
EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Men's Link Incorporated
Annual Report 2019-20



menslink
supporting young men in Canberra

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Menslink acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, as well as our neighbours including Wiradjuri to the west, Walgalu to the south, Yuin to the east coast, Ngarigo to the south east and Gundungurra to north east.

We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.



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Chair's Report – Michael Battenally

Members of Menslink, I open my report with a vote of thanks for the past twelve months of sustained support from the Menslink community. In times where our Canberra and region community has endured bushfires, smoke pollution, catastrophic hailstorms, the impact of COVID19 and subsequent financial stress. As a not-for-profit we have maintained service throughout this period, adapting and pivoting as many have had to do.

In this 2020 Annual Report you will hear from the Menslink CEO, Martin Fisk, how service delivery has returned on the financial support from all sectors. Through the undulations of operation, you will also hear from our dedicated Treasurer, Dion Cannell, reporting on the resilient financial position the Menslink organisation has sustained.

The capability of the Menslink Board has progressed in recent years, attracting and retaining a diversity of experience and skills. The legacy of past Board Members must also be acknowledged as Menslink now celebrates 18 years of service to our community.

The 2020 Board listed below has actively undertaken its role through regular online and in-person Board meetings, and supplementary Board Committee meetings fulfilling governance responsibilities for audit and risk, performance and fundraising initiatives.

2020 Menslink Board

Board Member	Role(s)
Michael Battenally*	Board Chair
Justine Saunders	Board Vice-Chair
Dion Cannell	Treasurer, Member Audit & Risk Committee
Golnar Nekoe*	Board Secretary, Chair Audit & Risk Committee
Bruce Papps	Member Audit & Risk Committee
Cathy Skippington**	
Jim Rice	
Daniel Oyston	
Martin Fisk	CEO, Executive Officer (non-voting) to Board

** seeking re-election at 2020 AGM ** not seeking re-election*

Cathy Skippington is not seeking re-election after six years of service on the Board. Cathy leaves the Board knowing her professional and personal contribution to the Menslink community has been appreciated and greatly valued. We also thank her for her continuing involvement beyond the Board role.

As we foster a strong Board for the 2020-21, we have a prospective nomination from Craig Allen. Craig is a well-known ABC Canberra journalist and public media identity, with extensive involvement in cross-cultural community groups.

Menslink today is built on the partnership and the generosity of Canberra led by our Principal partners and sponsors, supporting the wellbeing of young men in Canberra.

This support is significantly led by the ACT Government and the following Principal Sponsors:

- ACT Policing
- Snow Foundation
- ICON Water
- Capital Chemist
- Southern Plumbing
- Lennock Volkswagen
- GEOCON

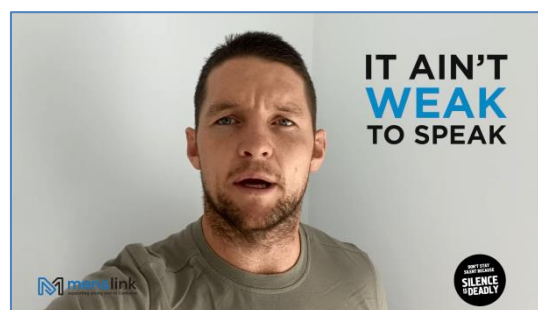
We also have a growing community of Major Sponsors who feature on the Menslink website and we thank them for their collective and significant support for young men in our community.



Members of the ACT Policing team, led by former CPO Ray Johnson APM, with Jimmy Barnes at the 2019 Business Breakfast

At the most recent Business Breakfast we launched the 2020 Menslink Impact Survey Results, communicating where counselling, mentoring, education, and awareness programs access the financial investment of both government and community to make a difference to young men – thank you.

2020 has been another great year for the Canberra Raiders on the field. COVID19 restricted their community involvement through our Silence is Deadly partnership. Nonetheless, the combined partnership with WIN TV ensured the important Raiders message for young men to become caring and resilient brothers, fathers, partners and friends was broadcast by in many viewing formats.



Raiders Co-Captain Jarrod Croker in our special ISO advertisement

While the Big Night Out (BNO) charity ball was cancelled due to COVID19, Peter Munday OAM and the Fundraising Committee, Fiona Sanfrancesco, Ron Shepherd, Jim Rice and Todd Wright are undeterred and planning for the 2021 BNO on March 26 is ready to go! As always with the Peter Munday promise to be 'bigger' than the previous one!

Menslink is working to connect with and respect the country on which we live and continues to foster a Reconciliation Action Plan developed in 2019. We have much to learn about the past ways of this country and will surely benefit the future as the stories are told and retold.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our CEO Martin Fisk and the Menslink staff for their contribution this year. The dedicated staff at Menslink are a mighty crew who have worked as a team throughout this year of COVID disruption to maintain continuous service to young men. What they do makes a difference in so many ways. We also acknowledge the volunteer brigade of over 80 mentors who provide thousands of hours of support to young men. While the breadth of activities has been challenged due to COVID, yet the commitment of the Menslink mentors has not!

I speak on behalf of all Board members in noting that it is an honour to serve Menslink in a unique and challenging time. We are thankful that our collective efforts have continued to be effective in guiding the strategic development of the Menslink organisation. I also thank Martin Fisk as CEO and Rebecca Swan for her executive officer support to the Board.

