
EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Men's Link Incorporated
Annual Report 2020-21



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“Fostering resilience & empathy”

represents the work Menslink does to break down toxic masculinity and support young men to become more resilient and develop the ability to address their emotional challenges without resorting to aggression and violence, self-harm or substance abuse. The two hands represent the support and holistic approach of Menslink within the ACT (the background). In the centre, the six sections represent Menslink’s values that guide them in their work to support the young men in their journey to build resilience and empathy so they can become the great men they want to be.

Local artist and Ngiyampaa woman Sarah Richards donated this painting to us in January 2021 to support our work.

Menslink acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and our neighbours including Wiradjuri to the west, Walgalu to the south, Yuin to the east coast, Ngarigo to the south east and Gundungdurra to north east. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region.

Chair's Report – Michael Battenally

Members of Menslink, through 2021 the learnings of 2020 have ensured the resilience of our organisation at all levels. Key community and government partners have maintained support; the Menslink staff and volunteers have pivoted when required to maintain quality service and support; and the stability and strength of the board has provided a team effort we are very proud of.

Our 2021 Annual Report will unpack this chapter of Menslink, hearing from CEO, Martin Fisk, how service outcomes have been strengthened, and our dedicated Treasurer, Dion Cannell, providing informed commentary and advice regarding the resilient financial position the Menslink organisation has sustained.

The Menslink Board has actively undertaken its role through in-person Board and online meetings, in addition to supplementary Board Committee meetings fulfilling governance responsibilities for audit and risk, fundraising initiatives, and staff recruitment. The 2021 Board is committed to progressing the work of past boards as Menslink approaches 20 years of service to our community.

2021 Menslink Board

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

* seeking re-election at 2021 AGM ** not seeking re-election

Dion Cannell is not seeking re-election after six years of service on the Board. Dion leaves the Board knowing his professional and personal contribution to the Menslink community has been appreciated and greatly valued. We also look forward to Dion's continuing involvement beyond the Board role, where he continues to attract support from a strong network.

The honours list this year awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) to our longest serving board member, **Jim Rice OAM**. A wonderful recognition and acknowledgment for a man who has given so much with over twenty years of dedicated service to Menslink. Congratulations on behalf of your Menslink community.

Menslink is built on the **partnership and generosity of Canberrans, our principal partners and sponsors**. Their enduring support has ensured the growth of Menslink services and programs, reaching a 20-year milestone next year in 2022.

We must acknowledge the **ACT Government** for their sustained support from the beginning, and the following **Principal Sponsors** for many continuous years of commitment.

- ACT Policing
- Capital Chemist
- GEOCON
- Snow Foundation
- Southern Plumbing
- Canberra Raiders
- ICON Water
- Lennox Volkswagon
- WIN Television



ACT Policing not only provide financial support to Menslink, but also ensure they spend time with our young guys; teaching them important life skills and helping to forge bonds between police and young people

Our Major Sponsors also feature on the Menslink website, and we thank them for their collective and significant support for young men in our community.

When I am approached by members of the community about Menslink, I tell them Menslink offers **counselling, mentoring, education, and awareness programs** that can make a life-changing difference to young men across years 10 to 25.

Before I joined Menslink, as both teacher and principal, I was aware of the turbulent journey many adolescent boys travel and the enormous efforts my colleagues in schools make every day to support them. This is not to say that young girls did not have issues, but the prevalence of boys with major social and behaviour issues was a growing and disruptive challenge in schools.

My first involvement with Menslink occurred many years ago when they reached out to support tragic and challenging circumstances in my school.

Menslink provided (free) male counsellors that specialised in working with young men and understood how to connect and talk about the personal and relationship problems they were having. It is not easy for young males (or older ones for that matter) to discuss their emotions. The impact was encouraging, and I knew that this service had the potential to change behaviours, male cultures and the lives of these young men and their families.

Menslink support also extended to groups of young men through the **Silence is Deadly program**, proudly supported by the Canberra Raiders and WIN TV. I saw this in action, when presented to an entire male cohort of a school. The key and powerful message was to shift the male culture from conflict and isolation, to caring for your mate.

As Chair, I share this story knowing why it is an honour to serve with the Board of Menslink in a unique and challenging time. As a board 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.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank all the Menslink staff for their contribution this year. The dedicated staff at Menslink are a high performing team who have worked continuously through COVID disruptions to maintain service to young men. What they do makes a difference in so many ways. We also acknowledge and thank the volunteer brigade of mentors who provide thousands of hours of dedicated support and guidance to young men.

It is important to acknowledge that many organisations and frontline services including emergency services, health and our police force have again 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.

