
EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Men's Link Incorporated
Annual Report 2014-15



Chairman's Report – Michael Battenally

The role of the Menslink Board is to provide good governance and strategic support to the not-for-profit body that provides significant support to young men 12-25 years of age across Canberra and Queanbeyan.

The Board expanded from five members to nine at the AGM elections 12 months ago. The new and continuing board members came together and reshaped the Board's role through regular Board meetings, and supplementary Board Committee meetings fulfilling governance responsibilities for audit and risk, community engagement and workforce development.

Reflecting on this year, the board membership has undertaken broader roles and subsequently provided impact through updated policies, revised strategic planning, financial policy, and strengthened workforce development. The Board has maintained a focus on strengthening the organisation, and supporting the dynamic Menslink staff and CEO, Martin Fisk.

The 2014-15 financial year was another year of growth for Menslink. As you will see in the CEO Report, we increased the number of young men receiving direct support from us by over 60%, while we also conducted an increasing number of *Silence is Deadly* presentations. Recurrent funding, grants and donations have maintained growth, ensuring a sound financial position as reported by our Treasurer, Kathleen O'Sullivan.

During 2015 some members of the board resigned for a variety of demands, both personal and professional. On behalf of the Menslink community I thank Dee McGrath, Mike Corke and Wendy Addison for their valued contribution.

Of special note, at this AGM we acknowledge Jenny Henderson for her six years of dedicated service as a board member, including the Secretary role. Jenny is passionate about Menslink, its sustainability and importance to the community. Her knowledge of risk management, community engagement and staff development has made a significant contribution to the direction of Menslink and we thank her for this. As she resigns from her position, she leaves a legacy in a Menslink growing in relevance and delivering valued services and programs in our community - Thank you.

Continuing Board members look forward to welcoming new members for the next year where Menslink will transition to a new strategic plan and strengthen the foundation work of our three key Board Committees. We welcome the commitment, acumen and experience the new members will bring. I am also pleased to note that Vice Chair, Jim Rice, will be confirmed as Vice Chair on the new board, extending on his thirteen years of involvement as a foundation board member.

Across the local community the Menslink brand of community support and advocacy for young men is highly valued. The media attention of early 2015 did create unexpected pressure on the organisation, which was ultimately resolved through good governance and transparency.

On the morning of 23 September this year, the philanthropic heart of Canberra opened up and affirmed the high value of the critical work Menslink continues to do. Over 500 Canberrans attended the Business Breakfast to listen to Lieutenant General David Morrison AO and our CEO Martin Fisk talk about the challenges of being a male in a society complicated by social disruption and increasing adolescent mental health cases.

At the Board level, we are grateful for the trust and expectation that comes with this financial support linked back to the high value the Menslink purpose holds with leading men and women in Canberra's community.

From all clients and members, I wish to thank our volunteers for their support and involvement with an organisation that continues to make a positive difference to the lives of young men and their families in our community.

Finally and on behalf of my fellow directors, I would like to thank our CEO and the Menslink staff for their very significant roles in delivering another excellent year for Menslink and thereby having a very significant impact on our community.



Michael Battenally
Chair Menslink
24 November 2015



"Menslink helps young men make better choices to engage positively with society, because young men matter to our society."

Treasurer's Report – Kathleen O'Sullivan

This year Menslink recorded an unprecedented surplus of \$85,947. This extremely strong result was largely due to a series of one-off donations and grants, from:

- The Parliamentary Press Gallery Midwinter Ball (\$30,000);
- Federal Government grants under the now-closed Youth Attainment and Transitions Strategic Funding Pool (\$42,544); as well as
- Stronger than anticipated support from our principal and major supporters.

Overall, Menslink recorded strong growth in its operations, resulting in total expenses rising from \$505,023 in 2013-14 to \$548,019 in 2014-15. A summary of expenses is as follows:

Expense area	This year (2014-15)	Last year (2013-14)	Change (%)
Staffing costs	396,398	342,139	16%
Program expenses (excluding staff)	59,572	72,569	(18%)
Administration costs	92,049	90,315	2%
Total Expenditure	548,019	505,023	9%

While our expense base grew by nearly 9%, the number of young men directly supported through counselling or mentoring grew by 60% in the same period; while we also recorded a 16% increase in the number of young men attending *Silence is Deadly* sessions.

