

# Our Strategic Framework 2022



## About HEAL

Founded in 2004, HEAL is a targeted, early intervention response for children and young people from refugee backgrounds, employing expressive arts therapies to help them navigate their trauma-recovery, settle into schools and bridge the gap of their disrupted schooling, through:

- Individual and small group therapy
- Transition support
- Crisis support
- Capacity building and support for teachers and school communities

Expressive arts therapies are evidence-based and delivered by qualified arts and music therapists. HEAL therapists work with school staff, families, cultural communities and other service providers to support young people in our program.

HEAL supports students to:

- Improve their emotional regulation in the classroom
- Engage with learning
- Improve their relationships with teachers and peers
- Increase their self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem
- Improve their mental health

HEAL's expressive therapies are less stigmatising for young people, have a focus on fun and creativity, are effective at reducing stress and isolation and foster connection and positive relationships.



HEAL supports around 240 students each year, from 47 cultural backgrounds including:

- Afghan
- Eritrean
- Hazara
- Syrian
- Burmese
- Ethiopian
- Iranian
- Tanzanian
- Burundian
- Êzidî
- Somali
- Thai
- Congolese
- Filipino
- Sudanese
- Ugandan

*“Coming to HEAL has really helped me.  
Before I used to fight and get angry, now I know how to calm myself down.”*

HEAL Student Feedback

## Our Vision

Our vision is for children and young people from refugee backgrounds in Queensland to have an equal chance to **flourish\***.

## Our Purpose and Passion

Our passion is to harness the power of creativity through expressive arts therapies to nurture emotional wellbeing and healing so that children and young people can grow and learn without trauma being a barrier.

## Our Commitment

We are committed to the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). We believe that children and young people have:

- the right to a full life
- the right to an education
- the right to a standard of living that is beneficial for their physical and mental health needs
- the right to have their voice heard

We strive to fulfill Article 22 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child that states that 'children who come into a country as a refugee (or asylum seeker) should have the same rights as children who are born in that country.'

## Our Values

**Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. The values which guide us are:**

**CREATIVITY** - We harness the creativity of children and young people to enable healing from refugee-related trauma.

**CARE** - We understand that parents and guardians want the very best for their children. We care about their needs and wishes and work together with them in the best interest of their child.

**CONNECTION** - We believe in the collective power of a connected environment. We collaborate with other caregivers (teachers, guidance counsellors, leisure workers and volunteers) to promote safe and positive experiences and nurture trauma-sensitive environments.

*\*Flourishing refers to the experience of life going well. It is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Flourishing is synonymous with a high level of mental wellbeing, and it epitomises mental health.*

## Our Goal

*Children and young people have the opportunity to grow and flourish without the impacts of trauma - including intergenerational trauma.*



## Our Challenge

**Any child or young person who experiences prolonged adversity is at risk of lifelong physical and mental health difficulties. They are also at increased risk of poor educational outcomes due to their trauma.**

Refugee-related trauma (both direct and intergenerational) can impact negatively on healthy development in childhood and adolescence. It can disrupt the foundations of attachment, behaviour and learning and impair development - with lifelong health consequences. For asylum seeker children and adolescents, the prolonged uncertainty of visa status compounds the trauma experience.

It is much harder and costlier to try to fix a magnification of problems later in adulthood than supporting healthy development in childhood and adolescence.



## Our Opportunity

Children and young people are resilient and are likely to recover from trauma if their core psychosocial needs are supported. In addition to a healthy family environment, if the care-giving environment is safe and stable with positive experiences, children and young people have their best chance of flourishing.

Creative expression is our catalyst for healing. Art, music and play are the tools that children and young people use to express themselves and learn about the world. The expressive therapies (art, music, play, dance, drama) combine psychology and creativity to promote healing and development. They are sensory-focused and can be non-verbal, which makes it easier for children and young people to convey their experiences, thoughts and feelings in ways that may be difficult to express with words (which can feel easier if they are also simultaneously learning English as another language).

