ADVENTURE
SPECIALTIES TRUST
EST. 1984

# MĀNUKA TRAIL

AN **OUTDOOR THERAPY** PROGRAMME FOR **CHILDREN AGED 9-11** IN ACC's SENSITIVE CLAIMS SERVICE

**INFO FOR PARENTS AND ACC THERAPISTS**

UPDATE: 22 MAY 2025

# MĀNUKA TRAIL

Adventure Specialties Trust and Visser and Associates are offering a **Trauma-Responsive Outdoor Therapy Programme** for children in ACC's Sensitive Claims Service.

EST. 1984
ADVENTURE SPECIALTIES TRUST

VISSER & ASSOCIATES

The name ***Mānuka Trail*** embodies the essence of the outdoor therapy group by symbolizing healing, resilience, and connection to the natural world.

Mānuka, a native plant of Aotearoa, is renowned for its medicinal properties, reflecting the programme's therapeutic aim of supporting children's recovery from trauma.

The concept of a trail represents a journey—one of exploration, discovery, and healing—where children move at their own pace, supported by attuned adults and the restorative power of nature.

Rooted in te ao Māori perspectives of wellbeing and connection to whenua, ***Mānuka Trail*** reflects a holistic, strengths-based approach that integrates play, movement, and social connection as key elements in trauma recovery.

# WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

## A SMALL GROUP

Mānuka Trail is a group of eight children (all of a similar age) and two facilitiators, meeting for a 2.5 hour morning session outdoors each Wednesday over eight weeks. Each of the eight sessions takes place in the same outdoor location, to create a sense of safety, connection and familiarisation with the land.

## CONSISTENCY

A gentle rhythm and routine will be established, providing consistency and smooth transitions between activities, and consistency between time at home/school/with caregivers and time on programme.

## A WARM WELCOME

Each session begins with a warm welcome and activity options as children arrive and get comfortable in the space. We then open with karakia and a group check-in to connect with each other and see how everyone is feeling. A shared morning kai follows, leading into a story that introduces wellbeing and therapeutic concepts in a way children can relate to. Facilitators use this story throughout the session to support individual and group interactions.

## CHILD-LED PLAY

Children then engage in child-led play and exploration, with optional activities provided to help them transition into play. These may include:

Physical activities like hut building, outdoor cooking, or fire lighting (if safe to do so in our location and season); sensory experiences (like making mud pies or insect hunting or swinging in a hammock); or creative tasks (like weaving or charcoal drawing).

## PROGRESSION

As the weeks progress, children will become more familiar with the space and each other, and facilitators can encourage them to take the lead in choosing how they play. Facilitators can support children by helping them make choices, develop skills, express their feelings, and build trusting relationships.

## REFLECTION

Towards the end of each session, we gather for a group game or activity, followed by journal time, where children reflect on their experiences by drawing or writing. The session ends with karakia before caregivers arrive to take them home.

## WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

After each session, facilitators write a letter to each child, summarising the day's activities and offering encouragement. These letters can be kept in their journals and then shared with protective adults or therapists, to strengthen connections. If concerns arise about a child, facilitators will check in with them and follow up with their safe adult or Lead Provider during the week.

## SUPPORT FROM TRUSTED ADULTS

In the first and last sessions, a trusted adult is invited to join each child for part of the session, to support their transition and help the child share their experiences.

# **KAUPAPA** PURPOSE

## CHILDREN WILL EXPERIENCE HEALING THROUGH PLAY

With the help of Nature, we aim to inspire curiosity, awe and wonder, to help children feel connected to something bigger than themselves. We aim to provide opportunities to experience joy and fun, through creative endeavours, imaginative play, and movement.

## CHILDREN WILL CONNECT WITH OTHERS AND EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF BELONGING

They may support a friend with a tricky weaving project, or help shift a heavy rock, or build a bridge over a creek. They will laugh, play, sing and eat together. They might quietly explore together, getting to know each other without the pressure to talk. Each child will discover their own strengths.

## CHILDREN WILL BUILD SELF-WORTH, DEVELOP A POSITIVE SENSE OF INDENTITY AND FEEL EMPOWERED

They will have our support to make choices, set boundaries, and mastering new skills such as fire lighting, crafting, or recognising healing plants.

## CHILDREN WILL LEARN WAYS TO COPE WITH PTSD

We support children as they learn and practice ways to reduce the symptoms and challenges that come with PTSD. For example, strengthening emotional intelligence (including non-verbal ways, such as nature art, movement-based play). They will learn and practice strategies such as sensory soothing and regulation, e.g. slow rhythmic activities like rocking in a hammock or wading through water.

