

While spending a number of years living and working overseas, Luke and Corina Ryan began to notice an increasing amount of 'greenwashing' - that is, a common marketing ploy used by brands to convince consumers that their products are natural, organic or cruelty-free, while still containing hidden chemicals and other nasties.

The couple's first child, a daughter named Willow, was born while they were living and working in New York. During Corina's pregnancy with Willow she struggled to find 100% certified organic, cruelty-free products that she felt confident using on herself and her new baby. The couple made the big decision to move home to Newcastle so that Willow could grow up closer to their family and experience her childhood by the sea. It was around this time the brand came to life.

During Corina's pregnancy with Willow she struggled to find 100% certified organic, cruelty-free products that she felt confident using on herself and her new baby.

"We were tired of all the products claiming to be natural or organic but still containing toxins, additives or fillers," explains Luke. "We wanted to provide for Willow (and all the other babies) a pure and gentle alternative while enjoying life by the sunny shores of Australia." Having previously worked in marketing for Netflix, Luke had a strong understanding for branding from the get–go. Meanwhile, Corina brought knowledge passed down by her late Grandmother; a traditional herbalist, to develop all the recipes herself. "As a child, Corina remembers travelling to the Romanian countryside with her mother and grandmother where they had a little holiday house," explains Luke. "She remembers being bathed in chamomile tea from the surrounding fields and being told about the amazing benefits for the skin, as well as the healing benefits of many other plants that grew nearby."

Having this understanding of the power of plants has clearly influenced Corina and Luke's philosophy when it comes to creating their own products.

"We use only the highest quality botanicals, waxes and oils and we would never create anything we don't use on ourselves and family," Luke continues. "If your skin is the largest organ of the body then why would you put anything on it that isn't safe to put in your mouth? A baby skincare product should not have to come with a warning or caution about calling ooo if ingested."

"We found that pregnant women were becoming savvier about what they were putting in and on their bodies and didn't want to comprise on quality or safety," says Luke.

We asked Luke if he could give us some insight into which nasty ingredients we should be avoiding when it comes to skincare, and particularly products that claim to be natural or organic.



"There are far too many to name but the key ones would be parabens, sulphates and triclosan," he explains. "Parabens are preservatives which are used to prolong shelf life, sulphates are chemicals used to create soap bubbles or lather and can contribute to eczema and triclosan is often used in antibacterial soap but can actually promote the growth of bacteria instead of preventing it."

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All products which currently include a line for babies and a line for mums, are made in small batches here in Newcastle. Luke explains that in order to get the recipes just rights, some went through over three hundred variations before the couple were completely happy with the consistency.

"Given climates are different all over the world with humidity being an issue in some places versus dryness in others, we wanted to make sure our products never felt greasy, soaked in well and left the skin soft and smooth," says Luke.

The current range of products for babies include bath teas, bottom balm and baby oil, while pregnant mums with growing bumps can enjoy the belly butter or belly oil.

You only pay for the ingredients that matter," says Luke. "We don't other additives or water which is often used as a filler to make products look bigger or reduce cost price.

"We source the best ingredients from certified organic suppliers all over Australia and develop our products ourselves," he continues. "What you see on the label is all that is in our products – 100% certified organic goodness."

It is evident that a lot of thought has also gone into the packaging and branding for each product. The labels depict beach scenes using a cute yet simple illustration.

"We wanted a look that told the story of a little girl living a natural life and enjoying simple things like spending time with her mum. We also wanted to inject elements of Australian culture into the design," explains Luke.

"We were drawn to pale pastels and old French travel posters so looked to introduce all of these elements into one animated scenario. We worked together with our designer and friend, Melissa Martin who brought this vision to life across all of the packaging."

Having grown up in Newcastle, Luke says the move home was all about getting back to a slower and simpler lifestyle. The couple decided to take time out from their previous professions to raise their daughter and establish *Willow by the Sea*.



"It was a big leap of faith but after many years working in the corporate world we got to know what truly made us happy – time with family, surrounded by nature and doing something genuine, truthful and sustainable", he says.

"And if our products can help other families like ours, in the most natural way possible, then we have achieved our goal."