokoda Youth Foundation is extremely grateful for his support.





# FINANCES

## OVERVIEW OF INCOME & EXPENSES

# \$300,629

**NET PROFIT RECORDED FOR THE 12 MONTH PERIOD ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2023**

This net profit amount includes the proceeds of the sale of the warehouse factory at Ashmore which was sold in January to enable to outright purchase of the Kokoda Park property at Thornton in February. This property acquisition significantly boosts our asset base whilst also providing the KYF with a fantastic venue not just for Outdoor Education but also our Digital Detox Program.

A record five Kokoda Challenge events were held in 2023 however total income for the Event portfolio decreased by approximately \$120k on the previous financial year. As more Events are back on the table in the greater community and the cost of living increases, donations from the public are getting harder to attract.

A successful grant under the Saluting Their Service Program for \$104,000 and substantial community support for the Canungra Vietnam Memorial Project ensured the KYF did not bear a financial impact for their involvement in the project, with it primarily costing our human resources in the planning and construction stages.

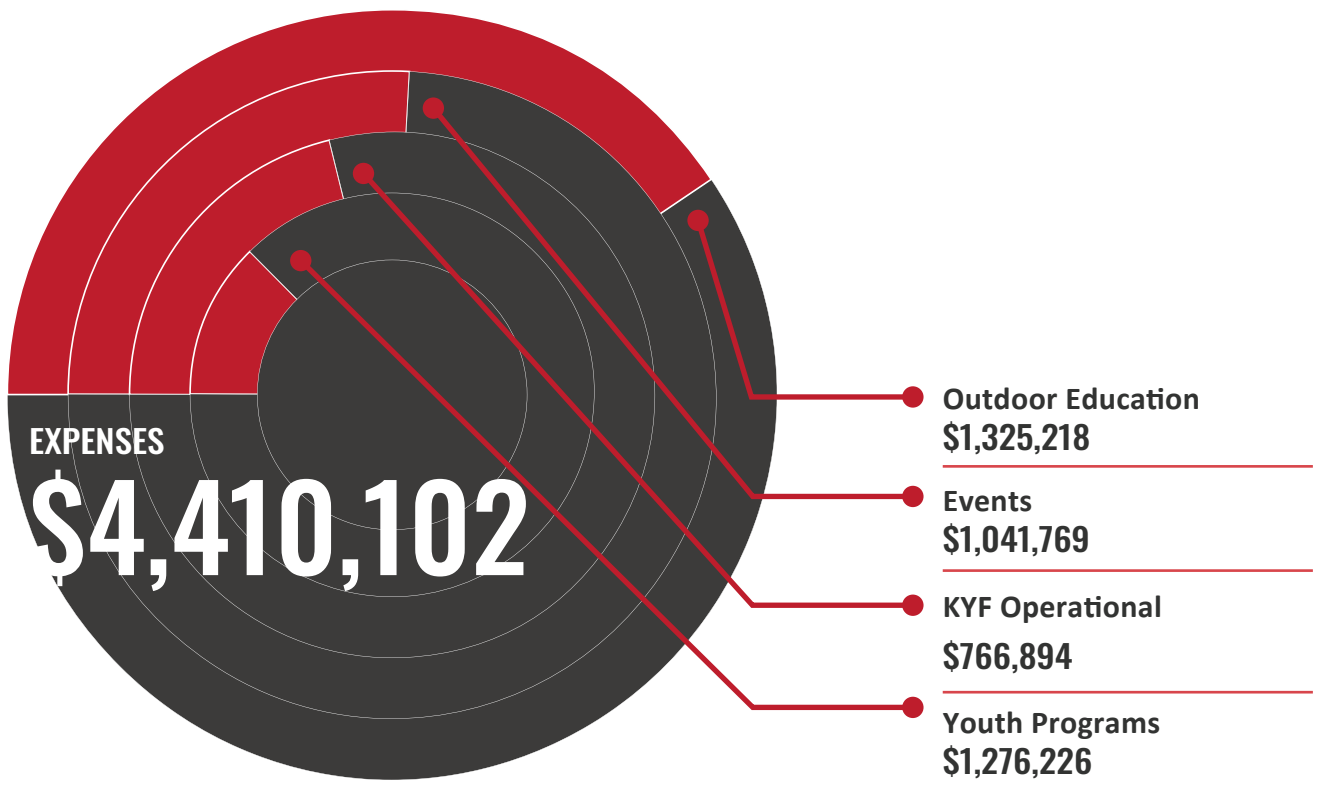
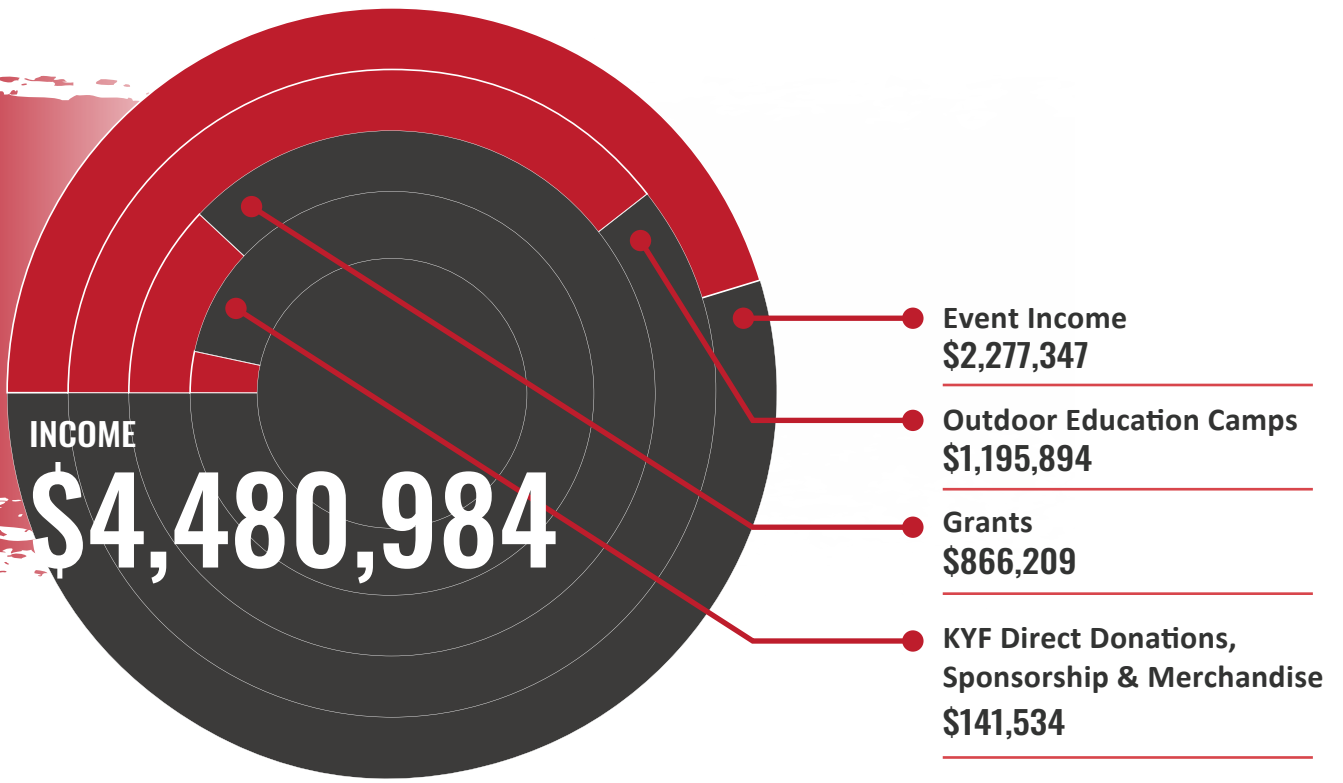
