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# EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

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Men's Link Incorporated  
Annual Report 2021-22



**menslink**  
supporting young men in Canberra

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**“Fostering resilience & empathy” by artist Sarah Richards, Murrawuy Journeys**

This commissioned painting 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.

Menslink is inclusive; we don’t judge, we don’t label and we provide a culturally safe space for our clients. It is important to emphasise that although Menslink works with a majority of male clients or those who identify as male, we also have non-binary and transgender clients choosing our service. For this report the terms young men, young guys and young fella’s will be used interchangeably with no disrespect intended to any of our clients or those who may be considering accessing support from Menslink, our important Sponsors or Donors.

*Menslink acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. 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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*Reproduced by permission of Sarah Richards, Marrawuy Journeys*





## Menslink Purpose

### *Supporting Young Men in Canberra*

*We help young men or those who identify as male across the Canberra region make better choices and engage positively with society because young men matter to their families, our community and our future.*

#### OUR IDENTITY

Menslink supports young men in the Canberra region through our free counselling, mentoring and Menslink In School programs. For twenty years, we have helped thousands of young guys get through tough or lonely times with the least amount of harm to themselves and those around them.

We help young guys build capacity, not dependency; developing and building on their resilience and empathy and helping them become the great adult men they want to be.

#### OUR VALUES

- Kindness and empathy
- Contribution and impact
- Connection and community
- Safety and integrity
- Innovation and adaptability
- Equality and fairness

#### OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- 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.
- Contribute to our broader community by supporting gender equality, cultural awareness and sustainability initiatives.

#### OUTCOMES WE AIM TO ACHIEVE – for young men, families, Menslink and the 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.
- Menslink has long term security of funding to continue to deliver and grow in line with community expectations.

We combine our own lived experience with professional expertise to support young men (and their families). Menslink's philosophy is underpinned by a strengths-based approach to working with young men. This means that rather than focus on "what's wrong", we identify their positive resources and abilities and help them leverage these in areas that aren't working so well.

<https://menslink.org.au/about-menslink/our-values-and-goals/>

## Board Chair's Report – Michael Battenally

The Board of Menslink sincerely thank the Canberra community and government partners for their sustained support over several years impacted by major disruptions. Through this continued support, the Menslink staff and volunteers have adapted to maintain quality service and support to our young men and boys across the region.

Our 2022 Annual Report will detail a successful year for Menslink, demonstrating how service outcomes have had a positive impact. We hear from our CEO's across the year, Martin Fisk and Penny Burns, and our experienced Treasurer, Bruce Papps, who confirms the resilient financial position the Menslink organisation has achieved.

The Menslink Board has worked enthusiastically as a team, through in-person and online meetings, in addition to supplementary Board Committee meetings. In March 2022 the Board convened a strategic workshop to review funding and key strategic pillars for the organisation, further to the overseeing governance responsibilities for audit and risk, and staff recruitment.

As Chair, I sincerely thank my board colleagues for their contributions and availability to the Menslink organisation, further progressing the work of past boards as Menslink celebrates 20 years of service to our community.

### 2022 Menslink Board

Board Member	Role(s)
Michael Battenally *	Board Chair
Justine Saunders APM	Board Vice-Chair
Bruce Papps	Treasurer, Member Audit & Risk Committee
Golnar Nekoe **	Board Secretary, Chair Audit & Risk Committee
Craig Allen *	
Katy Balmaks	
Frank Lo Pilato	Member Audit & Risk Committee
Jim Rice OAM	Member Fundraising Committee
Daniel Oyston	
<b>Non-Voting</b>	
Martin Fisk OAM	CEO, Executive Officer
Penny Burns	General Manager/Acting CEO, Executive Officer

\* seeking re-election at 2022 AGM    \*\* not seeking re-election

Golnar Nekoe is not seeking re-election after four years of service on the Board. The Board thanks Golnar for her professional and personal contribution to the Menslink community. It has been appreciated and greatly valued. We wish Golnar every success as she moves interstate to continue her professional career.