# WHO IS MĀNUKA TRAIL FOR?

This programme is open to children who are clients in ACC's Sensitive Claims Service (SCS).

## REQUIREMENTS

> Children must be in regular counselling or therapy with an SCS Lead Provider, with a *Support to Wellbeing* Plan in place. There must already be established goals for therapy, and this programme will offer a safe supportive environment to practice and develop these skills.

> The child must be interested in this programme and want to participate.

> Caregivers must be able to commit to their children attending all eight sessions (with exception to illness or exceptional circumstances). Lead Providers and caregivers work together to create a plan around reliable transport to and from programme. Please seek support from ACC as you would for attendance at regular therapy sessions.

> The Lead Provider determines that the child is in a stable and supported place to participate in the programme, and can access appropriate care outside of sessions.

> The child is considered by the Lead Provider and the by the Clinician from Adventure Specialties Trust to be a suitable match with other group participants, to ensure a safe and positive group culture.

> Caregivers and Lead Providers will need to complete an enrolment form that includes giving medical information and consent. It is important to us that each child has a state of physical and mental health that allows for safe participation in this programme. This will allow our facilitators to choose appropriate activities for the group and support individuals accordingly.

> Lead Providers and parents/caregivers will liaise with school to explain that this programme is a key component of the child's therapeutic plan and it is designed to support their emotional, social, and behavioural development. We welcome the school's input into the relevant sections of the enrolment form, and we encourage the children to share their weekly letters with all the trusted adults that support them.

## EXCLUSIONS

> While we are able to accommodate many physical constraints, we are unable to accept participants with severe medical conditions or injuries that pose a risk when engaging in outdoor adventure activities.

> Additionally, we cannot accept individuals currently experiencing psychosis, or those who are unable to understand and follow basic safety instructions due to intellectual ability or psychological state.

> We are unable to accept individuals who are actively suicidal, experience strong and frequent suicidal ideation, or who pose a potential risk to others.

> Children who have a history of both experiencing AND engaging in harmful sexual behaviour will need specialized support beyond the scope of this programme.

# OUR APPROACH

This programme draws on several different Outdoor and Theoretical approaches:

Adventure Therapy, Nature Therapy, Forest schools and “Nature Play” are some of these.

For us, this means we provide an outdoor environment where children engage in child-led, inquiry-based, and play-focused activities.

All our programmes follow a strengths-based approach, emphasizing children’s resilience and ability to drive their own learning and recovery.

We also are therapeutically oriented, integrating psychological and emotional healing within these experiences.

For us, Nature is not only our setting, but is utilised as a tool for processing emotions, building self-regulation, and supporting trauma recovery.

## CHALLENGE BY CHOICE

Challenge is definitely a part of our programme, and each activity will challenge everyone in a different way.

Challenge can be good for us!

A choice-based environment supports children who have experienced abuse and the resulting powerlessness. In our setting, children are able to choose activities they would like to engage with such as art, sensory exploration or physical activities, and be involved in group projects, like building a dam, where their contribution is valued.

## SUSTAINABLE GAINS

A sustainable healing practice is one that can be incorporated (by the child and their supporters) into every aspect of a child’s life.

This might include games, activities, metaphors or strategies, and encouragement to find similar spaces at home or school.

We will support this with letters that show and remind children of what they’ve done each session. We will also encourage home play and invite caregivers to the final day to see all of this in action.

## A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH WITH CHILDREN

We understand the need for emotionally attuned adults who prioritise co-regulation, non-verbal connection, and playful interactions.

Our trauma-informed approach is to meet children where they are developmentally, and see any challenging behaviour as deep-seated fears and survival instincts.

There are many examples in our setting that support a restoration of this sense of belonging and relationship, such as group rhythms and rituals, and collaborative projects.

We believe that trust can slowly be restored through repair and safe conflict resolution. For example, time alongside an attentive adult who invites restorative conversations in nature, or invites symbolic repair (e.g. rebuilding a fallen shelter).

## SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

First and foremost, it is a priority that that this group is a safe and supportive environment for all people.

Obviously, physical safety is important when doing outdoor activities!

We have qualified outdoor instructors and a safety management system that is audited and registered with Worksafe NZ. We require that participants follow our safety rules.

'Safe' also means emotional safety. We put significant time and energy into building a group environment with healthy dynamics and healthy relationships.

Activities are sequenced in a way that allows for safety to be firmly established in the group before doing activities that require higher levels of trust.

We work hard to build a culture where children can talk openly, feel supported, and can be themselves, no matter what culture, gender, sexuality, age or personality they have.