Employee benefits (wages, super and entitlements) are approximately 54% of 2023 expenses and this covered 22 permanent staff and a dozen casual employees. The total amount expended up 10% on previous financial year due to the expansion of the OTRT, which is predominately service based and required the employment of 4 new OTRT Youth workers.

Net assets at 31 December were \$5, 105, 085 and total Liabilities was approximately \$1,286,276, leaving a net balance of \$3, 818, 808.

To review the full set of Audited Financial reports for 2023 Financial year please visit: [www.kokodayoutfoundation.com/financials](http://www.kokodayoutfoundation.com/financials)









# GET TO KNOW OUR STAFF

## THE KOKODA CHALLENGE EVENTS TEAM



**Left to right: Andy Haynes** (Event Manager), **Ben Allan** (Event & Volunteer Coordinator), **Amy Puckeridge** (Marketing & Sponsorship Officer), **Tara Reiter** (Event Liaison Officer)

## KOKODA YOUTH FOUNDATION YOUTH PROGRAMS TEAM



**Left to right, top to bottom: Chris Emert** (DDP YP Coordinator), **Sam Chapman** (KCYP YP Coordinator), **Jay Bornstein** (OTRT YP Coordinator), **Angie Debnam** (Youth Services Manager), **Jessie-Rose Smart** (OTRT YP Coordinator), **Keith Debnam** (OTRT Program Manager), **Carly Moore** (OTRT YP Coordinator), **Stephanie Brescia** (OTRT YP Coordinator).