We have a prospective Board nomination from Paul Eccles that will ensure strong Board capability into next year. Paul is well-known in business networks and the broader community, with significant risk and insurance industry experience.

Menslink is built on the **partnership and generosity of Canberran's, our principal partners and sponsors**. Their enduring support has ensured the growth of Menslink services and programs, reaching this 20-year milestone 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
- Snow Foundation
- ICON Water
- Capital Chemist
- Southern Plumbing Plus
- Lennock Volkswagon
- GEOCON
- Canberra Raiders
- WIN Television

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.

In November 2021, the inaugural Menslink Great Walk saw 27 leaders of business and public sector organisations undertake a five day, 142km walk on the Canberra Centenary Trail covering the urban and rural areas of Canberra and surrounds. This amazing band of good people raised over \$350,000 for Menslink! A tremendous effort of community support, and we anticipate the 2022 Great Walk will also achieve a similar outcome. Congratulations to the organising committee including Martin Fisk, Todd Wright, Bjarne Kragh, Peter Davis and the Menslink Team.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank Martin Fisk (CEO) and Penny Burns (General Manager/Acting CEO) and the Menslink staff for their contribution over the year, as what they do makes a difference in so many ways. We also acknowledge the volunteer brigade of mentors who provide thousands of hours of support to young men. Collectively, the team and delivers **counselling, mentoring, education, and awareness programs** that can make a life-changing difference to young men aged 10 to 25.

It is once again 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.

### **Acknowledging 20 Years of Menslink**

In closing I wish to share a brief commentary describing the founding of the Menslink organisation. The 2003 photo below shows MLA and ACT Minister for Community Services, Simon Corbell, with the first Menslink CEO, Richard Shanahan, formally launching the ACT Government funded young men's support network as a Woden Community Services (WCS), a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) managed program. Richard Shanahan was initially employed by WCS to coordinate this program.

Richard, along with a group of informed advocates wanted to strengthen access to these programs for young men through the establishment of a separate NGO, namely Men's Link (Menslink), which was established and operated from premises in Light Street, Griffith (Previously a Fire Brigade Station).

### **The genesis of Men's Link had occurred.**

Known as Menslink to the community, it had now negotiated ACT Government funding and access to premises for the targeted provision of mentoring and counselling services for young men 12-25.

**An interim Board** was established under the leadership of David Roberts as Chair, drafting a constitution and administrative arrangements. The initial Men's Link Board was confirmed on 2 May 2003 with David Roberts in the Chair, Jim Rice, Laurie Broadbent (Treasurer), Derek Jory (Vice-Chair), Mary Gays (Secretary), and Elaine Young.

The Board role in the early days of Menslink was significant not only in governance, but also in unpaid administration. For example, the treasurer paid all accounts and payment of salaries. More broadly, the board members were very hands-on in establishing policy and procedures to support service and program delivery.



Richard Shanahan was CEO (2003-2007), to be followed by Glen Cullen (2007-2011), and from 2011 Martin Fisk has now led Menslink through a decade of growth and change. We acknowledge that each of three CEOs have played a significant role over 20 years coupled with the contributions of too many to name here.

It's worth reflecting however that since 2002, Menslink has directly supported some six thousand troubled and isolated young men; or one in every twenty-five adult men in Canberra.

We have delivered over 1,400 mental health and positive male behaviour sessions to nearly every primary and secondary school in our region reaching ... pretty much every male under the age of thirty.

Menslink exists because of a need that a few people identified 20 years ago. Many of the young lads from the early years are now the strongest ambassadors of Menslink and will tell you what a difference the support of Menslink made to their life opportunities and future.

2022 has been a milestone year and we have again come through stronger and wiser, looking forward to the prospect of 2023 – **Menslink 21 Years.**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'M. Battenally'.