We ensure that there are various options for physical shelter, to allow us to shelter from bad weather, and also for privacy and feelings of safety and containment.

# ABOUT ADVENTURE SPECIALTIES TRUST

Adventure Specialties Trust is at the forefront of developing Adventure Therapy services in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have been delivering outdoor education for over 40 years, providing a huge range of challenging activities on New Zealand's rocks, rivers, mountains, caves, sea and coast. But our real point of difference is in how we deliver those programmes. We facilitate every experience to maximise the opportunity for each participant to develop holistically. When we partner with you, we also incorporate your organisation's Mission and Values into our programme design, along with specific aims and objectives.

Adventure Specialties Trust is passionate about our Vision of 'Lives Inspired by Adventure.' Our Mission is to respond to community needs by providing purposeful adventure to facilitate therapeutic outcomes and positive growth. We are a faith-based organisation with an established set of values that guide our business decisions and how we work with our clients.

## OUR VALUES

We are guided by our Christian faith, which places the love of God at the centre of all that we do.
This is expressed by the following values:

**WE ARE HOPEFUL.** Change is possible for everyone. We are optimistic, we are confident and we use a holistic, strengths-based approach which supports hauora, "the winds of wellness."

**WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER.** We practice mahi tahi. We encourage each other and our participants. We grow community partnerships and collaborate to achieve shared goals.

**WE ARE ADVENTUROUS.** Outdoor adventure will transform lives. We use healthy adventure and a connection with te taio, the natural world, to nurture growth and learning.

**WE ARE INCLUSIVE.** Everyone is welcome. We honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We practice equity, respect and manaakitanga.

**WE ARE SAFE.** We embrace physical, emotional, social and cultural safety. We continually invest in our team and resources to ensure that everything we do is high quality.

# OUR FACILITATORS

## ANNEKE BEARDSLEY
ADVENTURE THERAPY CLINICIAN

Qualifications: Masters in Social Work, Bachelor of Geography, Outdoor First Aid

Anneke Beardsley is our Adventure Therapy Clinician and National Practice Lead. She is registered with ACC's SCS Service as a Lead Provider and Social Worker. Her 20 years of experience with children, youth and families includes specialist foster care, residential care, mental health and schools-based therapeutic Social Work. She has facilitated trauma-responsive outdoor individual and group work with clients of ACC's SCS service for the last three years. Anneke believes strongly in the healing and health benefits that come from a connection with te taio (the natural world) and is passionate about supporting and encouraging people as we adventure together.

## DIANA JOHNSTON
OUTDOOR INSTRUCTOR

Qualifications: Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (ECE), NZOIA Bush 1, NZOIA Rock 1, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care, Diploma in Biblical Studies (Youth Ministry), National Certificate in Outdoor Recreation (Instruction), Advanced Certificate in Performing Arts (Drama)

Diana is an experienced outdoor instructor, early childhood teacher and mother who has worked with children, youth, and families for over 20 years—most often in outdoor settings. She has been a kaiako and Health and Safety Lead at Bush Farm Education, a forest school programme, and has also taught in a community preschool. Most recently, Diana has been designing and leading nature-based education programmes that support children's wellbeing through connection with the natural world. She brings together her background in teaching and outdoor leadership, to create engaging, safe, and nurturing spaces for children. Diana is passionate about helping tamariki reconnect with themselves, with others, and with te taiao (the natural world).

# **INTERESTED?**
# PROCESS FOR LEAD PROVIDERS

Are you an ACC SCS Lead Provider wanting to refer your client into a Mānuka Trail group?
Please follow this process:

1. If you feel confident that your client meets eligibility criteria and is committed to participating in the Mānuka Trail programme, please register your client by filling in the form on our website: www.adventurespecialties.co.nz/register-your-interest-acc-scs
(If you're not sure whether this programme would be suitable for your client, or you want more information, please contact Anneke, our Clinical Lead, on 027 397 3057 or anneke@adventurespecialties.co.nz.)

2. Apply to ACC for approval and get a Purchase Order for your client.
A sample letter with goals and rationale for Adventure Therapy are on the following pages.
You'll also need the following details:
   Anneke Beardsley / Provider Number: PAQ155
   Martin Visser, Visser & Associates / Supplier Number: G09948
   Hours Needed: SCSGTT x 1 and SCSGT x 32

3. Complete the online enrolment form alongside your client and their caregiver:
www.adventurespecialties.co.nz/acc-adventure-therapy-programme-enrolment

4. On receiving both the ACC Purchase Order and the completed enrolment form, we will get in touch to confirm your client's place on the next Mānuka Trail programme.