It is important to acknowledge that many organisations and frontline services including emergency services, health and our police force have been stretched this year to keep our community safe. Local heroes to many, these people are regular Canberrans who go to work every day to make a positive and sometimes extraordinary contribution – we thank you.

"Thank you for changing my life and changing me into a man"

Young man, Counselling 2020

My closing comment is to remind us all that Menslink exists because of a need that a few men identified almost 20 years ago. What Menslink does now we hope will be magnified again in the years and decades to come. Through acts of resilience, empathy, innovation and charity this can continue to be a reality. 2020 has tested Menslink and we have come through stronger and wiser, looking forward to the prospect of 2021.



Michael Battenally
Board Chair Menslink
16 November 2020

MENSLINK VALUES

**Kindness and empathy
Connection and community
Equality and fairness**

**Contribution and impact
Innovation and adaptability
Professionalism, safety and integrity**

Treasurer's Report – Dion Cannell CA

I am pleased to present the audited financial report for the year ended 30 June 2020. Of note in this year's financial report:

- Our financial position remains solid with positive net equity of \$780,586;
- A surplus of \$66,184 was achieved for the year which despite being down on the prior year, represented a pleasing result given the unexpected challenges presented;
- Of the Association's \$1,226,492 in total assets, \$801,783 (or 65.4%) is represented by cash or cash equivalents; and
- Total revenue for the year amounted to \$1,455,097, a slight reduction when compared to the prior year.

In a year that significantly hampered our ability to host fundraising events, the operating surplus exceeded all expectations. Largely through increased government funding and continued strong corporate support, we were able to avoid redundancies during COVID and continue serving the young men of Canberra at a time where many needed it most. Both thanks and acknowledgment must be given to our amazing team of staff who adapted their hours during our shut down period yet quickly responded when demand then spiked and their skills were once again needed. The benefit of having such dedicated staff was invaluable to the community and instrumental in the surplus achieved.

Capital expenditure undertaken in the 2020 year saw an expansion of our premises through additional counselling rooms, the purchase of a bus, trailer and camping equipment for our outdoor mentoring experience and the commencement of our client relationship management (CRM) project. The additional rooms have increased our capacity to meet with young men seeking our services, whilst the introduction of the CRM will significantly improve record keeping and our ability to report on organisational performance. Unfortunately both bushfires and COVID prevented us from deploying our camping equipment, but we have made good use of the bus this year and everything is ready to go for our outdoor mentoring in 2021.

The strong reserves of the Association will no doubt be called upon in the future as we look to find alternative ways to raise funds and meet yet another year of increased demand.

As Treasurer of Menslink for over five years, I am continually proud of the way our Association is financially supported by the people, business and government of the ACT. This year in particular has been a standout for the way in which our supporters have not only managed to continue with their donation pledges, but in many instances increase them knowing these difficult times will only see the demand for the work of Menslink grow. My sincere thanks to all our supporters.

I am yet again grateful to Adrian King and the team at PwC for the provision of a pro-bono audit services and their knowledgeable advice regarding changes in reporting requirements relevant to Menslink.

I continue to feel privileged and honoured to help support a team that performs such amazing work in our local community.

CEO Report – Martin Fisk

You cannot predict levels of resilience. Of course you can take preventative steps to improve mental fitness and organisational strength and flexibility, but at the end of the day you only know how resilient you are when tested in tough times.

This year of course was one of those times – for each of us individually (clients, families, staff and volunteers) and for Menslink. We have had significant challenges personally and as an organisation but, throughout this year, we maintained our flexibility, our strength and, above all, our compassion for each other, our clients and those in the community doing it tough.

I'd like to think our resilience shone through and I am immensely grateful to *everyone* involved in Menslink for helping us get through this year. We talk about helping young guys get through tough times with the least amount of damage to themselves and those around them and I think the Menslink community was a shining example of how to do just that. I am both grateful and proud to be a member of this community.

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, this financial year saw the best of times and the worst of times. It really was the Tale of Two Years.

In the first half of the year (July to December), we continued to innovate and expand our programs, while the community – including the immortal Jimmy Barnes – got behind Menslink and enabled us to start the 2020 calendar year with more than \$200,000 in unbudgeted income.

Then the bushfires and hail storm affected our staff and clients alike, with COVID arriving to bring uncertainty, cancellation of events, school closures and a massive turnaround of all our programs.



Not only did Jimmy Barnes speak at the breakfast, he helped raise an additional \$10K by signing this fridge donated by Lennock Volkswagen (and others). A big thanks to Chisel fan (and former mentor) Paul Nicholls the winning bidder!