Michael Battenally  
Board Chair Menslink  
23 November 2022

## Treasurer's Report FY21/22 – Bruce Papps CA

I am pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2022. Key highlights from the financial statements are as follows:

	FY22	FY21
Total revenue	1,893,994	1,937,320
Total expenditure	(1,691,357)	(1,577,360)
<b>Net operating surplus</b>	<b>\$202,637</b>	<b>\$359,960</b>
Total assets (what we own)	1,561,299	1,534,889
Total liabilities (what we owe)	264,217	398,453
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>\$1,297,082</b>	<b>\$1,136,436</b>

Of note in this year's financial report:

- Our financial position is strong with net assets of \$1,297K at 30 June 2022.
- We achieved an operating surplus of \$202k for the year despite the pandemic again interrupting fundraising activities. This was predominantly due to relief funding from ACT Government, COVID funding, and our amazing sponsors and supporters who rallied to support the fundraising efforts associated with our inaugural Menslink Great Walk.
- The Menslink team again performed exceptionally well in a year of restrictions and lockdown periods. The team not only kept our programs running but that also managed our resources very closely.
- The Association's ability to meet its future commitments is strong with a current ratio of 6.6 at 30 June 2022.

We know the reserves of the Association will be needed now as demand for our programs increases and we look to new sources of revenue for our ongoing sustainability.

As Treasurer of Menslink, I would like to formally thank all the businesses, individuals, and the government for their wonderful, continued support of the Association. Without this amazing and committed support, Menslink would not be able to provide the critical support programs and services to young guys and their families.

And finally, Menslink would again like to express its appreciation to Adrian King and the team at PwC for the provision of a pro-bono audit services and their expert advice regarding changes in reporting requirements relevant to Menslink. Thank you, PwC.



# CEO Report – Penny Burns (Acting CEO)

## Connection & Community

As someone who has lived and worked outside of Australia for the past 15 years and totally new to Canberra, joining such an organisation as Menslink has been an incredible start to my life in the Territory. Being trusted at the helm to lead the organisation through much of its 20<sup>th</sup> year; enabling Martin Fisk our CEO to take a well-earned break after 11 years, has been a privilege.

My General Manager (permanent) position commenced in September 21, ensuring I had adequate time to drink the Menslink ‘kool-aid’ and be in a position to keep wheels turning as Acting CEO in Martin’s absence. It wasn’t difficult step once I experienced how fortunate we are at Menslink to be lead by a wonderfully caring Board who offer such depth of experience, and willingness to be involved. Adding to that our dedicated and ever professional Menslink Team who deliver our services and programs for the young fellas and indirect support to their families; these people *are* Menslink. I am so grateful for the support of both cohorts; they have been an invaluable resource and support for me personally welcoming me to Menslink, and as we all embarked on delivery of the final two months of this financial year together navigating the first leadership change (despite being temporary) for Menslink in 11 years.

With hope that the world would stabilise after the chaos of 2019 and early 2020, Menslink remained positive, not knowing what was to come. Keen to meet our Strategic Objectives growing our service delivery and programs, we continued with recruitment to replace a vacant position and introduce a new role. I thank Peter (Cookie) Davis for his leadership of both new recruits during this interesting time and pivoting quickly to get them actively contributing online.

We again entered the 2021-22 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 combined with rising costs. Our service delivery was again disrupted by COVID; both with the official 9 week lockdown so early in the new year, and the subsequent challenges and time taken for us at Menslink HQ as well as schools, to navigate back to uninterrupted face to face service delivery. The safety of both our staff and clients as always, was at the forefront of our decisions during this period. Our Menslink Team navigated this entire period with grace and professionalism and maintained a vigilant focus on our clients ensuring we were offering as much support as possible as quickly as possible as we all pivoted to online service delivery during the lockdown and subsequently navigated back to face-to-face service delivery and a ‘new normal’ in the second half of the year.

Menslink actively participated with the ACT Government’s new Commissioning Process, which imposed an unplanned time impost on senior resources. However, this wasn’t a process we could ignore, as it’s the new approach to funding and procuring community service delivery for ACT Health and Community Services Directorates participation was vital to ensure adequate representation around the importance of our gendered program.

