
**EVERYTHING
IS POSSIBLE**

Men's Link Incorporated
Annual Report 2012-13



Chairman's Report – Peter Clarke

This document reports the activities and performance of Menslink during the financial year that has just ended (1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013). The 2013 financial year was another successful year for Menslink with significant improvements in all our core activities and the introduction of a new program, *Silence is Deadly*. The numbers involved in mentoring have almost doubled and counselling hours have increased by about 50%. This has been achieved while strengthening Menslink's financial position, repairing and rejuvenating the office accommodation and building on the strong market position established during the previous financial year.

Martin and the team have achieved this excellent result while also improving Menslink's governance and risk management systems, and our policy documentation. Governance has been a keen focus for the board over the past three years and I am pleased to report that Menslink is now operating to best practice. The board has continued to develop its capabilities throughout the year, sharpening its focus on audit, risk and performance, and completing a board skills survey. We have derived confidence from a recent audit by the ACT government, which we passed without qualification.

That said, none of us can rest on our laurels. As an organisation that offers services to vulnerable members of society, we are acutely aware that like the rest of the sector we are under increasing scrutiny. There have recently been several distressing articles in the media reporting a range of incidents in organisations in the community services sector – some go back many years but some are much more recent. Alleged incidents range from negligence and inappropriate behaviour to criminal offences that, if proven, could lead to very long gaol sentences. The board and management are focused on this and will do all within our power to ensure that Menslink is beyond reproach in the way we treat our clients, other stakeholders and each other.

Towards the end of the year, we said good-bye to a long serving and much loved member of the team. After eight years with Menslink, Garry Starling left us to pursue his career elsewhere in the community services sector. Garry has trained and supported very many mentors and young men and his legacy will benefit the community and Menslink for years to come. We join with all members in thanking Garry and wishing him well.

I thank our committed band of volunteers who help out in many ways – from fund raising to cooking at camps. In particular I thank our mentors who give generously of their time week in and week out helping the young men who are the reason for our existence. I also thank our sponsors and funding partners without whom we could not survive as an organisation. Finally and on behalf of my fellow directors, I would like to congratulate our CEO on his leadership and energy, and the Menslink staff as a whole on an excellent year in which we have seen improvements in all our key performance indicators.

Menslink is very firmly on the map and all the indicators promise another great year in 2013-2014. Thank you!



Board Summary:

Director's Attendance at Board Meetings	
Director	Attended
Peter Clarke (Chairman)	8
Jim Rice (Vice Chair)	9
Simon Wallace (Treasurer)	5
Jenny Henderson (Secretary)	5
Mackenzie Clare ¹ (Board member)	4
Phil Gouldson (Board member – commenced 11/12)	3
Wendy Addison (Board member)	7
Andy Gregory (Board member to 11/12)	2
Martin Fisk (CEO non-voting)	8

¹ Mackenzie Clare took temporary leave of absence from the board under Article 17A of the Rules of Men's Link on 5th June 2013 owing to his employment with Men's Link

Sub-Committee Meetings	
Audit and Risk Committee	Attended
Peter Clarke ²	1
Phil Gouldson (Chair)	2
Simon Wallace	2
Performance and Remuneration Committee	Attended
Peter Clarke ²	1
Wendy Addison (Chair)	3
Jim Rice	3

² Peter Clarke was a member of the A&RC and the P&RC until 17th October 2012.

Treasurer's Report – Simon Wallace

Menslink recorded a solid financial result in the 2012-13 financial year with a profit of \$4,754. An unqualified audit opinion has been provided from external auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers.

There has been significant business activity in the current year with large increases to both revenue and expenses from prior year. This reflects greater activities and investment in Menslink undertaken during the financial year. The key areas of financial performance to note are:

- Higher revenues and expenses from the Silence is Deadly and Defence programs;
- Larger business breakfast resulting in increased revenue;
- Investment as the match day charity at the Prime Ministers XI to increase awareness in Menslink;
- Investment in the business through an upgrade in office facilities and staff development;
- Decrease in the value of the motor vehicle to reflect current market value.

Retained earnings increased by \$4,754 to \$82,646 which reflects the profit for the current year.

Liquidity has increased to \$131,904 (from \$88,256) largely through an increase in grant funds received which has yet to be recorded in the Income Statement as it relates to future periods.

Attached to this report are the audited financial statements.

CEO Report – Martin Fisk

The 2012-13 financial year was one of significant growth for Menslink in all aspects of our operations. Mindful of the challenges that growth can pose for a small organisation, we also improved much of our infrastructure and operational frameworks to support the safety and wellbeing of our young men, their families, our staff and volunteers.