I think it's fair to say we didn't quite meet our anticipated goals this year, but, as has been observed many times, communities often come together in tough times and I think the Menslink community has done that admirably. In summary this financial year, Menslink:

- Delivered *79 Silence is Deadly* mental health presentations to around 5,400 young boys and men. This number was down significantly from the previous year due to COVID school closures;
- Expanded our *PRIDE* program to a classroom format for the first time (previously it had only been delivered to small groups of up to twelve young men). This resulted in nearly five hundred additional participants this year, with feedback from schools indicating the classroom format works well and of course reaches a wider audience;

- Maintained the number of young men receiving positive male role-modelling and support in our mentoring program (87), despite cutting the number of new mentors dramatically as we had to cease training weekends due to COVID;



Bushwalking – one of the few COVID-safe mentoring activities in lockdown

- Delivered 1912 free counselling sessions to 662 young men, including online during COVID, which is roughly equivalent to last year;
- Implemented our standardised impact surveys across all programs to consistently evaluate the personal and social improvements our programs have had on young men;
- Welcomed over 540 guests to our 2019 Business Breakfast featuring Jimmy Barnes;
- Made a significant investment in equipment for our new outdoor wilderness mentoring experience – a three day guided bushwalk for mentees to teach them resilience and give them a sense of achievement and mastery in nature. Unfortunately both the bushfires and COVID conspired to put this innovation on hold until 2021;
- Built an additional four counselling rooms to cater for anticipated growth;
- Invested in a new CRM system to improve our systems and processes across all programs which will be fully implemented in the next financial year (2020-21); and
- While unit costs rose this year as a result of the COVID hiatus, exercised restraint and kept overall costs under control in line with our revised income forecasts.

This year more than ever, we acknowledge all the wonderful people who make up and support the Menslink community – the men, women and young people who time and time again do their bit to support our young guys and their families: our staff who have shown remarkable resilience, dedication, flexibility and compassion in so many ways, our dedicated Board members who supported me and the organisation through massive levels of uncertainty and risk, our volunteer mentors supporting their young fellas and of course the ACT Government and our corporate sponsors and donors who didn't hesitate to help us.

I'd particularly like to thank our senior team leaders this year – they were nothing short of amazing in supporting both me and their teams through the uncertainty. We are all better off because of your efforts.

"Menslink serves a very important role in reducing the stigma of young men in particular sharing their issues with others if they are having a hard time. The free ongoing counselling option is especially good for young men with ongoing issues, who need ongoing support and not time limited, funded places, which may not cover the extent of their issues."

College (2020)

I'd also like to thank our fundraising committee who spent countless hours preparing for our Big Night Out, only to have it cancelled with two weeks to go. The teams behind the annual *Nugg Off* and *Kick2Kick4aCause* are also to be congratulated for their ongoing dedication and support, even though the Kick event also had to be cancelled in April.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the ACT Government, who not only provide the largest contribution to our funding (nearly half a million dollars this year or 37% of our overall costs), but also jumped in providing us with some one-off grants and rent relief to offset our dramatic drop in fundraising. That extra funding, together with Federal JobKeeper and other support enabled us to get through the initial COVID shutdown without significant financial damage.

This report highlights the year's achievements and events in our mentoring, counselling and education programs, advocacy and community awareness, operations, staffing and cost control, as well as commentary about the future outlook for Menslink.



Socially distanced outdoor mentor training

COVID-19 Impacts and Response (March 2020 and ongoing)

The following is a brief description of the COVID impact on Menslink and our response:

Client Demand

As the ACT went into lockdown the first thing we noticed was the dramatic drop in requests for help (more than two thirds) in March and April. It wasn't until late June that we saw numbers spiking again, reaching record levels later this year.

Service Delivery

By early April, we had moved all our counselling sessions to phone or video with counsellors working from home. Despite the necessity for tele-support, we found it wasn't as effective or as popular as in-person counselling, largely due to privacy concerns (having sessions at home with family around), so we moved back to face to face after a month or so (while retaining an online capability if required).

Unfortunately we had to suspend all our mentoring group activities, but soon established that mentors could take their young guys out for a walk in the open air which was a terrific opportunity for them to get out of the house during lockdown. Over time, we resumed small outdoor Linkups and even converted mentor training to a smaller COVID-safe format in July.

We took the decision not to provide video group programs or school presentations, as we were concerned that we would not be able to properly support young men in distress (as we would in person). Once schools re-opened, we did many online presentations to classes where a teacher was present (for direct in-person support).

We would like to thank the Canberra Raiders, who quickly created a special ISO version of their *Silence is Deadly* TV commercial and WIN TV for airing it across their network. A copy of the commercial can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/LnuBLrc1r88>

Events and Fundraising

Of course all our events, from the flagship Big Night Out and the wonderful Kick2Kick4aCause through to our regular Midweekers had to be cancelled for the rest of 2021, with an estimated drop in income exceeding \$300,000 this financial year alone.

Staffing

As the toll of uncertainty and isolation took effect on staff, we provided all our employees with two weeks of additional "COVID leave" they could either take as a lump sum or in reduced hours to help them manage. We also had regular virtual check-ins to make sure everyone was coping as best they could.

Special Projects

Unfortunately many of our new (and existing) counselling rooms were built for a pre-COVID era (at 7 sqm!) so can't accommodate face-to-face counselling. We've converted a number of them to video rooms for remote presentations and/or support as required.

As previously mentioned, we've been unable to start our wilderness camping program, but hope to have this operational in a COVID safe way in 2021.

Program Delivery for Young Men:

Mentoring Program

This year we were able to maintain program numbers, despite a 12% drop in the number of mentors being trained due to COVID. 87 young guys were receiving mentoring at the end of the year (the same as last year) with 44 mentors being trained, down from 50 in the previous period. A big thank you to the mentors who offered to go around again – making up the numbers we lost due to COVID and enabling us to continue supporting the same number of young guys.