Earlier this year we lost a valued member of our former Board member and Menslink mentor, through the passing of a great man and mate, **Denis Sargent**. At his funeral service, the celebration of life was true to the commitment Denis had to family and his passionate involvement in community through motor sports and engagement with community groups. On behalf of Menslink, our CEO Martin Fisk shared the following at the funeral, "I'll miss you my friend, but you can go in peace knowing you've made a difference. Thank you." We note our condolences to the Sargent family once again.

My closing comment is to remind us that however you contribute it does make a difference. Menslink exists because of a need that a few men identified almost 20 years ago. Many of the young lads from the early years are the strongest ambassadors of Menslink and will tell you what a difference the support of Menslink made to their life opportunities and future.



Former mentee Kaleb describing the life-changing impact his mentor and Menslink have had over the past eight years on a video shown at the 2021 Big Night Out

2021 has been another rewarding year and we have again come through stronger and wiser, looking forward to the prospect of 2022 – **Menslink 20 Years.**

Michael Battenally
Board Chair Menslink
16 November 2021

MENSLINK VALUES	
<p>Kindness and empathy Connection and community Equality and fairness</p>	<p>Contribution and impact Innovation and adaptability Professionalism, safety and integrity</p>

Treasurer's Report – Dion Cannell CA

I am pleased to present the audited financial report for the year ended 30 June 2021. My thanks as always to Adrian King and PwC for yet another year of support and pro-bono audit services.

Of note in this year's audited financial report:

- Our financial position remains sound with net equity of \$1,136,436.
- Total revenue amounted to \$1,938,760, expenses totalled \$1,582,910 and a \$355,850 surplus was recorded for the year.
- Of the Association's \$1,534,889 in total assets, \$1,272,533 is represented by cash or cash equivalents.

We were fortunate, like many not-for-profits, to benefit from emergency Federal funding in the form of both Jobkeeper and the Cashflow Boost. In addition to this Federal assistance, the importance of our work was recognised locally with unbudgeted and unexpected funding from our Territory Government. We are thankful for the funding without which, I would most certainly be reporting on a deficit for the year and a reduction in our capacity to support the ever-increasing demand for the work we do.

In addition to government funding, we continue to benefit from private sector and community support. To all our supporters, we are sincerely grateful that despite your own share of new and unanticipated challenges, you continue to find ways to support our work.

From a planning perspective, the 2021 financial year was always going to present more questions than answers. In addition to the economic uncertainty faced by donors, the restrictions and limitations on public events made revised budgets and reforecasting an all too regular occurrence.

With the unpredictability over funding and donations came a reluctance for significant capital expenditure and program expansion. Financially, 2021 was a year of consolidation and preservation. Our monthly breakeven cost remained almost identical to the previous year despite our staff numbers and costs increasing. We recognise that much of the government funding in 2021 was non-recurring and granted in anticipation of future needs. We acknowledge the importance of our role supporting our young guys post lockdown, and believe we're well placed financially to tackle the new issues and challenges that such rapid change is sure to bring.

This report represents my 6th and final Annual Treasurers Report. My Board terms have afforded me insight into the problems faced by our youth and the effort Menslink, supported by our local community, is making in the life's of those they assist. I thank Martin, the Staff and the Board of Menslink for allowing me the opportunity to be involved with such an inspiring organisation.

CEO Report – Martin Fisk

Entering the new financial year in July 2020, Menslink and the community were just coming out of our first (largely national) lockdown. We entered the 2020-21 financial year with significant uncertainty regarding government and private sector funding, our staff and clients' welfare and our ability to deliver support to the level we were used to.

We also knew from research that mental health issues often surfaced *after* a challenging event like lockdown (think PTSD) so had to prepare for a surge in demand. In fact our highest ever level of demand came in August 2020, with 20% more young guys and parents requesting support than any previous month in our history.

With all that uncertainty, I'm pleased to report that our wonderful community of staff, volunteer mentors and Board members got on with the job and delivered not only our core support services but also some new innovations as well.

We were also very grateful to both the ACT and Federal Governments for their emergency COVID support packages totalling nearly half a million dollars or over a quarter of our income.

The beginning of the financial year was challenging, with increased demand for counselling and mentoring and schools still getting used to a return to face-to-face learning. We also had to contend with significant financial uncertainty throughout the year. Luckily we entered October with renewed and increased commitments from the ACT Government and JobKeeper extensions. Together with renewed funding from all of our Principal Sponsors and most of our Major Sponsors, we were able to rehire staff and meet the demand.



