

CEO's Message
October 2012

Hi everyone. It's been a while since my last column, since I managed to get off scot-free for the July newsletter. So I haven't put pen to paper so to speak since March.

Lot has been happening with the good ship Menslink since then. I'll fill you in on a few bits and pieces.

For those who have been visiting us in Griffith over the years, you may have noticed we have got some new furniture in to replace the pretty dilapidated old couches and chairs we used to have. We've also got a proper coffee machine for those who like a good short black or flat white. And thanks to Finn's relentless pursuit of strong coffee (at a gold coin donation per time), we're actually making money on it!

Also thanks to Bunnings Fyshwick, Just Better Care and Lemon's Carpets, we should be getting new floorboards and carpets soon, which are also badly needed. Ben has more plans for sprucing up the joint, which we should see come to fruition next year. Watch this space!

Thanks to the ACT Government and the kind support of our corporate sponsors like Actew Water and ACT Policing, we also managed to expand both our counselling program and

our mentoring program. Both programs are now helping out more young blokes and their families.

Counselling is now available five days a week, instead of three, and we are doing more work out in schools and in our justice system for guys aged twelve to twenty-five. Well done Finn for making this happen. Fingers crossed we may be able to do more things shortly....

We've also just had our biggest mentoring intake ever in September, with ten great volunteers matched with ten awesome young blokes. That's a great result and thanks to Garry, Ben and Harbs for making it happen. Thanks also to the mentors for putting up with my cooking on the training weekend – glad you all survived the trauma.

Late last month, I hosted over two hundred business, political, sporting and community leaders at our annual business breakfast.

This breakfast celebrated our tenth anniversary of supporting our region's young blokes and we had former Wallaby great Brumbies comeback legend Clyde Rathbone talk about his story and his thoughts about Menslink. We got some great press, including a live interview on ABC 666 with Clyde and mentor Denis Sargent. More importantly, the people who came – including

most of our current and future politicians – were able to hear about the great work we do and why it's so important. Fiona did a great job organising the event, which ran really smoothly.

Here are some photos from the day:





Finally, we're about to embark on a program with the Canberra Raiders where we will be going out to every school in the Territory and showing young blokes that it's better to talk about your hassles and to get help early than just suffering in silence. Many of the Raiders' first grade team have been through hard times and have managed to get through with help from coaches, mates and counsellors. Getting help early fixes problems early. Suffering in silence doesn't.

So hopefully all you young blokes in high school or college should be seeing Menslink and a few Raiders' players out at your school soon. And we have some exciting news for next year's mentoring program involving both the Raiders and Brumbies. You might just have to wait till my next column to find out though....

I hope to see many of you at our summer surf camp and families out at our Christmas Barbeque. The year certainly has gone quickly, hasn't it?!



Introducing...

Finn Liddy



Hey guys,

I've been harangued by the other staff into introducing myself as the newest member of Menslink's team. So... Hi I'm Finn Liddy, the new Counselling Program Manager.

I joined Menslink in July of this year, excited by an opportunity to provide counselling to the young men and male youth of Canberra. I began my career in the community sector in 2010, working as an AOD (Alcohol and Other Drugs) worker and group counsellor with Directions ACT. Prior to that, my previous work incarnations have been as a restaurant manager of a few establishments in Canberra and I have even worked as a Project Officer with the Australian Public Service.

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I've studied extensively which comes with the territory of not quite knowing what to do with my career, completing a Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education at the University of Melbourne and a Bachelor of Arts Degree (Sociology, English) at the ANU. I also hold a certificate IV in AOD, as well as recently completing a Mental Health First Aid course. At present, I am nearing completion of a Graduate Certificate in community counselling at the University of Canberra with a view to complete the Graduate Diploma in Community Counselling.

I'm looking forward to working with the rest of the Menslink team in providing a counselling service that helps young blokes get the tune-up they need to get on with the things they want to do in life. So, whether you might be having a few irritations with employment, the family, your job, with school or whatever life tends to throw up, I'm more than happy to organise a time for you to come in and have a yarn.

Cheers,

Finn

Winter Camp 2012

Birrigai

The inaugural Menslink Winter camp was held at Birrigai over the weekend of July 25th-26th. And it's fair to say it was well-attended with

lots of familiar faces floating about the place. And what a place it is! Nestled amongst the Tidbinbilla ranges, Birrigai rose from the cinders of the 2003 bushfires to become a state-of-the-art retreat. And being located just outside Tuggeranong it really is a hidden gem for Canberrans looking to escape the hustle & bustle.

