

## Popular scientific project description for project funded by Ekhagastiftelsen

Popular scientific project description is to be submitted within 2 months of project grant.

Application number:	2025-40
Project title:	A randomized controlled study assessing the effectiveness of a wilderness program on the mental and physical health of young cancer survivors
Receiver of grant (name, address):	Dr. Carina Ribe Fernee, University of Agder Prof. Sveinung Berntsen, University of Agder Post Box 422, NO-4604 Kristiansand, Norway
Contact / project manager:	Prof. Sveinung Berntsen
Project start (yyyy-mm-dd): *	2025-11-28
Project end (yyyy-mm-dd): *	2026-12-31
By Ekhagastiftelsen granted sum:	450 000 SEK

Project description: (200 - 300 words)

Cancer treatment has improved in the last decades and today more than 80% of children, adolescents and young adults (AYA) survive cancer. However, the journey does not end after treatment. Nearly 70% of children and AYA cancer survivors struggle with long-term and late effects such as chronic fatigue, pain and psychological distress. Nature-based interventions offer a promising and multi-modal approach to treatment and rehabilitation for various populations, including young people affected by cancer.

The rationale for the present *Wilderness program for adolescents and young adults affected by cancer* (WAYA-2) project is the link between nature connectedness and mental well-being. In the WAYA-2 study we aim to investigate improvements in psychological well-being, quality of life, nature connectedness, safety, physical activity level and -fitness over time in the wilderness group compared to the wellness group.

This is the first full scale randomized controlled trial of its kind. We are comparing a wilderness program of two gatherings over three months where the participants are introduced to hiking, kayaking, canoeing, rock climbing and mindfulness activities, with a wellness program where participants attend two stays during the same three months period at a spa hotel featuring leisure activities.

The WAYA-2 study is a multi-center trial conducted both in Norway and in Sweden. This funding specifically supports the Norwegian branch of the project, which reached a major milestone this autumn when participants successfully completed their respective programs. We are now moving to the next phase to document long-term effects of the program, and all participants will be followed up until September 2026.

For more details, please see: Jong and colleagues (2024). Protocol of a randomised controlled multicentre trial investigating the effectiveness and safety of a wilderness programme on the mental and physical well-being of adolescents and young adults affected

by cancer: the WAYA-2 study. *BMJ Open*, 14(5), e087626.  
<https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2024-087626> .

\* Dates for project start and end should be the dates for which the grant is received (Not dates for total project if longer than period for which grant is received)