Mentees on our inaugural Wilderness Experience high above the Monaro Plains near Bredbo

During the financial year to June 2021, Menslink:

- Delivered 107 *Silence is Deadly* mental health presentations to nearly nine thousand young men in schools and sporting clubs; up significantly from the previous year's lockdown-affected 5,400 number;
- Delivered our *PRIDE* group programs across both primary schools and high schools, teaching self-esteem, values and respectful relationships to nearly 700 students;
- Finished the year with 79 mentoring relationships; down from 87 the previous year largely due to challenges both in recruiting volunteers in uncertain economic times and COVID restrictions that reduced training places;
- Delivered 1,628 free counselling sessions to 633 young men, down slightly from the previous year, reflecting our reduced staff numbers in the first half of the year;
- Took two groups of young men on our three day *Wilderness Experience* – for almost all of them their first camping experience (away from their devices);
- Welcomed over one hundred organisations to our Business Breakfast featuring ACT Emergency Services Agency Commissioner Georgeina Whelan AM, CSC and Bar; which we had to deliver exclusively online for the first time;
- Welcomed 340 guests back to our first Big Night Out since 2019 featuring the Elton John Experience and raising a record \$183,000 after costs;
- Made further significant investments in our CRM system to better track clients, programs and outcomes for the organisation; rolling out across all programs in the latter half of the financial year;
- Developed and published our five year Strategic Statement – outlining both our strategic direction to 2025 and the outcomes we seek to achieve; and
- Still maintained effective cost control, despite COVID disruptions, with unit costs increasing 7% for direct support (mentoring and counselling) and decreasing significantly across education programs (as we were able to deliver more sessions with the re-opening of schools after the 2020 lockdown).



Staff, mentees and mentors celebrate another successful mentoring intake!

Vale Denis Sargent

We were saddened in May this year to lose a long-standing mentor and Board Director of Menslink, Denis Sargent. Denis joined Menslink as a mentor in 2009 and the Board in 2017 and remained an active mentor to Connor (his original mentee) and to me right up until the end. I was both honoured and privileged to spend time with him just before he died and to say a few words at his funeral. As I said in my eulogy speech:

“To me that was the essence of Denis: Always giving, volunteering to help out Menslink in any way he could but most importantly his unbridled enthusiasm. Denis always made you feel good about yourself. He gave advice where it was warranted but always had your best interests at heart and he made sure you knew he supported you through thick and thin”



Denis Sargent in 2014

We are all the better for Denis' involvement at Menslink: the young guys – especially Connor, the staff, the Board and the whole organisation. He is missed and loved by many.

Strategic Statement 2020-2025

Our Strategic Statement (<https://menslink.org.au/about-menslink/our-values-and-goals/>) confirms our overall identity and values and spells out both our overall Strategic Direction and Outcomes as follows:

These are the strategic activities and focus areas we will concentrate on to 2025:

- Encourage young men to seek help and assist others in difficult times;
- Develop young men's skills, self-esteem and motivation to improve themselves, their behaviours and their relationships with others;
- Support young men going through difficult times with professional counselling services;
- Provide young men with positive male role models through our volunteer mentoring service;
- Increase awareness of the issues relating to young men and their impact on families and the community;
- Continue to develop and modify our programs to meet the changing needs of young men and provide them with a choice of support options;
- Sustain and grow the organisation with sound governance and strong financial management; and
- Contribute to our broader community by supporting gender equality, cultural awareness and sustainability initiatives.

These are the outcomes we aim to achieve for young men, their families, Menslink and the broader 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 five per cent per year for existing programs; and
- ✓ Menslink has long term security of funding to continue to deliver and grow in line with community expectations.

This year, like the year before, was challenging for all of us. I would like to thank and acknowledge the amazing group of people who make up the Menslink community – people of all genders, ages and backgrounds who do their bit to improve the lives and outcomes of our young guys, their families and our entire community:

- Our staff who have shown adaptability, innovation, commitment, personal resilience and importantly compassion throughout the year;
- Our dedicated Board members who have supported me and helped steer the organisation through continued economic and community uncertainty and volatility;
- Our amazing volunteer mentors who have provided rock-solid guidance to our young guys – in and out of lockdowns and with all the challenges of two bumpy school years;
- Our sponsors and donors who largely stayed with us through thick and thin; and
- The ACT Government who provided an additional \$140,000 in special COVID funding and rent relief (plus announced a further \$135,000 which was paid on the 1st July 2021 so accounted for in the following financial year), as well as the Federal Government's \$350,000 in JobKeeper and COVID support.

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.

I'd also like to thank our Big Night Out Fundraising Committee who spent countless hours preparing for our Big Night Out, despite COVID restrictions reducing numbers and looming interstate lockdowns nearly preventing the event from going ahead. The event was a run-away success.

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.

Program Delivery for Young Men:

Mentoring Program

Unfortunately we finished this year with fewer young men (79) in our mentoring program – only seventy-nine (79) young men matched with a mentor as at June 2021.

We experienced a 7% drop from the previous year as we struggled to find volunteers willing to commit during times of economic and community uncertainty, as well as having fewer training places available for intakes due to COVID social distancing restrictions.

We trained 41 mentors, also down from the previous year, with COVID protocols also requiring smaller groups at training; increasing our costs.