*If we...*

*By...*

## Our Response

<p><b>Heal Trauma</b></p>	<p><b>Using expressive therapies to support individual children and young people to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the impacts of trauma including emotional dysregulation, difficulties with self and identity and interpersonal difficulties</li> <li>• Promote protective factors such as commitment to school and prosocial behaviours with family and peers</li> <li>• Minimise risk factors (individual and family)</li> <li>• Encourage healthy development (mentally and physically)</li> <li>• Recover and recreate those lost developmental opportunities afforded by creative expression and play</li> </ul>
<p><b>Build Skills, Confidence and Resilience in Groups</b></p>	<p><b>Using expressive therapies for group programs that strengthen the skills and resilience of children and young people to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have fun, experience joy and engage in positive group experiences</li> <li>• Understand and normalise emotions associated with stress and trauma</li> <li>• Develop positive coping strategies to deal with emotions</li> <li>• Build on innate strengths</li> <li>• Instil a sense of hope by empowering young people to feel more in control over stressors</li> </ul>
<p><b>Create Environments for Positive Experiences</b></p>	<p><b>Capacity building school and community environments to be refugee trauma informed so that they are able to support students to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve their capacity for effective learning and cognitive functioning</li> <li>• Prosper at home, at school and in the community</li> <li>• Be influential voices and grow to be our future leaders</li> </ul>

## Our Impact

**We will equip children and young people through:**

- Empathy and compassion
- Creativity
- Positive experiences
- Responsive relationships
- Safe environments

**They will feel:**

- Safe
- Healthy
- Happy
- Nurtured
- Included
- Able to reach their full potential



**This will result in children and young people being:**

- Confident individuals
- Successful learners
- Effective contributors
- Influential voices

**And then...**



*Trauma will not be a barrier to successful growing and learning.*

## Our Evidence

Contemporary neurobiological research into trauma suggests that trauma has a powerful physical component and thus the first step in addressing trauma should attend to embodied trauma responses. Because the creative arts therapies are based on body awareness, they can effectively address trauma and emotional and physical dysregulation.

Creative arts therapies can increase resilience by improving the sense of agency and self-understanding through the ability to express feelings symbolically. This can give new perspectives on oneself and on one's world view, which is essential in the recovery process."

*ANZACATA (Australia, New Zealand and Asia Creative Arts Therapists Association)*

Several primary studies and systemic reviews suggest that there is evidence that creative arts therapy can significantly reduce depression and anxiety, negative mood and other symptoms arising from experiences of trauma.

A meta-analysis of 52 controlled outcomes studies of play therapy supported its use as "a developmentally and culturally responsive counselling intervention effective across presenting issues" (Lin & Bratton, 2015). A meta-analysis of 23 studies evaluating play therapy in primary schools supported its use for students in need of a mental health intervention (Ray, Armstrong, Balkin & Jayne, 2015).

HEAL's own research has demonstrated that expressive arts therapies, used in partnership with narrative-based approaches, are effective in supporting young people from refugee backgrounds to heal from their trauma.

In 2014, HEAL ran a pilot study with eight young Liberian refugees aged 12 to 17 years. Over seven 80-minute group sessions, participants created their "Tree of Life," exploring their histories, their present circumstances, their strengths, important people in their lives, and their future hopes and dreams.

Through qualitative feedback, class teachers and group members reported high levels of satisfaction with the program. They reported improved classroom behaviour and improvements in peer relationships. Participants demonstrated an increase in reflective awareness of themselves and others. They appeared to be able to integrate their past experiences with their preferred self-narratives, helping to instil a sense of hope for the future (Schweitzer, Vromans, Ranke & Griffin, 2014).

Read the full study on our website [www.healqld.com.au](http://www.healqld.com.au)





## Feedback from Students and Schools

*"Thank you for sitting with me, talking, laughing and creating things together."* - HEAL student feedback

*"I have enjoyed sharing my worlds and stories at HEAL."*  
- HEAL student feedback

*"HEAL has supported many students and built very strong relationships and trust with the young people."*  
- English Teacher

*"HEAL has helped students in building emotional resilience."*  
- Wellbeing Team Member

*"Students leave HEAL seeming calm and happy."*  
- School Chaplain

*"Students are always telling me how much HEAL has helped them."* - Deputy Principal

*"The students love HEAL. They always show up asking for you."* - Youth Health Nurse



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[www.healqld.com.au](http://www.healqld.com.au)

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