The ACT Government introduced the ACT Wellbeing Framework in 2020 and it has been subsequently woven into these Commissioning discussions. It's apparent that the Government will soon require organisations to formally report on their impacts as they align with the Framework. Menslink has a strong history of monitoring and evaluation / reporting our impacts, yet this has highlighted a need for us to do even more in this area to remain a leader in this area. As such, work on our Salesforce CRM implementation continued to be a priority, with nuanced consideration towards the inclusion of reporting metrics that would enable us to communicate our impact relevant to the Framework's domains. More details on this below.

In April prior to Martin's hiatus, we were fortunately able to host our 20 Year celebratory function at Hotel Realm. A wonderful night, attended by over 130 of our long-term supporters; an extraordinary number of people given we were still navigating COVID impacts, which made their attendance all the more special. It was so important for us to be able to celebrate with everyone to share our journey, reaffirm the importance of our work and impact on community whilst also providing assurance of our commitment to keep delivering for the young fellas in our community for years to come.

A huge thank you to all our long-term funders; Government, Private Sector, Foundations, and individuals who maintained their commitment to Menslink during this year, as well as to our new funders. We acknowledge it wasn't likely an easy time for you either, making your funds even more precious to us. It was also humbling to note that despite the challenging economic conditions, some donors even increased their annual funding support for Menslink and we can't adequately express our gratitude for escalating your support to us during this uncertain time. A range of unanticipated Government COVID relief Grants were also gratefully received.

Whilst our donors and sponsors stood by us for the duration of the year, we are still reliant on fundraising events for approximately 1/3 of our income. Unfortunately, our internal fundraising efforts ended up a little hit and miss due to COVID. We were fortunate to have a strong start in these stakes with lockdown lifting just in time for us to proceed with our inaugural Menslink Great Walk 2021, 1-5<sup>th</sup> November 21. The Great Walk was a resounding success, raising over \$350,000 (around 18% total revenue) and with over 1600 individual donors from our community supporting our senior executive and business owners from across Canberra in their fundraising efforts. We were not so lucky in March, having to cancel our significant annual fundraising event Big Night Out, equating to us missing the opportunity to raise approximately 10% of total revenue. The Great Walk fundraising proved essential to our overall year end revenue position.

Maintaining our annual revenue meant we were able to support our experienced Team through the highs and lows of the year; avoidance of unnecessary staff losses meant protection of skills and corporate knowledge within Menslink, and meant we were able to quickly scale back up once many of the restrictions lifted. Thank you all for your belief in us as we worked through how to do this with a focus on cost efficient value for money program and service delivery whilst maintaining our ability to offer kindness and understanding to our staff as they each worked through the challenges of this year in their own way.

## Financial Year Overview - during the financial year to June 2022, Menslink:

- Delivered 115 *Silence is Deadly* mental health presentations to nearly 5,550 young men in schools and sporting clubs; maintaining the number of presentations as previous Financial year, however the drop in students presented to clearly indicate the impact of COVID on student attendance. The total number of students significantly down from the previous year's 8,800 students, and almost mirroring FY19/20 levels.
- Continued to deliver our *PRIDE* group programs across both primary schools and high schools, teaching self-esteem, values and respectful relationships to nearly 402 students a decrease of 46% on prior year as COVID made both access to schools and their ability to commit to an 8 week program difficult particularly in Term 4 2021 and Term 1 2022;
- Finished the year with 77 mentoring relationships; down from 80 the previous year again largely due to challenges in finding volunteers willing to commit to a two year term during the particularly uncertain economic and health environment;
- Delivered 1750 free counselling sessions to 588 young men, with total sessions up 7% from the previous year, with less clients undertaking more sessions to manage their challenges;
- Took one group of young men on our three day *Wilderness Experience* – for almost all of them their first camping experience (away from their devices), sadly additional events were cancelled due to COVID impacts;
- In the middle of our unexpectedly extended lockdown 12th Aug – 15<sup>th</sup> Oct our annual Business Breakfast was again held online for a second year running. Featuring Hon Julia Gillard AC, Chair of Beyond Blue. We had over 75 businesses, Federal and State Government Departments as well as individuals dial in to join us. Many hosting small events for staff in their own offices, or enjoying a home cooked breakfast as they listened in.
- Unfortunately, had to take the decision to cancel Big Night Out 2022, a significant dent in our fundraising for the year;
- Midweekers were cancelled due to COVID despite much demand from our community. They will be reinstated in 2023.
- Continued to make a significant investment in our CRM system to better track clients, programs and outcomes for the organisation (more details below);
- Cost control was again managed tightly, however unit costs per client unfortunately increased by 16% for direct support (mentoring and counselling). Significant increases also in unit cost per student for Menslink in School programs due to protracted issues accessing schools combined with their inability to commit to programs due to ongoing COVID related illness and shutdowns