During the year we re-introduced Linkups, gradually increasing in size with eased restrictions and increased community confidence. Nine young guys successfully completed Level One and Two international sailing qualifications as a result of a new partnership between YMCA ACT and Menslink.

This year we took sixteen mentees in two groups on our first *Menslink Wilderness Experience*, a three day immersion into the bush where young men get to experience and learn about country from an aboriginal, white settler and environmental perspective (with possibly Australia’s only population of bark-eating koalas!).

Feedback for the Mentoring Program

“I can’t recommend what these guys do for our young boys enough! Menslink were there for my son right when he needed them the most. He was grieving the loss of his father, looking for approval from the wrong influences and was really angry with everything and everyone. Menslink’s intervention helped guide him down a better path and take responsibility for his actions. I will be eternally grateful to them for what they have done for my son as I was at a real risk of losing him. Thank you!”
Single Mum (2020)

“Thank you, you have helped me bring my son from a disenchanted, sad little boy to a confident, happy young man. He has learnt so much about himself, he has learnt that he is not his father’s mistakes but he is in fact his own amazing person. He is not able to look to the future because he now know he has a future”
Single Mum (2021)

“We are so happy to have found the Menslink program. They have provided invaluable support for my son and my family during an incredibly difficult time in his life. We literally didn’t know where else to turn. The provision of a responsible role model is essential to young boys and I believe this program fills an enormous need in the community”
Single Mum (2021)

“Menslink mentoring has been an unbelievably important part of my boys’ lives. Even the shyest or most awkward of kids seem to be supported through the experience. The change in behaviour and attitude has been the most noticeable of outcomes. Thank you Menslink for this great opportunity. Lost without you!”
Single Mum (2021)



Young guys relaxing by the fire after a long day's hike at our Menslink Wilderness Experience

The young men get to challenge themselves, get a sense of place, achievement and time away from their devices.

After both trips, all of the young men came back overflowing with excitement and energy, after having met their own challenge and achieved something they did not know was possible.

The honouring ceremony on their return was the highlight of the year for many parents. One of our mums even told us her son had not previously realised he enjoyed outdoor activities – this event was possibly life changing for him.



You can't get much closer to nature than this....

While our traditional summer camp had to be cancelled due to COVID, we were able to hold a huge outdoor gathering for an evening barbeque – over one hundred mentors, their mentees and families came to a great event on the Cotter River: our biggest event ever.

We continued our Linkup themes throughout the year; 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.



Young mentees learning how to sail on Lake Burley Griffin, thanks to our partnership with YMCA ACT

This year we continued to invest in our mums' journey alongside their son in the mentoring program. Not only does our Intake Officer Roni give them insights into what works with mentoring from a parent's perspective, we also give every mum a copy of psychologist Maggie Dent's book *From Boys to Men*. Mums also participate in our graduation ceremonies – with many of them reflecting on the experience of listening to an adult man honour and praise their young son on his journey to manhood.

Finally we were able to welcome nearly twenty mentors to our mentor retreat in Jindabyne in May; where we were able to share stories of hardship, success and mateship over a roaring outdoor fire. Another one to remember....



Admiring the view high above Lake Jindabyne during our mentor retreat in May

Counselling Program

The counselling program delivered 1628 free counselling sessions to 633 young men and their families, compared with 1912 sessions to 662 young men in the previous year, with around 70% of sessions delivered at Menslink with the rest in up to nine schools across the Territory.

Sessions were down as we saw an initial downturn following the 2020 COVID lockdown, reversing to a record high number of referrals after a couple of months. December and January were unusually quiet although again we saw higher numbers of referrals and sessions in the latter part of the financial year.

Support for pre-teens continues to be in demand, with 127 young guys aged 10-12 receiving free counselling support this year. 10-12 year olds are now consistently around 22% of our total counselling client base.

During the year, we noticed a significant increase in the number of referrals for online addictions, including gambling, gaming and pornography; probably driven by young men's isolation during the prior lockdown.

We continued to receive highly complex referrals – often from government and private mental health providers – which challenged our more generalist service and sometimes required us to refer onto more clinical or specialist care providers (ie chronic and escalating drug and alcohol addiction, severe mental health issues, significant impairments etc).



Counsellor Biraj Dhital providing much-needed support

Feedback for the Counselling Program

"Every student seems to feel better after talking to the Menslink counsellor. 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 follow up, 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)

"Menslink has been an invaluable service that has provided me with the help I need that would be out of reach otherwise due to the financial cost of other mental health services. The word 'life-changing' has become an overused cliché, however the excellent support Menslink has provided me has positively changed my outlook on life. A huge thank you to the Menslink team"
Young Guy (2021)

"Menslink has been a saviour for us. Our son was in a very dark place and I'd rang many places and was unable to get an appointment for a few months. Which was very concerning for our family. Headspace recommended Menslink. I had previously thought it was only for adults. Menslink offered my son an appointment in two days and he's in a much better place now!"
Parent/Guardian (2020)

"I cannot thank Menslink enough for their support for my young men through a difficult separation and issues of self esteem and anxiety. Quality counselling for men, and by men has been so valuable. Such a wonderful initiative. I would love to see Menslink go nationally."
Single Mum (2021)

We did see an increase in last minute cancellations or no-show appointments, which we understand to be in line with the experience of other youth mental health providers in Canberra. Of course empty appointment slots impact our ability to see as many clients as we would like so we continue to work on strategies to reduce them.