## KOKODA YOUTH FOUNDATION HEAD OFFICE TEAM

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**Left to right: Nicola Stachurski** (Media Coordinator), **Melissa Matthias** (Accounts Officer), **Johllene Cooper** (Chief Executive Officer), **Nikki Ross** (Administration & HR Manager).

## KOKODA OUTDOOR EDUCATION TEAM

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**Left to right, top to bottom: Jared Huges** (Camp Instructor), **Charley Joblin** (Camp Instructor), **Hannah Greenwood** (OE Program Coordinator), **Justin Gregor** (OE Manager), **Zelda Tranter** (OE Operations Supervisor), **Nadine Nason** (OE Administration Officer), **Craig Parker** (Maintenance Supervisor).



# GET TO KNOW OUR BOARD



**Doug Henderson**  
Founder



**Lynley Mangin**  
Chair



**Eric Flammang**  
Treasurer



**Belinda Northam**  
Director



**Sophie Hoskins**  
Secretary



**Mark Pearce**  
Director



**Mike Toby**  
Director



**Nikki Horton**  
Director



# GET TO KNOW OUR KCYP LEADERS

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**Beau Chapman**  
Group Leader Brisbane



**Abby Blair**  
Leader Brisbane



**Jean Teamoke**  
Leader Brisbane



**Martin Mackinlay**  
Leader Brisbane



**Leanne Bradshaw**  
Group Leader Gold Coast



**Kasia Sobczak**  
Leader Gold Coast



**Lachlan Bartlett**  
Leader Gold Coast



**Lucas Faulkner**  
Leader Gold Coast



**Nathan Little**  
Support Leader (both)



# CLOSING NOTE

## FROM THE CEO



Reflecting on 2023 fills me with immense pride as I recount the many accomplishments and endeavours we have collectively undertaken which have furthered our mission and strengthened our community.

In the realm of events, we organised and executed the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and Gold Coast Kokoda Challenge, as well as venturing into new territory with our inaugural event in Lake Macquarie and finishing the year with a second Kokoda Legacy Event. A record breaking 5 events in one year and I must commend Andy, the event team and all our volunteers for their flawless execution, demonstrating an excellent understanding of what makes a Kokoda Challenge truly exceptional.

Turning our attention to our Youth Programs, both the OTRT and KPP programs concluded with their graduation ceremonies in October. While we celebrate our achievements of conducting five school based youth programs, we also acknowledge the need for broader dissemination of these programs, a challenge we are steadfastly addressing. The DDP also continued its amazing progress in addressing the negative impact of technology with four free school holidays camps helping 100 young people and their families.

The progress of our KCYP branches in Brisbane and Gold Coast is heartening, with our Kokoda Kids undertaking their first overseas peak experience since 2019 with the Sandakan Memorial March in Borneo. This was a truly transformative experience and one I am pleased will remain on the KCYP schedule again in 2024 as the story of the POWs in Sandakan highlight the incredible power of the human spirit.

The year also witnessed remarkable strides in our Kokoda Outdoor Education department, with substantial upgrades and improvements across both centres. Despite staffing challenges early in the year, we finished 2023 with a strong team working alongside Justin and we anticipate record-breaking bookings for 2024- a testament to the growing demand for our programs and facilities.

In addition to our core initiatives, we embarked on the endeavor of relocating the Canungra Vietnam Memorial at the Kokoda Barracks. This project is a testament to the collaborative spirit and dedication of our volunteers, community partners, and supporters and provides an incredible public venue to honour and pay respect to all our service personnel.

At the conclusion of 2023, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each member of our Association and Board for your unwavering support and commitment. To the staff and team at Kokoda Youth Foundation who work passionately to change lives and promote the Kokoda Spirit daily – thank you. Together, we have all achieved remarkable milestones and pushed the boundaries of what's possible. As we look ahead to 2024, I am filled with optimism and excitement for the continued growth and success of the Kokoda Youth Foundation.

Thank you all for your dedication, passion, and tireless efforts.

Many thanks

**Johllene Cooper**  
Chief Executive Officer





# THANK YOU

# THANK YOU

TO OUR VALUED PARTNERS & SPONSORS







**KOKODA**  
YOUTH FOUNDATION  
*Changing Lives*

[KOKODAYOUTHFOUNDATION.COM](http://KOKODAYOUTHFOUNDATION.COM)