Linkup attendance was down from last year, reflecting COVID restrictions and also the number of our mentors and mentees who lived or worked with vulnerable people and were unable to attend our regular get togethers.

Pre-COVID Linkups continued to focus on the three pillars of *Challenge* (getting the young guys out of their comfort zone), *Development* (learning life skills) and *Philanthropy* (giving back to others in the community), while making sure everyone has fun.



One of our mentees trying his hand at archery

Feedback for the Mentoring Program

"I cannot thank Menslink enough for helping my son find his way out of trauma and fear, to become the confident and happy young man he is now. His mentor has not only helped my son with his confidence and self-esteem but has also helped him believe and trust in himself and his choices and views in life"
Single Mum (2020)

"Menslink has supported me greatly during my time with them. Menslink is a friendly and supportive service that has provided me with emotional support, mentoring and most importantly, a friend that I can rely on and talk to about anything with."
Young Man (2020)

"Menslink has provided a great avenue for my son to build his confidence and manage the day to day issues that come with growing up in the successful world we live in today. He's met great people through the program and developed useful skills both emotionally and practically. It has been especially helpful as a single mother of a male."
Single Mum (2019)

"The Menslink mentorship has been absolutely amazing. To see [my son] smile and genuinely being happy is so heart-warming He really looks forward to catching up with his mentor too and this is having such a positive impact on his all round well being. We're so happy to be a part of this."
Single Mum (2019)

Menslink Kitchen Rules is an excellent example of a great Linkup, with a number of young guys going on to cook their first meal for their families as a result of the skills they've learned and the confidence they've built.

In December we celebrated our largest ever summer camp, with 50 mentees and 36 mentors enjoying a weekend at Greenhills Centre on the Cotter River. Matt Davis, one of our mentors, was our guest speaker, taking the young guys through his recovery journey after a major fire accident that burnt 60% of his body. After that our talent show had well over half of our mentees overcome their fears of public performing and get up on stage to the applause and support from all the mentors and young guys alike.

The crew system continued to thrive, with six crews supporting around fifteen mentees and fifteen mentors each; allowing us to manage a large number of mentees while still retaining a small community feel.

This year we also increased the involvement of our mums in the program. Roni our intake officer (and mum of two former mentees) now talks to mums at the beginning of the program about what to expect and how to support their sons, while we've also increased the frequency of check-ins with mums during their son's two year journey. We plan to also bring mums into each graduation ceremony later in 2021.

Another casualty of COVID this year was our much-loved mentor retreat in Jindabyne. Hopefully this will be back in 2021....

Counselling Program

The counselling program reduced numbers slightly this year, with strong growth in the first half of the financial year offset by drops in the second half as the team managed their way through COVID. This year, we delivered 1,912 free counselling sessions to 662 young men and their families, compared with 1,949 sessions to 662 young men the previous year.

Around 35% of our counselling sessions were in ACT schools, down from 49% last year as COVID restrictions meant we were not able to provide direct in-school counselling in Term One and Two this year.

As mentioned previously, we found many challenges with providing support online. While it certainly reduced transport issues for families, we found that distraction, privacy and the lack of true human interaction all resulted in sessions being generally less effective for the young men.

Demand for counselling continued to grow strongly during the second half of 2019 and early 2020, with a number of agencies referring young men they were either unable to assist or where their own waiting times were too long for the young man. This saw an increase in both our wait times and case complexity last year. We commenced recruiting new counsellors in response, but had to cut that process short due to COVID.

Feedback for the Counselling Program

"The free counselling service that Menslink offers is a wonderful compliment to the work of the mentors and gives my son a safe male space to talk and be accepted and to think about better ways to communicate and manage life's challenges. It also assists working through patterns of the past including exposure to family violence. As a single mum rearing my son I am very very grateful to this service as we feel empowered to be part of it and not shamed for seeking help."
Mum (2019)

"Menslink counsellors have made a positive impact at our school. The boys who have accessed these services have felt heard and supported, largely due to the rapport counsellors so readily develop with our young men. The strategies they have learned appear to be relevant and therefore the boys are more open to giving them a go. Our boys are happy to have repeat sessions with Menslink counsellors and many do express appreciation for the help they have received. This is very important as it sets them up to be help seekers in the future because of their positive experiences through Menslink" **High School (2019)**

"Every student seems to feel better after talking to the Menslink counselor. It could be that their stress and anxiety has been relieved by some strategies. It could be that they have renewed hope for the future. It could be that they have new approaches for managing their anger. No matter what the issue, Menslink seems to help. Students sometimes see Menslink once, sometimes twice for followup, and sometimes regularly over longer periods when developing regulation strategies. We rely heavily on our support from Menslink to help our students to succeed."
High School (2020)

"The Menslink Counselling service has been of great benefit to our students. Menslink has made a world of difference to many struggling young men in our school, and indirectly benefits our whole community."
High School (2019)

During this high demand period, we also worked with specialist providers who were better able to support young men with specific primary issues requiring psychiatric or other specialist care (ie chronic drug and alcohol addiction, severe mental health issues, significant impairments etc)

Education Programs

Silence is Deadly campaign

During the financial year (spanning two educational years), we delivered 79 mental health and fitness presentations to 5,431 young men in primary schools, secondary schools and sporting clubs across the region. This was down substantially from the previous year (around half to two thirds less), given Term Two is typically our busiest period and this year schools were closed.