Education Programs

Our education programs – ranging from single presentations to hundreds of young men right through to multi-session programs with small groups of up to ten students – continue to deliver critical support and teach life skills in a gender-specific way to young men.

Our experience delivering these programs for over nearly a decade is that young men open up and can often be more receptive to storytelling and examples from adult men who have “been there and done that”. Our team of presenters combine their lived experience with professional expertise to deliver improved outcomes for our young men attendees.

Importantly, these programs reach and assist young men who otherwise may not be willing or ready to engage in one:one support or for whom more generic programs are less suitable.

Silence is Deadly campaign

During the financial year (spanning two educational years), we delivered 107 mental health and fitness presentations to 8,794 young men in primary schools, secondary schools and sporting clubs across the region; up from 79 sessions and 5,431 young men the previous year.

We continued the trend from 2019-20 of smaller group sizes in school to accommodate COVID restrictions. While this meant more work and cost for us; smaller group sizes meant more young guys got to ask meaningful questions in the all-important Q&A components.

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.”

Feedback for Silence is Deadly

“The work the presenter did with our boys was incredible. The simple advice along with sharing his own story so honestly had the room in awe. You could have heard a pin drop for 60 minutes. The boys appreciated the practical advice and many parents shared how their sons had talked about it at home. Highly recommend to any school in Canberra!”

Primary School (2020)

“Menslink provided a range of expert presentations to our year 10, 11 and 12 students, and our International and ‘at-risk’ students providing expertise, evidence and care, using a personalised approach. I have engaged Menslink in my previous high schools and colleges and my partner in a range of primary schools - every student and teacher needs to include Menslink in their Pastoral Care and Wellbeing programs.”

College (2021)

“I highly recommend Menslink Silence is Deadly. It was a great way to discuss topics that might be too difficult to talk about openly in a whole class setting and was beneficial for the kids to see Men talk about feelings.”

High School (2020)

“I thought that this would be another presentation about Mental Health - but when I listened to the presenter’s story, I realised that this wasn’t about facts and figures, but a person and their story to find a voice. Students have many numbers and pat answers thrown at them at school - what they need is a story and the encouragement to speak out”

High School (2020)



Canberra Raiders’ forward Sia Soliola providing valuable advice to young guys

PRIDE Program

This year we continued to extend the *PRIDE* program, with both the small group and classroom formats taken up in higher numbers than the previous years.

During the financial year (spanning two school years) we delivered 18 small group programs to 125 young men and 21 larger group programs reaching 552 young men.

The large group classroom format is particularly suitable for primary schools, as younger students can be more comfortable discussing personal topics in larger groups.

Impact Results

Every six months, we survey schools, parents and young men (over 18) on the impact they believed our programs had on sixteen personal and social areas. The survey was developed by Dr James Neil from the University of Canberra's Psychology Department and the results consistently demonstrate the impressive impact our work has across all our programs:

- 80 - 94% of respondents (schools, parents and young men) reported positive or very positive impacts of Menslink *counselling* on young men's ability to manage stress and anxiety;
- 89 - 92% of parents reported positive or very positive impacts of *mentoring* on their son's confidence and self-esteem;
- 97% of schools reported positive or very positive impacts on their students' help seeking behaviour as a result of attending *Silence is Deadly* presentations; and
- 94 - 100% of schools reported positive or very positive impacts on their students' peer and staff relationships, as well as their ability to manage and control anger, after participating in the *PRIDE* program. 78 – 89% also reported positive or very positive impacts on their students' attitudes towards women.

The latest report is available here: <https://menslink.org.au/about-menslink/what-we-do-works/>

Feedback for PRIDE Groups

"[PRIDE] has been an integral part of our schools social, emotional learning program for a number of years now. We find that as the boys have moved up through the program, they have a great rapport with the Menslink facilitator and have a shared common understanding of their role and responsibility in making our school a respectful and safe learning environment"
High School (2020)

"We saw an improvement in respect and comradery from our PRIDE participants after the program. Well worth implementing at your school"
Primary School (2020)

"Our school's well-being and pastoral care program relies on the professional programs and delivery of the programs from Menslink. Our students benefit, evolve and grow in mental strength and capacity and in confidence as a result of our ongoing connection with Menslink"
College (2020)