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.

A personal thank you to;

- our Senior Management Team; Peter (Cookie) Davis and Matthew Taylor. With my arrival to Menslink, they were both so supportive and open to my different approach, new ideas, and always ensured that we kept our clients at the forefront of any decisions. Menslink would not have been able to deliver what we have this past year without the commitment of you both leading your teams during difficult circumstances.
- Our Intake Officer Roni Belden who I shared office space with and who extended well beyond her role to include many additional administrative functions without complaint in order to support the delivery of important activities for Menslink as I found my way.

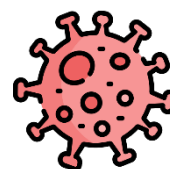
And finally...on behalf of everyone at Menslink – whether staff member, young guy, volunteer or family – I want to thank everyone involved with us who continue to support us. You inspire our Team to strive every day to help our young guys make better choices and make our community a better place. We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

This report highlights a summary of the continued COVID impact, the year's achievements and events in our mentoring, counselling and Menslink in School (education programs), advocacy and community awareness, partners & supporters, operations, people & culture and cost control, as well as commentary about the future outlook for Menslink beyond our 20<sup>th</sup> year and a list of ways people can get involved or help Menslink.





## Continued COVID-19 Impact



This new Financial Year commenced with students returning to school from their mid-year holidays halfway through July, only to be quickly impacted and returned home during the 9 week COVID lockdown implemented from 5<sup>th</sup> August. Once lockdown lifted on 15<sup>th</sup> October, and students started slowly returning to school, parents to work etc, and everyone slowly worked out how to actually 'work' with the post lockdown rules and sensitivities, it meant we effectively lost close to 5-6 months of our ability to deliver our successful face to face services and programs.

In this first half of the year, the Menslink team was quick to pivot and overcome these challenges, reformatting our programs ensuring we reached as many young men as possible within 24 hours of the lockdown being announced;

- Counselling moved to online. Noting the online methodology wasn't always ideal for our age cohort 10-25yo who mostly lived in the family home.
  - Online sessions required our clients to have a private and 'safe' space to engage with their counsellor, which wasn't always achievable for those in small houses, with thin walls and/or family members ever present in the house with them.
  - In the 'device age', young clients, despite them being on the whole tech savvy, were harder to keep focussed when working online compared to face-to-face sessions. Ever tempted to use alternate devices concurrently within the counselling session, impacting their engagement with the counsellor.
- The Mentoring Program was re-jigged into an online format to keep both Mentors and Mentees engaged and offer an important outlet for them during what was quite an insular time for many.

However, our Menslink in School programs were sadly severely impacted by COVID in the first half of the Financial Year

- Access to schools was not possible until after mid-October, yet even then still impacted by both student and teacher illness as they tried to get back to 'normal'.
- Offering our programs to school students in an online capacity was considered, but due to the concerns around sharing stories that may trigger someone in an unsupervised home environment, and our overarching philosophy to do no harm, we did not proceed with this option.