Our in-person presentations were backed up by both our regular and special isolation versions of the *Silence is Deadly* TV ad running on WIN Television, with more than 6,000 ads reinforcing the message that “it ain’t weak to speak.”

In late 2019 we reviewed the entire program, as it’s been running in the same format for six years, with the same message often given to students every year. While the overall theme of stigma reduction and help seeking remains the same, we have incorporated other themes into the presentations such as positive coping, dealing with anger, bullying or relationships.

Schools can now choose which theme they want presented based on the needs of the particular cohort at the time. Unfortunately COVID has hampered our run out of the new format but initial feedback has been positive.

Feedback for Silence is Deadly Presentations

“An outstanding and relevant message for our boys, with an engaging presentation that once again highlights how important this topic is for our students. As a staff member who has sat through many of these presentations, I once again left reminded of how important it is for us to have menslink in each and every year to keep this message up to our boys. Thanks for the work you do in this space.”

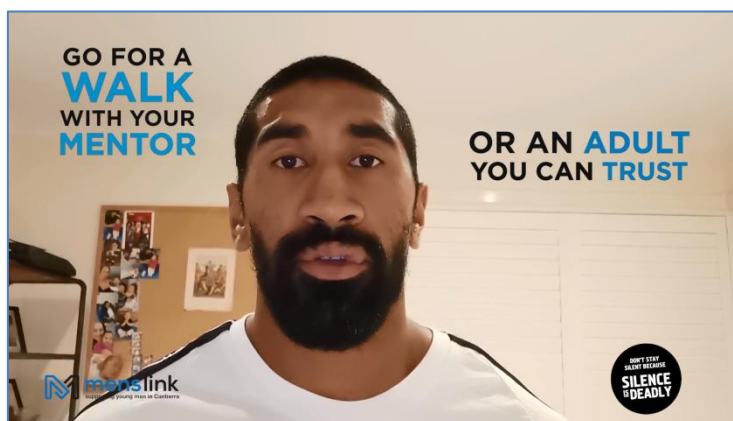
K-10 School (2019)

“The Menslink ‘Silence is Deadly’ program was a great success. The professionalism, honest and trustworthy nature of the facilitator enabled our boys to feel calm and respectful while talking about complex and challenging scenarios in their own and their friends lives. This is a brilliant introduction for our boys to the Menslink organisation and has provided them with another option in times of trouble, particularly when they feel that they have no one to talk to. Thank you.”

Primary School (2020)

“The program provided our boys with an understanding that they are not alone and that showing their emotions does not make them less ‘manly.’ This is the second year our school has invited Menslink to present to our boys as part of our Mental Health Week. The message ‘Silence is Deadly’ is poignant, even at this young age. We will definitely invite them back next year.”

Primary School (2019)



Raiders prop Sia Soliola urging young guys to stay connected during ISO

PRIDE Program

Now in its fourth year of operation since the original pilot in Lanyon High School back in 2017, the *PRIDE* team continue to work with small groups of young men over a series of weeks to develop self-esteem and greater emotional intelligence and decision making.

This year, after listening to feedback from both primary and high schools, we extended the program to deliver in a classroom environment for groups up to around 30-40 students at a time (up from a maximum of twelve in our standard format).

We now deliver in both formats – balancing both reach (the number of students) and depth (of the relationship) in our delivery depending on each school's individual requirements.

This financial year, we delivered *PRIDE* to 73 students across 10 small groups; with a further 8 classroom-size programs reaching 649 students. Last financial year we delivered a total of fourteen programs to 187 students.

Feedback for *PRIDE* Groups

"This group really makes a difference. We are seeing the impact months after the program has been completed. There is a much greater understanding of what bullying is and a real commitment to not want to be a bully. The boys were inspired by the ideas that were presented and were willing to be challenged. I had a number of parents contact me to tell me how much their boys enjoyed the program and the changes they were seeing at home. An amazing resource for schools!" **Primary School 2019**

"There were a number of significant impacts for the students. There has been a significant increase in their understanding of their role and the impact of bullying and anger management strategies. The program was a number of months ago and the students continue to make reference to what they learned at Menslink. In the last months I have heard the following comments from a range of participants "It made me feel people cared about me when I was part of the group". "Am I being a bully" and his eyes widened "I have to stop because the victim becomes the bully and it keeps going and going, doesn't it". During an escalating incident "I should use the traffic light shouldn't I?" The teachers also gained insight into what were the values and beliefs behind their actions." **Primary School 2019**

*"I've run the Menslink *PRIDE* Program multiple times now and the results are always fantastic. Helping young boys see things from a different perspective and discussing things they probably have not thought about before like personal Integrity and how important things like that are."* **High School 2019**

Impact Results

This year marked the first full year of consistently measuring the impact of our programs on a range of social and personal measures. Every six months, or at the completion of a particular program, we ask schools (education and counselling programs), parents (counselling and mentoring programs) and young men themselves (counselling and mentoring if over 18) to assess the personal and social impact of their support from Menslink.