Program expenses were lower this financial year largely due to lower costs in our *Silence is Deadly* program, as we leveraged investments made the previous year (when we entered a new two year partnership with Brumbies Rugby)

During the year, the ACT Government renewed its funding agreement with Menslink, securing 50% of our funding until June 2017. The remainder of our income relies on corporate and private sponsorships and donations.

Retained earnings increased to \$170,132 which reflects the strong surplus for the current year.

Menslink has total assets of \$208,332, of which \$196,848 is in cash. Liabilities at the end of the year were \$38,200. Menslink is in a very strong position to meet its debts.

An unqualified audit opinion has been provided from external auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Attached to this report are the audited financial statements.

CEO Report – Martin Fisk

The 2014-15 financial year was again a solid year for Menslink, as we supported more young men in the Canberra region than ever before. In summary this year, we:

- Reached nearly 8,000 students with our *Silence is Deadly* campaign, reducing the stigma associated with mental health among young men – an increase of over 15% from the previous financial year;
- Increased the number of young men receiving counselling support by nearly 90%;
- Slightly reduced the number of young men receiving mentoring support, due to timing issues in our intake program. This should see an equivalent jump in numbers for the 2015-16 year;
- Received two awards for our programs: the ACTCOSS *Little Feet Big Steps* Award in recognition of the significant impact our work has in the community and the ACT Government's *Partners in Prevention* award for assisting to end violence against women and children;
- Undertook an extensive review of all policies and procedures together with major supporter, Proximity Legal;
- Appointed a new Chair to the Board, along with four new Directors; and
- Further extended our public awareness and fundraising campaigns to help raise funds and awareness to address the many issues faced by young men in our region.

A series of one-off grants and donations also resulted in Menslink achieving an \$80,000 surplus for the year. While this extraordinary result may not be repeated, it does give us some money to invest in future innovation and programs.

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 Program

This financial year forty one (41) mentoring relationships were maintained and actively case-managed by the team, down from forty seven the previous year. Unfortunately we needed to postpone one of last financial year's intakes, which reduced our numbers from an anticipated 48 for the year.

Fifteen mentors were trained and matched with young men over the period, a reduction from the previous year due to the postponement mentioned earlier.

"My son's mentor has brought so much into our lives. My son has become a happier more relaxed and positive person and I see him being much more positive about the future. His mentor has introduced so many good ideas and values. Just by being himself and being present as a friend he opened my son's eyes to lots of good things about life and being a man. He now has an awareness of the possibilities of the person he can be that he never had before.

The friendship of his mentor has got him through some difficult years where it would have been easy for him to feel very negative. He's become a much more wonderful brother to his sisters too."

Sue, single mother of three, including sixteen year old mentee, John

In October 2014, we had a record sixteen mentors and mentees graduate after their two year journey together, representing a retention rate of nearly 90%. This was a record for the mentoring program and shows the benefits of an increased focus and investment on Linkup activities and case management throughout the two year program.

We were also pleased during the year to see a number of mentors come back to Menslink for their second and even third mentoring round.



Mentees gathered around the fire at our winter camp

This year's camps were again well attended, with between 37 and 40 mentees and mentors attending the facilities at Birrigai in Tidbinbilla and Longbeach down at the coast. A variety of exercises were held for the young guys, including high ropes courses (at Birrigai) and raft building and laser tag at Longbeach.

We were also fortunate to have former Olympian Stephen Hodge talk to the group at the winter camp while South Coast youth worker Mark Ettridge provided the after dinner talk at our summer camp.

In addition to our camps, Menslink run monthly group activities called Linkups for both mentees and mentors. Attendance declined slightly on the previous year, contributed to by (at times) insufficient staffing and lack of variety; both of which have been subsequently remedied.

Notwithstanding some low attendances though, our March Linkup at Powerkart Raceway broke Menslink attendance records!

Other successful Linkups during the year included tenpin bowling, movie nights, Laser Tag and barbeques. We also took the young guys to Mitchell Service Centre to learn basic car maintenance and spent some time behind the scenes at Raiders HQ to see what it takes to be a professional sports person.