This investment, as well as the increased awareness of the great work we do supporting our next generation of young men, has positioned us well for the next phase of our development.

In summary this year, we have:

- Nearly doubled the size of the mentoring program, through increased recruitment and training of volunteers and better retention of mentoring matches;
- Increased the number of counselling hours by over 50%, providing more counselling sessions to each client to help them through troubled times;
- Updated our strategic plan to provide direction through to 2016;
- Overhauled our policy and procedure framework to comply with current legislation and the expectations of government, clients, staff, volunteers and all Menslink stakeholders;
- Embarked on the *Silence is Deadly* campaign, reaching around five thousand young men in the financial year with the positive messages of talking about your problems, getting help and helping a mate out; and
- Expanded our public awareness and fundraising campaigns so that more Canberrans are aware of the work we do and the support we provide young men.

We are now in an excellent position to support more young men to a higher standard than ever before; helping them to make the right choices in their lives, enhance much-needed social skills and avoid the many negative outcomes that can befall them in today's world.

This report highlights the year's achievements and events in our mentoring and counselling programs, the *Silence is Deadly* campaign, advocacy and community awareness, operations and staffing, as well as some commentary about the future outlook for Menslink.

Program Delivery for Young Men:

Mentoring

This financial year forty two (42) mentoring relationships were maintained and actively case-managed by the team, nearly double the number (24) from the previous year. This reflected a small increase in the number of new mentors trained and matches (from 13 to 16) as well as higher retention rates in the program (three mentoring relationships ended prematurely).

With increased community awareness bringing more potential volunteers, we increased the number of intakes from two to three, resulting in a potential of 24 mentors trained and matched each year.¹ Pleasingly, we finished the financial year off for the first time with a waiting list of potential mentors, despite the increased intakes.

¹ While mentor training took place in June, matching with mentees did not occur until July meaning the full impact of this increase will not be felt until the 2013-14 financial year

To improve attendance rates at monthly Linkups (and therefore build better relationships and outcomes for our mentees), we invested significantly in our Linkup activities, together with support from our many generous partners. This year, we:

- Doubled the number of overnight camps (from one to two), introduced the guest speaker program and moved to dormitory accommodation (reducing workload and removing cost barriers for young men to attend); and
- Greatly improved the variety of Linkups, to provide a broader range of activities, including Raiders and Brumbies games, the Canberra theatre, a visit to Raiders' HQ, sailing, indoor rock climbing and bowling.

*"I've learnt many life lessons from Menslink and Kieran, like ways to manage my problems better, how to have better reactions to my problems, and how to channel the emotion it causes into something positive and better for myself and those around me.
If it wasn't for Menslink, I would still be in that same sad place. I can't express how much I appreciate what Menslink has done for me."*

Alex, current mentee

Attendance rates at Linkup events have increased between two and five times from the previous year.



Sailing on Lake Burley Griffin

Importantly this year, we also collected the first results from our annual mentee well-being survey. This survey uses the *Strengths and Difficulties* scale developed by UK psychiatrist Robert Goodman and compares baseline data collected when they join the program to an annual assessment collected each June. Now we have quantitative data that our mentoring program changes lives.

Preliminary results indicate:

- Total difficulties experienced by young men reduced by 12% over the year;
- Peer problems (being picked on, being isolated etc) were down 31%; and
- Conduct problems (fighting, lying, stealing etc) were down 36% and, importantly, near the Australian average by the end of 12 months with their mentor.

We will of course now be running that survey every year and hope to be able to replicate and even improve these initial results. Importantly, we hope to also show these results are sustainable over a longer term – showing that mentoring not only works during the two-year program, but that its benefits are long lasting.

Counselling

The counselling program delivered 366 hours of individual counselling to 120 young men and their families, compared with 220 hours and 125 young men in the previous year. This increase of some 66% in hours corresponded with fewer no-shows and single session clients.

We extended our outreach program during the year, nearly tripling our locations and hours, in recognition that young men often find it difficult to come to Menslink. By the end of June 2013, we were providing outreach services in five high schools and colleges around Canberra, as well as the Alexander Maconochie Centre and other correctional facilities.

In the prison system, we participated in the government's *Throughcare* initiative, whereby our counsellor sees detainees and establishes a relationship before they are released on parole. Upon their re-entry into society, they have a trusted relationship they can rely upon, rather than trying to start one from scratch. In at least one instance, we believe this approach has been instrumental in assisting a client keep his parole conditions and remain out of prison.