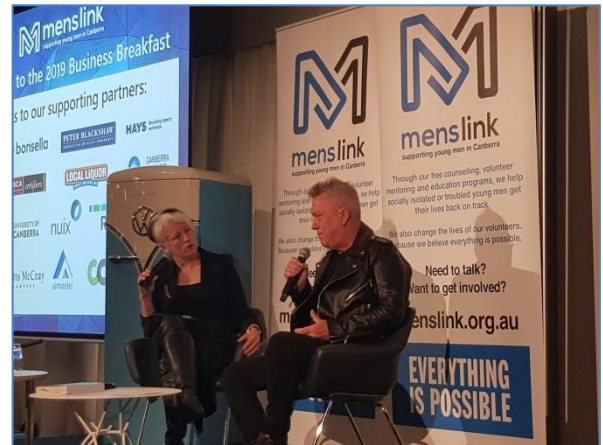
The quantitative and qualitative results from these surveys are now published every six months on our web site, starting with results from Jan-Jun 2020. We believe publishing the results not only holds us accountable, but may also encourage other community organisations to develop their own impact measures, thus improving transparency and outcomes across the ACT.

The full report can be found here: <https://menslink.org.au/about-menslink/what-we-do-works/>

Advocacy and Community Awareness

Menslink staff continued to raise awareness across Canberra and nationally on key issues affecting young men and their families; particularly areas such as youth suicide, mental health issues and family violence.

This year's Business Breakfast held in September 2019 had nearly 550 guests spellbound as legendary rock star Jimmy Barnes talked to Genevieve Jacobs about the challenges of his upbringing and the impact of a traumatic childhood on the rest of his life. Supporting our *Silence is Deadly* messaging, he told the audience "I thought for years that if you see a counsellor, you're a lunatic. But that was the day I became truly courageous and my life changed."



Jimmy Barnes in conversation with Genevieve Jacobs

During the year, we gave over twenty presentations to businesses, sporting clubs, community groups, government agencies and the general public, talking about issues as varied as masculinity, mental health, raising teenagers, family violence, violence in schools and the impact of social media.

We additionally gave over twenty interviews across all mainstream media, from local television, radio print and online media channels, as well as a number of interstate and national radio broadcasts and a number of audio and video podcasts during the COVID lockdown.

In late 2019, we were particularly pleased when ABC Life featured our long term education program coordinator and mentor, Michael Aichholzer, in a national program called *A Few Good Blokes*. The program and story can be accessed here: <https://www.abc.net.au/life/is-it-possible-to-change-angry-and-violent-behaviour/11798478>



Education Program Coordinator Michael Aichholzer as featured on the ABC Life website

Prior to COVID, Menslink were invited to speak at three national conferences in Sydney Melbourne and the Gold Coast on the subject on adolescent family violence and the how to break the intergenerational impact of family violence.

Continuing our tradition of assisting other charities and community organisations, Menslink staff provided free training, expertise or simply volunteer time for a range of other community organisations, including ACTCOSS, Australian Men's Health Forum, Blokepedia, Lifeline Canberra, MARSS, MIEACT, Red Cross, Vinnies and a number of women's charities and community groups.

This year, a combination of bushfires and COVID prevented us from fundraising at large events such as the Multi-Cultural Festival and Raiders games, but we hope we can come back as and when health restrictions allow.

Our series of *Midweek* talks by high-profile Canberran men continued to draw crowds and inspire audiences of all ages and genders in 2019 and early 2020. This year, while a shorter list than most, many high profile Canberrans talked about some very tough and personal times. Speakers included MLAs Chris Steel and Mark Parton, former Sky News journalist David Sharaz, DPP Shane Drumgold, Geocon's Damon Smith, Kulture Break's Francis Owosu and, in our only Midweek for 2020, Raiders' forward Sia Soliola.



Long term Menslink supporter, Geocon's Damon Smith talking about some particularly tough times

We are of course hoping to get *Midweekers* going again sometime later in 2021.

Fundraising and corporate sponsorships

The first half of the year was exceptionally strong for fundraising with a sell-out Business Breakfast and strong support from donors and the corporate sector.

As mentioned previously, the ACT Government continued their strong support – particularly during the COVID period – providing additional much-needed financial assistance to Menslink to mitigate our fundraising losses.

I would like to make special mention this year of the lads who organised the third annual *Nugg Off*. This year, they raised over \$60,000 for Menslink – a big increase from 2018 and a great sign of the community's support for Menslink's work. A huge thank you to Brendan Rocha, Kristoff Penc and Joseph Mammoliti who turned junk food into a major fundraising event down at the Public Bar in Manuka!

While unfortunately this year's **Big Night Out** was cancelled only two weeks' out, our fundraising committee worked tirelessly to ensure everything was ready to go. Don't worry! Your efforts haven't been in vain as we're hoping to reprise all those preparations and auction items for a Big COVID-Safe Night Out in 2021. A huge thank you goes as always to the fundraising committee led by Peter Munday OAM from Lennock Volkswagen and our other amazing volunteers including Fiona Sanfrancesco, Ron Shepherd, Todd Wright and Jim Rice.



The very successful 2019 Nugg Off was clearly held in pre-COVID times!

Also cancelled at short notice was this year's **Kick2Kick4aCause**. Again the team had put in a lot of work and were very disappointed it wasn't able to proceed. Another huge thank you from all of us to Adam, Anthony, Dave, Hannah, John, Leo, Matt and two Pauls for all your efforts!