"We constantly enjoy seeing the progress some of our students make with regard to their level of confidence and feeling more in control of their circumstances. A much greater level of calm is felt after our PRIDE sessions".
High School (2020)

The PRIDE program is an amazing resource to target specific students who require social and emotional support and mentoring. It is particularly valuable to those students who do not have a strong male role model at home. The facilitator is extremely personable and built strong relationships with the boys in a short space of time, sharing personal experiences and providing perspective for the participating students. We look forward to working with Menslink again to support our students"
Primary School (2021)

Advocacy and Community Awareness

Despite the challenges posed by COVID, 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 was held online for the first time with individuals and organisations logging in for a "virtual breakfast" watching ESA Commissioner Georgeina Whelan AM, CSC and Bar, talking to Chief Editor of Region Media Genevieve Jacobs AM. Her theme this year was resilience; particularly apt after the summer bushfires and COVID pandemic.



Emergency Services Agency Commissioner Georgeina Whelan AM, CSC and Bar talking resilience at our virtual breakfast

We delivered nearly thirty presentations on masculinity and gender issues, mental health and fitness, resilience, family violence and Menslink more broadly to businesses, community groups, sporting clubs and a Canberra TEDx Conversations event. Most of these presentations were in person; some were online and a few were a mix of the two formats.

We also gave a range of interviews for mainstream local and national media across online, print, radio and television formats.

Our series of *Midweekers* were unfortunately curtailed this year given venue COVID space restrictions, but we were fortunate to hold one event in June 2020 featuring local Queanbeyan and international actor Nathan Spiteri who described some of the harrowing events contained in his autobiographical *Toy Cars* book.



Toy Cars' author Nathan Spiteri at our only Midweeker

In January 2020, we were honoured that Menslink’s long-time friend and local artist, Ngiyampaa woman Sarah Richards, painted a special piece for Menslink, entitled *Fostering Resilience and Empathy*, which now adorns our reception area and Menslink polo shirts worn by our staff. This is the story she wrote about the piece:

Menslink supports young men in the Canberra region through free counselling, mentoring and education programs. I am a big supporter of the work Menslink does as it contributes to what I spoke about in my Journey of Change piece around the need to shift our culture from one that strives for power over each other and over nature, to one based on mutual respect. Little boys everywhere are conditioned to be stoic via repetitive statements like ‘boys don’t cry’ and ‘man up’. (Shaikh, 2017). Instead of providing them the tools they need to be able to feel the full range of human emotions, they’re taught to ignore most of them - unless their emotions are associated with “perceived” dominance e.g. anger.



Local artist and Ngiyampaa woman Sarah Williams presenting her picture to Menslink

“Fostering resilience & empathy” represents the work Menslink does to break down toxic masculinity and support young men to become more resilient and develop the ability to address their emotional challenges without resorting to aggression and violence, self-harm or substance abuse.

The two hands represent the support and holistic approach of Menslink within the ACT (the background).

In the centre, the six sections represent Menslink’s values that guide them in their work to support the young men in their journey to build resilience and empathy so they can become the great men they want to be.

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, Helping ACT, Lifeline Canberra, Reach for Nepal, Vinnies, the Women’s Shed movement and Women with Disabilities ACT.

Menslink is also very proud of our involvement in the establishment of a new charity, *Fearless Women Inc*, which was set up to provide equivalent services and support to young women across the ACT region. Menslink are providing intellectual property to the new organisation and I serve on its Board of Directors, as does Denis Sargent’s daughter, Dr Kerry Sargent.



Having fun at an indoor climbing Linkup

Fundraising and corporate sponsorships

This year was a mixed result for fundraising and sponsorships, with some sponsors very kindly and generously increasing their financial support, while others sadly had to curtail theirs.

Overall, corporate sponsorships, donations and income from the Business Breakfast fell by nearly \$200,000 from the previous year; which was largely offset by much-needed income from our Big Night Out, which was a terrific success.

The *Big Night Out* was our most successful yet, raising more valuable funds than ever before, despite COVID restrictions requiring a 25% reduction in the number of attendees. A huge thank you goes as always to the fundraising committee led by Peter Munday OAM from Lennox Volkswagen and our other amazing volunteers including Fiona Sanfrancesco, Ron Shepherd, Todd Wright and Jim Rice, ably supported by our Business Manager Rebecca Swan.



After the previous year's cancellation, the 2021 Big Night Out lived up to all our expectations

I would also like to thank the nearly one hundred local businesses who very generously donated goods and services for our auction, especially Lennox Volkswagen, ACT Decks, Canberra FM, Christopher Toth, Creations Jewellers, Elite Heating and Cooling, Schneider Electrical, WIN Television, and Willinga Park.

Our seven Principal Partners continue to lead the way in providing significant funding for our programs. Between them they contributed over 16% 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.

I would especially like to thank Lennox Volkswagen and Geocon who not only directly support us, but encourage many other businesses and individuals to get involved as well.



