

# Clare students awarded Operation Flinders success

**Gabrielle Hall reports:**

OVER eight days, with packs carrying supplies on their backs, across some of the toughest and most beautiful terrain in the Flinders Ranges, a group of nine Clare High School students faced some of the greatest physical and emotional challenges to date.

Trekking more than 100km across Yankaninna Station, learning bush survival skills, abseiling, learning indigenous culture and team building challenges, the students were pushed to their limits, with no chance to 'opt out'.

But Clare High's 2020 EX4SA20 Operation Flinders team rose spectacularly to the challenge and were last week awarded the prestigious honour of being presented with the Pam Murray-White Most Improved Team Award.

It is an honour that is not awarded easily.

Named after the founder of Operation Flinders Foundation, the Pam Murray-White trophy is awarded to a group that displays the most significant improvement as a team over the duration of an exercise.

Students Rory Nutt, Ryan Stocker and Jakob Lalic are among the CHS students who have benefitted from the opportunity to be involved in Operation Flinders.

Each took away something different from the program.

"Resilience, I can do anything, I



Dave Russell (assistant team leader), Rebekah Holland (CHS support staff), David Smith (team leader), Mitchell Beverdam, Jakob Lalic, Dan Hutchinson (back), Rory Nutt (middle), Jacob Hayes (CHS support team), Thorin Scarles, Hamish Tappin, Brock Elsworthy, Ryan Stocker and Caleb Klingner.

am stronger than I realised," Rory said.

"What people perceive of me, what they see on the outside is different to how strong I am on the inside."

For Ryan, it provided another support network he did not realise he had.

"When I first started out, I was mentally unprepared, maybe my mental health was not good," he said.

"Over time, I realised I was not alone, that we have each other and we can all help each other out."

For Jakob, it was a boost to his self-confidence.

"I was able to walk away knowing that I had the ability to talk to

others without feeling shy," he said.

The school's student learning support coordinator Rebekah Holland and teacher Jacob Hayes were also part of the team and reflected on the experience with the CHS EX4SA20 group.

"When I reflect on last year's exercise, there are a few things that I immediately remember," Mr Hayes said.

"I remember the bravery and courage that these young men demonstrated.

"I remember the inclusiveness, support and friendships that were forged out in this rugged country.

"I remember the nights around the campfire where we were pro-

vided the opportunity to be raw, vulnerable, honest without the fear of judgment.

"I remember a team that tackled every challenge and obstacle thrown at them and conquered them with determination and grit.

"I saw a team that embraced the very vision that Pam Murray had for this program."

Mrs Holland said the experience had a long-lasting impact on all its participants, none more so than those involved in the winning CHS team.

"Operation Flinders takes you back to the basics; providing a clear open perspective with no frills, nowhere to hide," she said.

"Changes occur, some within

the week and some change will occur later when those experiences become more relevant.

"This team has all implemented change already, I'm sure with more to come."

CHS has been involved in Operation Flinders since 2011, with passionate local advocate Katherine Nugent leading the first team out in August of the same year.

Operation Flinders business development manager Jonathon Robran said the Pam Murray-White Most Improved Team Award recognised the team's efforts and continued Pam's legacy.

"The award is named after the founder of Operation Flinders, Pam Murray-White, who had a passion for working with young people and seeing the benefits of the Flinders environment," he said.

"Unfortunately, Pam passed away in 1995 but her legacy lives on today with over 8500 young people participating since the programs' inception in 1991.

"Given the significance of the award, it is not necessarily given out on every exercise, only to those teams most deserving.

"The 2020 Clare High School team thoroughly deserved their award. Operation Flinders recognises the team leaders and school support staff who guided the students through their trek, but most importantly congratulates all students on their significant progress and achievements."

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