During the year, we were also privileged to take a small number of mentees to Ronald McDonald House where they cooked and served dinner to families with a sick child in hospital: a special experience for all involved.



Mentees putting on the pace around the racetrack

Our Linkup and special activities give both our young guys and their mentors the opportunity to engage in quality bonding time while having a bit of fun along the way. They are a great opportunity for marginalised young men to socialise with peers in a safe, non-school environment.

June 2015 saw our partnership with Outward Bound come to fruition, when eleven of our young guys participated in a seven-day "Wilderness Challenge" throughout Namadgi National Park.

This challenge was made possible through a Telstra grant organised by a previous mentor, as well as the Outward Bound Foundation providing us with a subsidised rate. This initiative was an enormous success and we're hoping to make it a permanent fixture in the Mentoring Program for years to come.



Mentors and mentees alike enjoying a bushwalk and the spectacular views from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

Also in June, mentoring program manager Ben Triglone was invited to deliver a presentation at the Australian Youth Mentoring Network conference. Ben provided insights and experience to a national audience on maximising match retention rates and reducing early terminations.

Counselling Program

The counselling program delivered 738 hours of individual counselling to 285 young men and their families, compared with 394 hours and 151 young men in the previous year. This represents an increase of 87% in counselling hours and an increase of 89% in the number of young men supported through difficult times.

During the financial year, we provided counselling to a total of ten schools, up from six the previous year. We find providing counselling in the school environment works exceptionally well, as it removes a number of barriers (such as transport or parental reluctance) that might otherwise prevent teenagers from getting the assistance they need.

At our offices in Griffith, we've also managed to support an increasing number of clients, not only from an increase in new clients but also higher numbers of clients returning for consecutive sessions.

We have continued to provide counselling sessions to young detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, with the emphasis on establishing a supportive relationship that will hopefully continue to provide that support upon release.

Importantly, this year the counselling team also adopted *Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)* into their practice. ACT emphasises accepting challenging thoughts and emotions rather than changing or fighting them, while encouraging clients to focus on their values and to set goals based on those values.

Both our counsellors this year embarked on extensive training and practice of ACT and it seems to have had very positive results, helping our young men move from "This is terrible! Why is it happening to me?!" to "It might be bad, but I can handle this..."

"I was suffering from depression when I first came to see Menslink last year. I'd tried hurting myself a couple of times and had pushed my family away. I even left Canberra for a while. Through all of this I had regular contact with Menslink, often having counselling over the phone. I'm now back in Canberra and have re-established ties with my family, and I have started my own Charity. I honestly don't think I'd be alive if it wasn't for Menslink."

Josh, counselling client

"When my son first came to Menslink he was struggling with his grades and was having a hard time connecting. His friends would describe him as lonely and sad. What a turn around it's been! His last report saw him being awarded A's and B's. He is now playing representative sports at a state level and has been in a steady relationship for the last 6 months. He seems so much more outgoing and engaged with the family and with his school life. He really appreciates having someone to talk to that he knows will listen and won't judge him. Thank you Menslink."

Lisa, mother of a counselling client



Rolf Einhaus gives advice on how to get through tough times

Silence is Deadly campaign

During the financial year (spanning two educational years), Menslink presented our key mental health stigma reduction campaign to over 7,900 male secondary and tertiary students in 61 sessions. This compared to 6,800 students in 39 sessions the previous year; an increase of more than 16%, or 1,000 students.

Consistent with previous years, our campaign spanned schools and universities in both Canberra and Queanbeyan from the public, independent and Catholic school systems. Supported by players from Brumbies Rugby (either on video or in person), our presenters spoke to students in groups ranging from as small as five right through to 400 or more at a time.



Des and the Brumbies talk to high school students about how important it is to talk about problems and get help in tough times

A pool of ten presenters (staff and volunteers) carried our message to students that it's a normal part of life to have problems, but it's critical to talk them through so that they don't become overwhelming.

In both years, we were lucky enough to have players talk openly on camera about their experiences seeing professional counsellors to get through problems; messages that were reinforced by both the players and Menslink presenters on the ground.