During the year we upgraded our case notes system, documenting counselling sessions electronically instead of handwritten notes. This improves our record keeping and will improve client outcomes when multiple counsellors may see the same young man.

Silence is Deadly campaign

In 2013, we embarked on our Silence is Deadly campaign together with the Canberra Raiders. In the first half of the year (to June 2013), we ran 30 sessions in 23 high schools and colleges across Canberra.



Explaining why Silence is Deadly to students at Lanyon High

The campaign ran across high schools and colleges, including both public and private schools and one session for indigenous students run by the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.

Students were given a ten minute talk together with a video where Raiders' players talk about having hassles, getting help and talking to your mates. Every session included question and answer sessions with Menslink and the players – sometimes lasting as long as forty or fifty minutes.

Our message about opening up and getting help for your problems resonated with the three to four thousand students we addressed, with very positive feedback from teachers and students alike.

"As part of our throughcare initiative, Menslink's counselling support has been a significant contributor to parolees not reoffending and staying out of detention. This has significant cost savings to government and the community."

Mark Bartlett, ACT Corrective Services

"[The Menslink counsellor] has been working with two boys in particular who had expressed that they needed support after the Silence is Deadly presentation. There has been a significant improvement in the attitude, engagement and attendance of these boys. It has really made a difference."

Gary Rolfe, UC High School Kaleen

This campaign started in response to research showing that young men were three times less likely to seek help than their female counterparts. In fact, only one in ten young men will actively seek help to overcome life's challenges, with nine out of ten suffering in silence, with sometimes fatal consequences.

While the formal program evaluation is yet to be completed, the overwhelming feedback from schools is that more male students are seeking help, with positive results for their schooling and their overall wellbeing.

More information is available, including links to our community partners Lifeline, Headspace, Reachout and Kids Helping, from our campaign website www.silenceisdeadly.com.au

"A number of our students felt empowered through this session to actively seek help. The session really helped reduce the stigma of mental health issues amongst our students and I look forward to having Menslink back in our school to run more sessions in future years."

David McCarthy, Belconnen High

"The College and its students...have benefited enormously from the involvement and support of Menslink. Menslink's work is invaluable to our communities"

Lois White, Mary MacKillop College

"Our Pastoral Care Coordinator has seen more young men seeking help for depression and anxiety as well as other life issues as a result of this presentation."

Lauren Richardson, Namadgi School

Advocacy and Community Awareness

In addition to our *Silence is Deadly* campaign, Menslink reached out to more people in our community than ever before; advocating on behalf of young men, recruiting volunteers, reaching out to families (especially single mums) and raising funds.

We actively promoted Menslink to young men, parents, schools, government, business and community groups. Through presentations, exhibitions and the media, we reached thousands of people who otherwise would never have heard of Menslink.



Brumby Clyde Rathbone addresses the 2012 Breakfast

Early in the financial year we held our annual Business Breakfast, nearly doubling attendance from 130 guests in 2011 to over 220 in 2012.

We also welcomed ACT Policing as a major sponsor, joining ACTEW Water who have supported us for many years. Other corporate supporters included ActewAGL, ACT Cricket, bankmecu, Brumbies Rugby, Canberra Raiders, FS Solutions, Optus, PWC, the Southern Cross Club and Thinkplace.

Capital Chemist joined the Menslink community later in the financial year, becoming our latest major sponsor in what we both hope will be a long term relationship.

In January this year, we were delighted to be selected as the match-day charity for the PM's XI cricket match at Manuka Oval. This event provided significant media and networking opportunities, allowing us to promote our work (and collect donations) amongst the seven thousand or so attendees. We are very grateful to Cricket ACT for providing us with that opportunity.

Mark Whithear, local businessman, long-time supporter of Menslink and Director of Surfers Against Suicide, continued his generous support of Menslink throughout the year – especially the annual surf camp in December.

We were also lucky enough to also be selected by the Raiders to be the match-day charity for one of their home games – again providing a valuable opportunity to promote our service and collect valuable donations from the public. Both these events relied heavily on volunteers – more than a hundred of them – who were able to assist us in promoting our service.

This March this year, with the support of Brumbies Rugby and Gryphons, we launched the successful *Midweek* series, where well-known Canberran men talk about their life journey, overcoming challenges and important role models in their lives. During the financial year, we had speakers ranging from sportsmen, winemakers, politicians and authors and now draw a regular crowd of around fifty men and women each month.

During the year, Menslink continued to engage with the community sector and government, including organising the annual men’s suicide prevention conference in June, together with ACT Health, ACT Policing, Lifeline, Marymead, the Mental Health Community Coalition, Ozhelp and Supportlink.