Post lockdown and early Term 1 2022;

- Schools had to first focus on the safety of their students and as such the moving feast of COVID outbreaks and school closures meant it was problematic for external service providers to enter schools. Understandably Menslink was not always a priority.
- Gradually as Teachers observed behavioural changes and increased levels of anxiety in students there was a rush to lock in our programs; in particular our PRIDE small group program was very popular and we hit maximum capacity to deliver.
- Despite demand for service, high rates of client, parent and student/teacher illness during the year, sadly meant underutilisation of our services with high cancellation rates for both counselling and Menslink in School sessions. Staff weren't immune to illness either with staff and their families impacted, resulting at times in chronic staff shortages but we know we weren't alone in this experience.

# Program Delivery for Young Men

## Mentoring Program

Unfortunately, we finished this year again with slightly fewer young men in our mentoring program compared to the prior year; a total of 77 active matches at year end. Equating to a 4% drop from the previous year as we again struggled to find volunteers willing to commit during times of economic and community uncertainty.

We trained 46 mentors, only slightly up from the previous year, congruent with the past few years COVID protocols again requiring smaller groups at training: increasing our costs. Thankfully we had 5 existing mentors who's match had ended during the year agree to be rematched with a new mentee as we tried to meet the demand for Mentors. We offer special thanks to these 'retreads' for their ongoing commitment to our program and the young men we support.



Some of the successful Lockdown Linkup events for mentees were; Awaken the Chef and Nail your own trick shot with mums often jumping in to assist their young fellas participate or film themselves. Thai & Talk was offered regularly for Mentor Check-ins.

## Feedback for the Mentoring Program

*"The Menslink mentor is the first man in my son's life that has allowed him to learn, grow and ask questions. My son is thriving with his mentor and learning that it is OK for men to be embarrassed. OK for men to be awkward and OK for men to admit they aren't perfect. It is the best way for this kid to learn and be led by the example of his wonderful mentor."*

**Shared by a solo parent (mum)**

*"Young men are dealing with a range of challenges in their lives during their pre-teen, teen and early adult years. The Menslink idea and Mentor program has been a very successful support for my son. The range of activities and meet ups are fantastic for good examples of healthy relationships and fun times for our future men. The Mentors are very engaged in their commitment to their Mentee. As a Mum, I am very appreciative and thankful for the program for my sons to have been part of the experience."*

**Solo parent (mum)**

*"Menslink plays an instrumental role in my son's life. He doesn't have a father to look up to, learn from, and have that connection with a man that all boys need. Before Menslink's Mentoring Program, my son had a lot of behavioural problems which stemmed from the abuse and then abandonment of his father. Everyone at Menslink are very professional, approachable, and keen to help wherever they can. Menslink has been our saving grace"*

**A mum**

*"A fantastic program that deserves more funding and continued support. It makes an incredible difference to families. This program helped my family in ways I did not anticipate and at a time when we were feeling lost, frightened and almost desperate. They make an incredible difference not just to the boy being mentored but to the extended family as well. Can't praise Menslink enough."*

**Solo parent (mum)**



These activities maintained the group connection whilst remote from each other. They were offered in addition to the valuable work our Mentors also undertook ensuring they continued to be present for the young fellas despite not being able to catch up 1:1.

Once our group activities were again possible, our Linkups offered such opportunities around Canberra as; Frisbee Golf, Laser Tag, Driving Range, School of Rock, Movie Nights with a motivational themed 'classic' movie option, etc. Activities enjoyed by all. Illness still plagued our volunteers and where our Mentors were impacted by COVID, our Menslink Team stepped in and supported the Mentees in their absence; ensuring the young fellas continued to have strong male support in their lives with minimal interruption.





From a starting block of 17 young men, we are proud to announce that 10 young men were able to avoid the impacts of COVID and make it through to successful attainment of their International Sailing qualifications as a result of our continued partnership between YMCA ACT and Menslink.