5. The next step is that your client and their caregiver will have a one-on-one meeting with Anneke, our Clinician Lead for Mānuka Trail in Christchurch. She will contact your client's caregiver directly for this. (You are welcome to be part of this meeting). We will answer any questions that your client or their caregiver might have about the day-to-day logistics of the programme, plus we will discuss what your client hopes to gain from the programme, and also ensure that we know how to support them while they're with us. This will include discussing the information provided in their enrolment form.

# THERAPEUTIC GOALS

This programme is designed to support children as they continue with their individual therapy. The group setting is particularly useful for treatment goals that require rehearsal in a social context. Adventure Therapy can be really helpful for recovering from some of the mental injuries resulting from sexual violence.
Below, we have identified some of the goals that clients might have:

## IMPROVE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS / TAHA WHĀNAU

> Support to develop appropriate relationships and connection with facilitators and peers, thus reducing loneliness and isolation, and increasing a sense of accomplishment and worth.
> Facilitate small moments of connection, such as shared laughter, storytelling or eating kai together helps rebuild relational trust, and feelings of safety around people.
> Gain a sense of belonging: shared activities (such as building a shelter or swing together) or exploration (finding insects, plants or flowers) naturally build relationships in a quiet way without pressure to talk.
> Allow for co-regulation within the small group (and outdoor environment) through support and validation from facilitators so that children are seen, heard, and understood within this temporary community.

## IMPROVE PHYSICAL WELLBEING / TAHA TINANA

> Nourish and nurture bodies (self-care). E.g. Eating healthy food.
> Restore a positive connection to body and sense of empowerment through small manageable risk-taking physical activities like climbing trees, balancing on logs, digging in the soil.
> Support development of interoception (awareness of internal body signals) and proprioception (body awareness in space) through sensory rich, movement-based activities.
>Support children to recognise and respond to their needs (self-care). Such as recognising when they are cold and need another layer of clothing.
> Encourage movement for health, release of energy, and shifting mood.

## IMPROVE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING / TAHA HINENGARO

> Support to make choices, set boundaries, and regain confidence in their own agency (addressing loss of control after trauma)
> Build confidence and self-esteem through mastering new skills (to contradict trauma-related feelings of helplessness), such as fire lighting, crafting, recognising healing plants.
> Support children to manage trauma-related emotions, and strengthen emotional intelligence, including in non-verbal ways such as nature art, movement based play.
> Build resilience, with time in nature to provide respite from trauma symptoms
> Develop coping strategies, such as how to release energy, seek support, or find safe places.
> Increase ability to show self-kindness and self-compassion
> Offer experiences of sensory soothing and regulation, eg slow rhythmic activities like rocking in a hammock, wading through water.

## FIND A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND HOPE / TAHA WAIRUA

> Inspire curiosity, awe and wonder to help children feel connected to something bigger than themselves. Through discovering new things in their environment such as insects and flowers.
> Provide opportunities for creativity, using their imagination to find joy and a sense of aliveness.
> Strengthen identity, and encourage celebration of diversity (through strengths-based approach and open-ended natural resources to express self)
> Encourage optimism and hope (contradict helplessness and hopelessness) through connecting with land, seeing that their contribution makes a difference, and support from peers and adults.

## RECONNECT WITH THE OUTDOORS AND THE ENVIRONMENT / WHENUA

> Introduce using nature and green spaces for soothing and calming, eg. Water, smells of plants, textures of earth and bark.
> Allow space for restoration of land/nature to mirror restoration of self. For example, planting a tree, or noticing an injured bird, can restore a sense of compassion and connection
> Facilitate connection with natural environments to allow effects of stress reduction, improvement of mood, cognitive function and immunity.
> Strengthen identity with land/belonging/whakapapa, particularly for Tamariki Māori. The land becomes a partner in children's play.
> Allow space for the organic processing of trauma through play, for example building shelters can symbolize safety or playing in water being a release or cleansing. Allowing children space to reimagine their story through play.

In addition, Lead Providers/therapists will refer with specific individualised outcomes they hope their clients to achieve.

ADVENTURE
SPECIALTIES TRUST

EST. 1984


**AUCKLAND**
09 837 6033
office@adventurespecialties.co.nz
1/4 Winston Place
Henderson

**CHRISTCHURCH**
03 348 4547
chch@adventurespecialties.co.nz
71 Bamford Street
Woolston

**ONLINE**
adventurespecialties.co.nz
Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, YouTube
@adventurespecialtiestrust