Our key messages in schools were also reinforced around the region through extensive showing of our *Silence is Deadly* advertisements on regional television, thanks largely to major campaign supporter, WIN Television.

Staffing issues meant that we were unable to survey schools and measure the impact of the campaign in 2014, but have already commenced surveying schools to assess the impact of the campaign in 2015.

This year sees the end of our two year agreement with Brumbies Rugby and we would like to thank the Club and their players for their tremendous support throughout the 2014 and 2015 calendar years. Our Silence is Deadly partners from next year will again be the Canberra Raiders.

"Over 800 students were exposed to the 'Silence is Deadly' message this week. The presentations were age specific, well balanced and direct. I thank you sincerely for assisting our boys and young men with exposure to your excellent service and the messages of both hope and inclusiveness it captures."

Pat Langtry, Director Pastoral Care, St Edmunds College

"Des, I would just like to extend my thanks to yourself, LTCOL Mark Coyle and Mike Aichholzer for sharing your stories with the Midshipmen and Officer Cadets of Charlie Squadron. The feedback I have received from my peers has been exceptional as many engaged with the personal stories that you all shared with us."

Timothy Ireland, Officer Cadet, ADFA

Advocacy and Community Awareness

This year saw Menslink staff and volunteers advocate on behalf of young men and their families more than ever before; highlighting the issues facing young men in society, the impact they can have on our community – both positive and negative – and how Menslink supports them.

We were invited to talk about young men's issues on all local radio stations, television programs, in local newspapers and at numerous government, business and community events across Canberra. These included presentations to doctors, government departments, church and community groups, various conferences and even a Lifeline telephone counselling training session.

Unfortunately early in 2015 we received some negative press, but were overwhelmed with the level of community support shown to us by government, corporate sponsors, the media, volunteers and members of the public.

This was highlighted to us by very high levels of support shown to the more than 100 volunteers who helped raise awareness and collect money at the 2015 Multi-Cultural Festival. Despite the rain, we collected a record level of gold coin donations; donations that were repeated at collection events with the Handmade Markets and the Brumbies-Waratahs match later in the year.



AWM Director Dr Brendan Nelson talks about values to a sell out crowd at the 2014 Business Breakfast

Our 2014 Business Breakfast at the National Press Club was again a sellout event, with nearly three hundred guests listening to keynote speaker Dr Brendan Nelson, Director of the War Memorial, who spoke about the fifteen values that have shaped our nation, enshrined in the Hall of Memory, and how they applied to young men today.

We were fortunate to also have then Chief Minister Katy Gallagher open the Breakfast, while former mentee Connor Lore gave a rousing talk about his journey with Menslink and his mentor, Denis Sargent.

During the year we were honoured to receive two awards for the work we perform in the community. We received the ACTCOSS *Little Feet Big Steps* award in September 2014, which “recognises a small organisation that is taking big leaps in the provision of service delivery to Canberrans experiencing disadvantage.”

In December, we received an ACT Community Services Directorate *Partners in Prevention* award for our work in promoting non-violent alternatives to young men who may be dealing with strong emotions.

Throughout the year, we continued our successful *Midweek series* of informal talks by high-profile Canberran men. The financial year included talks by local businessmen, politicians, current and former professional athletes, radio personalities and even comedians.

Of particular interest were the three speakers who all had profoundly disabled children. All of them started or concluded their talks by saying how lucky they were; as did former Wallaby Pat McCabe who prematurely ended his promising rugby career after breaking his neck for the third time. These speakers all showed the inherent value of perspective....

The *Midweekers* attracted between thirty and eighty female and male attendees and provided a way for us to engage with the local community while also promoting the work we do.

Menslink also continued to actively engage in government and community forums and working groups throughout the year, including ACTCOSS, suicide prevention, community sector reform, justice reinvestment, restorative justice and domestic violence committees and groups.



ABC 666 Breakfast Announcer Philip Clarke talking at a Midweeker last year

Fundraising and corporate sponsorships

This financial year was a very strong year for Menslink, as our corporate supporters and partners got behind us to support our programs, increasing our external (non-ACT Government core funding) from 40% last year to 47% this financial year.