Our seven Principal Partners continue to lead the way in providing significant funding for our programs. Between them they contributed over 22% of our total income for the year, with a number of them increasing their support this year, even after the COVID pandemic started. We cannot thank them enough for their continued support of Menslink.



Our Major Partners also provide strong support – either through direct funding or generous donations of specialist in-kind and pro bono expertise and services. Together they provided nearly 10% of our total funding and much needed services for which we are very grateful.

Major partners this year included ACT Veterans Rugby, Allbids, Bendigo Bank, Boorer Foundation, Canberra Raiders, CBR Brave, Chase Constructions, DDCS Lawyers, Elite Event Technology, Independent Property Group, John James Foundation, Much More Than Money, Proximity Legal, PWC, Southside Physio, Thinkplace, ThreeSides Marketing, Village Building Co, Viva Leisure, WIN Television and Zoe Routh Leadership Development. Thanks to all of you!

Other corporate supporters this financial year include ActewAGL, Advanced Robes and Kitchens, Advantage Advertising, AGH Demolition & Asbestos Removals, Airmaster, BCA Certifiers, Bayldon Ag, BAL Lawyers, Blackshaws, Bonsella Business Solutions, Canberra Data Centres, Canberra FM, Cantlie Recruitment, Capital Recruitment, Capital Certifiers, Clonakilla Wines, EY, Hays Recruitment, Independent Liquor Retailers, KPMG, Nuix, RSM, University of Canberra and Watts McCray.

We cannot thank our corporate sponsors – both large and small – enough, as well as those dedicated individuals who help us raise money from the public or donate generously themselves. We could not operate without you!

Operations and Governance

This year we proved our organisational resilience, quickly moving from growth to survival, in-person to virtual and from office to home in a very short period of time.

Our Board meetings, staff meetings and client delivery all moved quickly online, showing that we can continue to work and provide much-needed services to young guys even in the face of community-wide challenges.

Despite these challenges, we also commenced projects during 2020 to:

- Review and completely update all our policies and procedures;
- Overhaul our risk register, replacing the traditional view of “risk likelihood” with control effectiveness to give managers and the Board a more comprehensive and effective view of organisational risk;
- Implement a new CRM platform supporting all our programs as well as corporate sponsorship and donations. This initiative will streamline processes, improve our client responsiveness and improve the all-important checks, balances and safeguards that support the wellbeing of our young guys, mentors and staff.

These projects are all ongoing and are slated to be completed by the end of 2020.

Staffing

This year our dedicated staff continued to go the extra mile to support our young men and their parents – either directly in schools, in the community or at Menslink; or indirectly by making sure our volunteers, donors and sponsors feel valued, supported and engaged and that Menslink is well run and managed.

Like everything else this year however, staffing levels were subject to significant change. At the beginning of the year we welcomed Dave Parkes and Lyndon Storey into the mentoring/education and counselling teams respectively. Unfortunately Lyndon moved interstate at the beginning of 2020 while another counsellor, Albert Valadez, also moved on at the end of the financial year to pursue other interests. We wish them both well in the future.

While we were unable to hire additional counsellors in 2020 due to COVID financial restrictions, we were very pleased when Ben Triglone decided he would like to move into a counselling role after some eight years working with young guys in the mentoring program. We supported him with obtaining additional counselling-specific qualifications over and above his psychology degree and he moved into the counselling team early in the 2020-21 financial year.

In January this year, Matthew Taylor accepted a promotion to Counselling Program Manager, as Rolf felt he would prefer to focus more on frontline work as Senior Counsellor. I commend both Matthew and Rolf for a smooth transition. Their work together has only strengthened the team and our organisation as a whole.

Also in January, Business Manager Jacinta Johnstone accepted the lure of the private sector and returned to her previous employer in a more senior managerial role. She will be sadly missed. Luckily for Menslink however, former Business Manager Rebecca Swan, who was helping us prepare for this year's Big Night Out, decided to re-join us in her former role. Welcome back Bec!

With COVID and the cancellation of many courses, our investment in training and support fell slightly to \$31.1K or around 3% of payroll, down from a record the previous year of \$42.1K.

Finally, I wanted to commend all our staff – but particularly the senior leaders – for their resilience, flexibility and compassion as we went through the COVID crisis. Almost every day we needed to adapt and change as both our environment and financial circumstances changed. Some staff had reduced hours or were unable to perform their jobs; others had to adapt to delivering their work online from home or hastily set-up video rooms at Menslink. Everyone had additional challenges at home they had to deal with.

I'm very proud of each and every one of you for how you coped, created and cared during the main phase of COVID lockdown in Canberra. Thank you.



*Passionate Operations Manager, Cookie Davis
telling it like it is during mentor training*

Volunteers

The nearly one hundred volunteers who work tirelessly for Menslink and our young guys are the lifeblood of our organisation – they are role model mentors for our young guys, help raise funds for Menslink and govern the organisation on the Board. Without them we would not be able to do what we do.