Operations and Governance

During the year, staff and the Board met twice to update the Menslink Strategic Plan, which sets our overall direction for the service through to 2016. In essence, the plan proposes growing our core programs to accommodate increasing demand, having now set a firm base for the organisation in terms of a more robust policy and procedural framework.

This framework was also a major focus for the year. Starting with the development of our formal risk management policy, Menslink reviewed and updated every policy and procedure governing our operations, including:

- Organisation management and governance
- Risk management
- Program Delivery
- Client service
- Employee management and relations
- Volunteer management and relations
- Workplace safety
- Office Support Functions (ie finance, administration, IT&T)
- Funding and Marketing

In March this year, we submitted all policies and procedures – together with our financial statements, risk management plan and other governing documents – to the Community Services Directorate for a detailed audit against nine criteria, including governance, safety, complaint handling and human rights, management systems and financial viability. Menslink passed this audit without qualification.

As anyone who has visited Menslink over the past twelve months will attest, we have made very important and much needed improvements to our premises to support our client and staff health and wellbeing. These have included:

- Replacing the loose asbestos shingle roof and all guttering and downpipes;
- Providing a concrete apron at the front of the building to eliminate drainage problems;
- Replacing ageing carpet and asbestos floor tiles on the top floor;
- Replacing aged and broken furniture including couches, chairs and desks;
- Replacing old data cabling which did not survive the flooring replacement;
- Installing reverse-cycle air-conditioning, providing every office with heating and cooling for the first time;
- Replacing our old phone system with a modern VOIP system

We are very grateful to the ACT Government (TAMS) for the majority of this work, but were also assisted by Just Better Care, Bunnings and Harvey Norman who provided and installed the new carpet and flooring on the first floor.

Staffing

With increased funding from the ACT Government, we were able to upgrade two positions from part-time to full-time during the year, namely our counsellor and mentoring coordinator.

Sadly in May this year, Garry Starling decided that it was time to leave Menslink after some eight years in the organisation. Garry did a great job for Menslink and the young men we support and we are sorry to see him go. He has told us though that he will be back helping us out as a volunteer at some stage in the future.

In May, we promoted Ben Triglone to the position of Mentoring Program Manager and recruited former mentor and MAG Committee Chairman Rob Regent to Ben's position, although Rob did not start in that position until August.



Garry and Harbs enjoying a break during mentor training

Also in May, Director Mackenzie Clare took a leave of absence from the Board to come and help out in the mentoring program and Menslink more broadly.

During this year, we made a significant investment in staff development, more than doubling expenditure and resources in staff training. Staff attended conferences in youth mentoring as well as training in counselling techniques, suicide prevention, team dynamics, first aid and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness.

Volunteers

This year we had an exceptionally strong team of volunteers working with us. Forty two mentors carried out their commitment to help out the next generation of young guys, while a number of them went even further – contributing their time to act as ambassadors for the program and to spread the message at Midweekers and our special fundraising events through the year.

This year we also welcomed around sixty or seventy new volunteers – women and men ranging in age from sixteen to sixty-six – who have helped raise funds and awareness in the community.

A number of current and former mentees volunteered for us either in the office for work experience or talking to other young men in the *Silence is Deadly* campaign. It was very pleasing to see these young men give back to the community which assisted them in some hard times.

Future Outlook

Menslink now supports young men across our region in three ways:

- Encouraging them to speak up and get help, or to encourage their mates to get help, through one-off educational sessions in schools and other community groups;
- Providing intensive but short-term counselling to help them get through stressful life events with the least amount of harm to themselves or those around them; and
- Longer term mentoring support from positive male role models, especially for your guys who are socially isolated or for the 17% of all young men who no longer live with their father.

In this coming year (2013-14), we want to build on our strengthening foundations and further expand our services to young men. In particular, we will seek to:

- Continue a re-invigorated *Silence is Deadly* program in schools and community groups throughout 2014 and beyond;
- Seek funding to extend our counselling service beyond a single staff member, with a focus on outreach services in schools and correctional facilities;
- Extend our mentoring program by leveraging our experienced mentors to increase our annual intake to over thirty (ie 50-60 young men being mentored at any given time);
- Continuing to campaign and advocate actively to our community on behalf of young men.

Finally, on behalf of Menslink, our young men and their families, I thank all of the people who contribute to the great work we do - our dedicated staff, our Board of Directors, our volunteers, our mentors and ambassadors. I would also like to thank the ACT Government, ACTEW Water, ACT Policing and all our corporate supporters who fund our operations. Menslink would not exist without you all.