The Menslink gang arrived in droves on a crisp but glorious Saturday morning. Little time was wasted before we got into the first of what was to be several adrenalin-pumpin' activities run by the friendly Birrigai staff. Some of our more cautious-minded folk glanced up in trepidation at the peculiar combination of ropes, pulleys and milk-crates not knowing quite what we were getting ourselves into. But it seems caution may be an age thing as there was no shortage of young blokes willing to throw their hat into the ring.

Known as the Crate Climb, it involves two participants working together to build (and ascend) a tower of milk crates. Partners need to steady each other as they ascend, particularly as the tower grows in height while the remaining team members assist with construction from the ground. Each attempt at the Crate Climb is terminated when the tower topples, at which point chaos ensues by way of flying crates and swinging bodies. The fearless partnership of Dylan and Trent

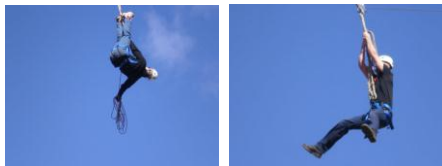
climbed an astonishing ten crates, setting a Menslink record along the way. Meanwhile, for the many acrophobes (feel free to Wikipedia that one) amongst us, it was the first hint that the day's activities were to be the stuff of nightmares!



From here it was onto the flying-fox where many thought the 8-metre climb to the departure platform to be scarier than the flying fox journey itself. Gordon, aka "The Inverted Fox" dazzled onlookers with his daredevil antics, hanging upside down for the duration of his journey. Meanwhile Menslink CEO Marty, known for his distaste of heights, was nowhere to be seen. He was last heard muttering something

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about going on what appeared to be a “conveniently-timed” shop-run. In contrast one of our young blokes by the name of Brett decided that he’d tackle his fears head-on. Having reached the lofty heights of the jumping platform, Brett broke the cardinal rule - “don’t look down”. As he sat down to contemplate his next move many in the crowd below wondered whether he’d lost his nerve. But after some enthusiastic coaxing he took the plunge and in doing so silenced the doubters. It was a great show of courage from Brett, and it was hard not to be a little inspired by it.



After chowing down on a well-earned lunch the group meandered to the next challenge. Once again it was not an activity for the feeble-hearted as it involved climbing a giant ladder whose rungs were spaced rather challengingly indeed, although resident icemen Dylan and Ethan might disagree as they scrambled to the top with relative ease. But the nature of the Vertical Playpen (and life in general one might say) is that no man can reach the summit on his own. The pair of Maurice & Gordon exemplified this beautifully. Though perhaps lacking the agility of their younger counterparts, they nonetheless reached the top showing an

unwavering belief in each other as well as a little old-school dogged determination!

The next activity elicited more high-pitched screams than the average One Direction gig. Resembling an oversized slingshot, Birrigai’s Giant Swing is really something to behold. First up was renowned entertainer George, and he didn’t disappoint. Having been hoisted to a great height by a dozen or so of our most enthusiastic rope-pullers, George was flung towards the distant Brindabella Mountains at speeds that would scare a formula one driver. Were it not for a long line of people waiting for their turn George would probably still be happily swinging back and forth, screaming like there’s no tomorrow.

But if we thought Birrigai had finally decided to show some mercy we were wrong – there was one more thrilling challenge to go. It’s known as the Leap of Faith, and you guessed it – it involves heights and soiled underwear. By this stage many of us were experiencing an adrenalin dump so spectating was looking like an attractive option. So it was left to the young blokes to provide the entertainment, and once again they obliged. Let’s just say there were some priceless verbal exchanges between the hesitant jumper and the negotiator on the ground, none of which can be repeated here.

By the afternoon everyone had basically had their fill of action sports and a bit of free time was on the cards. Some of us chose to chew the fat over a can of coke as a game of touch-footy broke out nearby. It was around this time that the barbie began calling our names, and the old adage that many hands make light work was once again shown to be true. And on that note, the Menslink staff members are forever grateful of the help provided by all of the mentors; it really does make a huge difference. There was never a shortage of helping hands when it came to cooking or cleaning. And Audi & Ralph deserve a special mention for the tasty salads that they somehow concocted from the modest Menslink rations. Who said you don’t make friends with salad?

As the group devoured the tasty BBQ dinner, some wondered who the burly guy with the South African accent sitting at the end of the table was. Turns out it was in fact Clyde “Rattlebones” Rathbone, our special guest speaker for the night. Being a humble sort of bloke, Clyde had made an inconspicuous arrival and many of us sitting at the table were completely oblivious that we were sitting right next to sporting greatness.

By this stage the sun had long gone down and the mercury had dropped significantly. Lucky we had the warmth of a cracking campfire to sit around, courtesy of (reformed)

pyromaniac Harbs. Great work Harbs. It was a crystal-clear night and the shining stars provided a spectacular backdrop.