We'd particularly like to thank:

- All our dedicated mentors both new and more experienced. This year more than ever you've helped our young guys through tough times. Even in isolation you kept in touch and ensured these young fellas had a connection and someone who cared outside their family. We cannot thank you enough;
- Rock legend Jimmy Barnes who was our keynote speaker at the 2018 Business Breakfast and who helped promote the work we do to so many;
- Genevieve Jacobs who hosted our Business Breakfast and continues to find innovative ways to cover the work we do through her work at the RiotAct;
- Menslink Ambassador David Morrison AO who also donated time, gave speeches and assisted us in many ways throughout the year;
- Dave Bermingham, who manages a mentoring crew (the only volunteer to do so) and supports over fifteen young guys and their mentors;
- Jim Rice who, in addition to serving on the Board (since our inception!) and fundraising committee, also supported us at events and fundraisers during the year;
- Our Board of Directors – particularly Chair Michael Battenally – who dedicate their time and take on responsibility for the organisation. This year in particular was very challenging for Board members, with many emergency meetings to discuss the impact of COVID on our operations, safety and welfare, clients and finances; and
- Finally, all those who signed up to assist us with events and other activities but whom we weren't able to engage – we're hopeful that at least some of our events will come back next year.....



Ongoing mentor training supports our dedicated mentors during their two year journey with us

Five Year Cost Comparison

Menslink take our financial obligations very seriously and are very conscious of the trust placed in us by the ACT Government, our sponsors and donors. We not only aim for great outcomes for our young guys, but to achieve those outcomes at the lowest possible unit cost.

This year, COVID restricted our operations and caused some programs to remain static or shrink. Therefore our unit costs increased as we continued to pay staff wages even while our programs were either suspended or dramatically reduced.

Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	1 Yr Change (FY18-19)	5 Yr Change (FY14-15)
PROGRAM OUTPUTS								
Silence is Deadly campaign								
Total number of sessions	61	52	78	77	102	79	-23%	30%
Total number of young men reached	7,926	6,633	9,572	8,924	10,125	5,431	-46%	-31%
YOY growth	13%	-16%	44%	-7%	13%	-46%		
PRIDE Small Group Program								
Number of groups	n/a	n/a	2	5	14	10	-29%	
Number of students	n/a	n/a	9	40	187	73	-61%	
YOY growth				344%	368%	-61%		
PRIDE Classroom Program								
Number of groups	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8		
Number of students	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	649		
YOY growth								
Mentoring								
Mentors trained	17	29	31	36	50	44	-12%	159%
Number of active mentoring matches	42	45	53	63	87	87	0%	107%
Counselling								
Number of sessions	738	957	1,200	1,645	1,949	1,912	-2%	159%
Number of clients	275	312	422	548	662	662	0%	141%
Total number of young men directly supported	317	357	475	611	749	749	0%	136%
YOY growth	42%	13%	33%	29%	23%	0%		
PROGRAM EXPENDITURE AND UNIT COSTS								
Total Expenditure (excludes fundraising costs)								
Expenses funded by ACT Govt Contract	340,352	360,624	377,132	449,600	477,533	496,945	4%	46%
Expenses funded from own sources	194,246	255,580	369,473	557,304	665,700	851,947	28%	339%
Total program expenditure	534,598	616,204	746,605	1,006,904	1,143,233	1,348,892	18%	152%
Percentage of costs provided by ACT Government	64%	59%	51%	45%	42%	37%		
Unit cost of direct support								
Unit cost per young man (all direct support)	1,450	1,329	1,242	1,269	1,255	1,441	15%	-1%
Unit cost per young man (mentoring)	5,855	6,025	5,635	5,434	3,982	4,651	17%	-21%
Unit cost per young man (counselling)	778	652	690	790	896	1,019	14%	31%
Unit cost per counselling session	290	212	243	263	304	353	16%	22%
Unit cost PRIDE Program								
Unit cost per group (approx 8 sessions/group)	n/a	n/a	18,665	18,124	6,288	9,742	55%	
Unit cost per small group attendee			4,148	2,266	471	1,335	183%	
Unit cost per classroom attendee	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	120		
Unit cost Silence is Deadly campaign								
Unit cost per session	1,227	2,726	1,531	1,831	1,132	1,195	6%	-3%
Unit cost per attendee	9	21	12	16	11	17	52%	84%

Future Outlook

The coming 2020-21 financial year continues to be uncertain, both operationally and financially. That said, the combination of strong and increasing support from the ACT Government and our sponsors, together with Federal JobKeeper assistance in 2021 provides Menslink with the financial assurance to increase staffing levels this year – at least to a level we had planned prior to March 2020. We are proceeding with caution.

Like all organisations, we continue to be cautiously optimistic for 2021 and will do our very best to continue supporting as many young guys as we can across the Canberra region – at Menslink, in their schools, in the community and online if we have to.

We will continue to strive towards the following outcomes in our community:

- Young men are not ashamed to ask for help and to reach out to help those around them
- Young men are more resilient and can manage emotional challenges without resorting to aggression and violence, self-harm or substance abuse
- Young men engage in less anti-social behaviour, are more pro-social and their families and schools report improved relationships with them
- The Canberra community is actively engaged in supporting young men through government, corporate, philanthropic and volunteering support of Menslink's vision, values & work
- The majority of our clients and stakeholders report positive personal and social impacts across all our programs
- Menslink contains unit cost increases to within 5% per year for existing programs
- Menslink has long term security of funding to continue to deliver and grow in line with community expectations

And Finally...on behalf of everyone at Menslink – whether staff member, young guy, volunteer or family – I want to thank everyone involved with us who continue to support us. You inspire me personally to strive every day to help our young guys make better choices and make our community a better place. We couldn't do it without your support.



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