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 ActewAGL, ACT Decks, ACT Veterans Rugby, Allbids, Bendigo Bank, Boorer Foundation, Canberra FM, Canberra Raiders, Capital Recruitment, Chase Constructions, Creations Jewellers, DDCS Lawyers, Elite Event Technology, Elite Heating and Cooling, Independent Property Group, Jamala Wildlife Lodge, Much More Than Money, Proximity Legal, PWC, Region Media, Southside Physio, Thinkplace, ThreeSides Marketing, Village Building Co, Viva Leisure, Willinga Park and WIN Television. Thanks to all of you!

Other corporate supporters this financial year include Advantage Advertising, AGH Demolition & Asbestos Removals, BCA Certifiers, Blackshaws, Bonsella Business Solutions, Canberra Data Centres, Capital Certifiers, Carlton & United, CBR Brave, Clonakilla Wines, Independent Liquor Retailers, RSM, University of Canberra, Watts McCray and Zoe Routh Leadership Development.

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!



Skills development at a Linkup near Stromlo

Organisation and Governance

After the early lockdowns of 2020 and ongoing financial and community uncertainty, this year we largely “kept the ship steady” rather than embark on significant changes, innovations and new projects.

Of note however, was the implementation of our new CRM system which, while taking longer and costing more than originally forecast (quite unusual for IT projects!), went live across all our programs in 2021.

We also upgraded much of our aging IT infrastructure (some of it seven or eight years old), purchasing new computers and improved security and management software.

Staffing

Yet again our staff went the extra mile to make sure our young guys, their families, our volunteers, sponsors, donors and each other felt welcomed and valued. They work each and every day – many of them on weekends as well – to support our work and our community.

We did experience some staff turnover this year, with Richard Wigley reducing his hours while both David Segal and Jonathan Engel left us after a couple of years in counselling and mentoring respectively to focus on other opportunities. We wish them both well in their future careers.

Later in 2020, we were able to hire additional counsellors with Biraj Dhital joining the team and Grant Mackay rejoining after a couple of years away. We also substantially increased Intake Officer Roni Belden’s hours to respond to increasing requests and referrals across all our programs.

After nearly eight years at Menslink, our longest-serving employee Ben Triglone, decided it was time to try a new role in a different organisation. Ben had a significant impact on Menslink and our young guys during a terrific career with us. We wish him very well and thank him for nearly a decade of true service.

With significant financial uncertainty for the bulk of this year (and the lack of in-person courses), our investment in training and support fell to \$20.8K, down from \$31.1K the previous year.



Operations Manager Cookie Davis enjoying the sublime views at our staff retreat near Bungendore

At our staff retreat in July, all staff worked on developing and documenting our core philosophy about what we do – in effect the essence of Menslink’s beliefs about our young men and the work we do. These beliefs are now included in all our policy manuals – from Board governance to volunteer mentoring. They are:

- Our primary purpose is to support the young guy – everything else is secondary
- Young men are people; not a problem to be fixed or a behaviour to be changed
- We don’t label our young guys – they’re just young guys
- The choice of how and if to engage with us is always up to the young guy. We provide options but at the end of the day it’s his life and his choice
- Our combination of lived experience and professional expertise works
- Our job is not only to support today, but to build capacity and resilience for tomorrow
- If we’re not making a difference, we shouldn’t be doing it
- Our young guys’ environment is constantly changing and changing fast – we should keep up!
- Our values should guide our behaviour both in and out of work
- Growth, learning and resilience often come from challenge – we encourage our young guys to step out of their comfort zone
- Face to face connections and community can never be replaced by online interactions

Finally, I wanted to commend all our staff – but particularly the senior leaders – for their dedication, resilience, flexibility and compassion. While largely we reverted to “normal operations” we did so in an environment of significant volatility, challenge and uncertainty – this was difficult and everyone should be commended for their approach and their work throughout.



Mentor coordinators Des and Dave training new mentors out at Innabunya

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. You've remained "lighthouses" and reliable, steady influences for our young guys when everything else seemed uncertain for them. That means a great deal and we cannot thank you enough;
- Genevieve Jacobs AM who not only hosted our first online Business Breakfast but continues to find innovative ways to cover the work we do through her work at the RiotAct and in the community more broadly;
- ESA Commissioner Georgeina Whelan AM who spoke at our Business Breakfast;
- Menslink Ambassador David Morrison AO who also donated time, gave speeches and assisted us in many ways throughout the year;
- Dave Bermingham who continues to dedicate his time as an experienced mentor, helping both young guys and new mentors alike;
- Matt Davis and Troy Huckstepp who, along with Dave Birmingham, helped run our Menslink Wilderness Experiences;
- Peter Munday OAM who dedicates so much of his time and endless energy in leading our fundraising committee and making the Big Night Out the success that it is;
- Leo Sayer, who kindly came to our Big Night Out and generously gave his time and donated a signed box set of his entire collection;
- Our Board of Directors – particularly Chair Michael Battenally and other office bearers – who dedicate their time and take on responsibility for the organisation. This year was again very challenging for Board members, with significant and ongoing financial instability and uncertainty; and
- Finally, all those who signed up to assist us with events and other activities but whom we still weren't able to engage – we're hopeful that next year may be somewhat more normal!