We were very pleased to welcome ACT Policing, Capital Chemist, Icon Water and the Snow Foundation to a new level of Principal Partner, recognising their very significant levels of financial and other support for Menslink's work in the community.

The ACT Rugby Veterans Club, bankmecu, Brumbies Rugby and WIN Television continued to show their support by remaining Major Partners, while we were also pleased to welcome Lennock Motors and the National Driving Academy as major supporters through the year.

Other corporate supporters this financial year include the ACT Chamber of Commerce, ActewAGL, Canberra Southern Cross Club, Clonakilla Wines, Cricket ACT, Luton Properties, McDonalds ACT & Queanbeyan, the National Press Club, PWC, Ricoh, Thinkplace, Threesides Marketing and the Village Building Company.

Operations and Governance

Both Board members and staff members spent time reviewing progress against our three year strategic plan (2013 – 2016) and confirming our strategic intent and goals for the 2015-16 year.

During the year, we inadvertently breached the Working with Vulnerable People Act, by allowing a volunteer to participate in *Silence is Deadly* sessions in excess of the number of times provided for in the Act without a Working with Vulnerable People Card. Upon discovery of the breach, we immediately notified the Office of Regulatory Services and ceased engagement with the volunteer. We received a \$2,500 fine for the breach which was paid in January.

Together with major partner, Proximity Legal, we embarked on an extensive review and analysis of all our policies, information sheets and contracts across our programs. This review is ongoing but will result in better risk management across the organisation and particularly in our mentoring program.

Staffing

Yet again our dedicated group of staff were active on the frontline, supporting young men, running the office and helping raise money to support our programs.

In January this year, we welcomed three new staff members to Menslink, with former volunteers Des and Jordan both accepting casual positions with us in the Silence is Deadly and mentoring programs. Richard Wigley also joined us as a part-time counsellor, replacing Rolf who was promoted to the counselling program manager's position.

During the year, former counselling program manager Mackenzie Clare decided to leave us for a teaching career after eighteen months in the role. Neale Roberts also joined us for ten months in the mentoring program before moving on to other opportunities, while casual Silence is Deadly presenter Shane Horsburgh finished up his presenting duties after the end of the 2014 campaign.

I'd like to thank Ben and Rolf for their tireless efforts in managing the mentoring and counselling programs and ensuring young men get the support they need when they need it.

I'd also like to thank Fiona our office manager and Lesley our casual bookkeeper for their ongoing support for Menslink's finances and operations.

This year we again invested significantly in staff development, increasing expenditure slightly from \$12.5K to \$13.25K this financial year, representing 3.5% of payroll.

Volunteers

This year again was a very strong year for our volunteers, providing direct mentoring support for young men, presenting our Silence is Deadly messages to school groups and helping raise funds at major events.

I'd specifically like to thank Michael Aichholzer who has not only mentored a young man through the year (his second), but also presented his compelling personal stories at nearly all our Silence is Deadly sessions (over 20 in the six months to June), inspiring many young men to think about their issues, get help or reach out to help a mate in need.

Graham Hannaford, a volunteer stalwart of many years' standing, is also worthy of special mention. Graham worked every shift at both the Multi-cultural Festival and Bog Boys Toys Expo (working nearly twenty hours each weekend) to help raise money for our programs.

All of our volunteers – current mentors, new recruits, recent graduates and those who help us fundraise – have done a sensational job this year and have really made a difference to all the young men and their families we have supported through the year.



Menslink volunteers attended a thank you reception in July 2014 at the Legislative Assembly hosted by Speaker Vicki Dunne

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 young men who are socially isolated or for the 21-24% of all male teenagers who no longer live with their father.

This year, we will continue to consolidate the growth and improvements made in previous years. A particular focus for this financial year will be to:

- Further improve our policy and procedure framework to provide better outcomes for young men, our volunteers and staff;
- Increase our counselling staff to provide greater support to young men in need;
- Implement a measurement program (with specific funding provided by the Snow Foundation last financial year) to assess the impact of our programs on young men, their families and community (as far as possible);
- Continue 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 and all of our principal, major and corporate supporters, as well as individual donors who fund our operations. Menslink would not exist without you all.



Menslink CEO Martin Fisk photographing Brumbies players during the 2015 Silence is Deadly filming