Shortly after, Clyde was kind enough to share his story with us. Though sad at times, the candour and humility with which he spoke showed real guts. And seemingly courage *is* contagious, because there was no shortage of people, young and old who followed Clyde in sharing their own ups and downs with the rest of the group. This part of the night was completely unintended but for many was the highlight of the camp. A big thanks goes to one of our young blokes Dylan for getting the ball rolling.

Some of us (i.e. the snorers) slept better than others that night but the scent of eggs and 3 kg of bacon the next morning was enough to drag even the most reluctant of morning persons from their sleeping bags. Good ole Marty (does he ever rest?) was up at the crack of dawn firing up the barbie once again and the ample breakfast he'd cooked up was truly a sight for sore eyes.

Once the brekkie had settled a bit some of us found the energy for a short hike up to mushroom rock which was definitely worthwhile and a great way to end the weekend.

Thanks to Garry for organising as well as all those who attended our first Winter Camp, we hope you had

as much fun as we did and look forward to doing it all again next year!

Retreat 2012

Aaaaaah, the Retreat. One of the highlights of the Menslink calendar. When August rocks around the Menslink Man starts thinking, "Retreat, Retreat". But not in the military sense, more in the share a meal, sit around the fire and tell a few yarns kind of way. It's the outside world that's retreating from our thoughts. If you know what I mean.

Anyway, on a beautiful Friday afternoon -Gaz and Harbs in one car, Marty and Ben in another - headed south. Destination: the magnificent Caloola Farm.

By about 1:30 Gaz and Harbs turned off the bitumen onto the dirt road that signals the Retreat has started, mobile coverage drops out and good vibes begin.

Around 2, Gaz, Harbs, Marty, Ben, Graham and Audi were well ensconced in the Farmhouse and starting to prep the kitchen for a feast to do the Menslink Man proud.

As the arvo wore on, Men started drifting in, relaxing, offering help where needed and by 7pm we had 20 Top Blokes sitting around the dinner table ready to chow down on a feast of Spaghetti Bolognese,

salad, garlic bread and the like. Good hearty tucker for a cold Caloola night.

After dinner we went outside and lo and behold – Harbs, Shane and Trev had built an awesome fire. There was no chance we were gonna get cold around that beauty. So we sat, we yarned, we enjoyed the good vibes that come from getting together with a bunch of very cool dudes and hanging out. What a ripper of a night.

Eventually everyone filed off to their snug little bed. We slept a good sleep then got up to a great brekkie, bit more of a chat about our Menslink year and headed home.

Absolutely awesome – so good in fact I think we'll do it again next year.

Yarrahorn 2012



At our annual Retreat we award a trophy that is called the Yarrahorn. It is a remarkable set of Bull Horns stuck to a shield. It is awarded as a perpetual trophy to the Mentor who best exemplifies the spirit of honesty, sincerity and humour.

This year the Yarrahorn was awarded to Graham Hannaford.

Graham has been involved with Menslink as a Mentor since 2005. In that time he has been a Mentor to 2 young guys; he has been actively involved with our MAG committee; has helped design numerous Link Up activities; has always put up his hand to help out where needed; and has generally been the sort of rock you can look to when you need a guiding hand.

Menslink would not be what it is today without someone like Graham. Nothing is ever a problem. He goes about his business without any fuss and achieves a hell of a lot.

Graham thoroughly deserves to be this year's Yarrahorn recipient – which entitles him to the honorific – MENS LINK LEGEND.

August Link-up Movie Night

We once again had a great turn-out to our most recent link-up; a movie night at Menslink HQ in Griffith. As per Menslink tradition, the night kicked-off with a pizza dinner packed full of tasty delights including cheese, pepperoni and cholesterol. Before too long the lights dimmed and the projector roared to life. The movie selected was the Aussie flick "Red Dog"; the true story of a humble Red Heeler who captures the collective heart of a Western Australian mining town. Red Dog drew plenty of laughs and even a few tears along the way (even if no-one would admit it).

That Red Dog was a champion little woofy no-one can deny. But the star of the show was undoubtedly the elegant '66 VC Valiant Safari station wagon driven by the main character, John. This model

represents the pinnacle of automotive design and for this reason alone the movie warrants a 5-star rating.

Proceedings were paused halfway through for a brief intermission so that some of the young dudes could empty their bladders of the litres of fruit juice they'd used to wash the pizza down. Meanwhile Harbs was showing great proficiency on the ole microwave as he churned out bag upon bag of popcorn. Seemingly many in the audience found it difficult to locate their mouths while attempting to eat this popcorn, as those who later vacuumed the theatre floor will attest!

Thanks to all those fellas who came along to the event, as usual it was a lot of fun. The next link-up will be held on Thursday October 4th at Laser Zone in Belconnen. It'll be war, man, see y'all there!