Genevieve Jacobs at our Business Breakfast

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.

Overall, our total costs increased by 5% this year, with unit cost increases for mentoring and counselling rising by 7% but offset by reductions in PRIDE unit costs (52%), with Silence is Deadly remaining relatively static (a 1% decrease).

Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	1 Yr Change (FY19-20)	5 Yr Change (FY15-16)
PROGRAM OUTPUTS								
Silence is Deadly campaign								
Total number of sessions	52	78	77	102	79	107	35%	106%
Total number of young men reached	6,633	9,572	8,924	10,125	5,431	8,794	62%	33%
YOY growth	-16%	44%	-7%	13%	-46%	62%		
PRIDE Small Group Program								
Number of groups	n/a	2	5	14	10	18	80%	
Number of students	n/a	9	40	187	73	125	71%	
YOY growth			344%	368%	-61%	71%		
PRIDE Classroom Program								
Number of groups	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	21	163%	
Number of students	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	649	552	-15%	
YOY growth						-15%		
Mentoring								
Mentors trained	29	31	36	50	44	41	-7%	41%
Number of active mentoring matches	45	53	63	87	87	79	-9%	76%
Counselling								
Number of sessions	957	1,200	1,645	1,949	1,912	1,628	-15%	70%
Number of clients	312	422	548	662	662	633	-4%	103%
Total number of young men directly supported	357	475	611	749	749	712	-5%	99%
YOY growth	13%	33%	29%	23%	0%	-5%		
PROGRAM EXPENDITURE AND UNIT COSTS								
Total Expenditure (excludes fundraising costs)								
Expenses funded by ACT Govt Contracts	360,624	377,132	449,600	477,533	496,945	659,528	33%	83%
Expenses funded from own sources	255,580	369,473	557,304	665,700	851,947	750,731	-12%	194%
Total program expenditure	616,204	746,605	1,006,904	1,143,233	1,348,892	1,410,259	5%	129%
Percentage of costs provided by ACT Government	59%	51%	45%	42%	37%	47%		
Unit cost of direct support								
Unit cost per young man (all direct support)	1,329	1,242	1,269	1,255	1,441	1,545	7%	16%
Unit cost per young man (mentoring)	6,025	5,635	5,434	3,982	4,651	6,069	30%	1%
Unit cost per young man (counselling)	652	690	790	896	1,019	980	-4%	50%
Unit cost per counselling session	212	243	263	304	353	381	8%	79%
Unit cost PRIDE Program								
Unit cost per group (approx 8 sessions/group)	n/a	18,665	18,124	6,288	9,742	5,424	-44%	
Unit cost per small group attendee		4,148	2,266	471	1,335	781	-41%	
Unit cost per classroom attendee	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	120	206	72%	
Unit cost Silence is Deadly campaign								
Unit cost per session	2,726	1,531	1,831	1,132	1,195	923	-23%	-66%
Unit cost per attendee	21	12	16	11	17	11	-35%	-47%

The significant increase in ACT Government funding in the 2020-21 financial year is attributable to emergency COVID funding provided by ACT Health and is not expected to continue.

Future Outlook

The 2021-22 financial year has already started with considerable challenge and continuing uncertainty with an extended lockdown and the possibility of rolling individual exposure site lockdowns in future months.

As happened during 2020, we experienced a downturn in client demand for counselling during lockdown, followed by a large upsurge as Canberra came out of lockdown. It seems young men enjoy virtual entertainment but not virtual support – a surprising phenomenon also noted by a number of other youth mental health providers in Canberra. Feedback has been that online reluctance is often driven by privacy concerns in their home, but may also be influenced simply by the format of video consultations.

We are forecasting a significant cost increase in 2021-22, with mandated wage rises of 3% from July 2021 and all other costs also rising. We are also replacing staff who left last year and bolstering capability in our mentoring and management areas. Our total wages bill covering wage rises, new hire costs and on-costs is expected to rise by more than \$300,000 this financial year. From an income perspective, Federal Government JobKeeper payments have ceased and, while the ACT Government stepped in with COVID financial support this year, ongoing funding commitments are still being negotiated.

That said, we have embarked on a new fundraising initiative this year to cover some of the shortfalls and have and will invest in further capacity to make sure we meet the expectations of the community and our young guys for the support they need.

We continue to believe that EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE and will do everything we can to deliver on that promise to the Canberra community and the young guys we serve.

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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