Unfortunately, off a great start last year, this year we were only able to take one group of mentees (11 in total) on our *Menslink Wilderness Experience*; a 16km three-day immersion into the bush where young men get to experience and learn about country from an indigenous, white settler and environmental perspective (with possibly Australia's only population of bark-eating koalas). The young men get to challenge themselves, get a sense of place, achievement and time away from their devices.





While our traditional summer camp had to be cancelled due to COVID, we were able to welcome a huge outdoor gathering in collaboration with Cricket ACT Comets Team for an afternoon barbeque – over one hundred mentors, their mentees and families came to a great event at their home ground. It bucketed rain, which was likely the best outcome, as all the kids and mentors threw off their shoes and went and played cricket in the rain! There were kids and mentors everywhere, embracing all the activities on offer in conjunction with the Comets Team; little kids and big kids engaged in kick to kick on spare spaces of the oval, and those less interested in large group activities shot hoops together with others trying out their DJ ability ensuring there were some groovy tunes to keep the atmosphere festive. A great afternoon for all with something on offer for everyone.



### **Mums included and supported**

This year we continued to invest in our mums' journey alongside their son in the mentoring program. Roni our Intake Officer managed their induction on Mentee Match Day offering insights into what works with mentoring from a parent's perspective, but she also offered every mum access to a range of resources and supports.

Mums are actively encouraged to participate in their son's mentee graduation ceremony – 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.

### **Mentor Retreat**

Finally, in May we were able to welcome nearly thirty mentors who braved the rain sleet and ice-covered roads to our mentor retreat in Jindabyne; where we were able to share stories of hardship, success and mateship over a roaring outdoor fire that Cookie was magically able to keep burning despite the weather! Another one to remember....



### **Menslink Counselling Team**



**Menslink's esteemed Counselling Team FY21/22; L-R Richard, Matthew, Grant, Biraj & Rolf**



## Counselling Program

The counselling program delivered 1,750 counselling sessions, offered at NO CHARGE, to 588 young men and their families. Despite COVID this was 122 more sessions compared to the prior year, however to 7% less individual clients. (FY20/21 - 1628 sessions to 633 young men) Around 70% of sessions were delivered at Menslink HQ with the rest delivered at the 7 schools across the Territory and one in Queanbeyan we offer In-School Counselling services to.

Whilst sessions were up in comparison to the previous financial year, we did see a downturn in the number of referrals from parents, guardians, schools and agencies both during the 2021 COVID lockdown and the beginning of the 2022 calendar year. We undertook a range of strategies including sending out a reminder of Menslink services to all schools for inclusion their school newsetters. We saw an increase in referrals in the latter half of the financial year once COVID restrictions had lifted.

We have 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).

We have also seen an increase in the number of double sessions undertaken. These are sessions whose duration greatly extends past what we would classify as a standard length of time for a counselling session, which is 45 minutes. In the past financial year, our counselling team have recorded 67 double sessions. This has created an additional administration load.

The latter half of this financial year has seen a significant increase in both last-minute cancellations and no-show appointments, which we understand to be in line with the experience

### Feedback for the Counselling Program

*"My time before I went to Menslink, I was confused about what was happening in my life. Speaking with my counsellor, was the best thing that ever happened to me, as it allowed me to peel back the layers of trauma, which then slowly, ever so slowly, showed me the pieces to my own puzzle, that I did not want to address as it was scary to me. From the word go Menslink were smiley, happy and received me in good spirit. I've been a lot of places in my life and achieved a lot of things. But the work I did with my counsellor in Menslink I am genuinely most proud of. I am blessed to have worked with this amazing organisation and I wish them all the best in their future work. If you are pondering getting counselling as a young man, if you are confused, if you are in a place and you can't speak to your parents, you can't speak to your friends, or they simply do not understand. This is the best thing for you.*

*Lads, pick your head up, life is tough, it really is, but if you have the courage to say you need help, these legends will give it to you."*

**Young Guy**

*"Menslink is amazing. Their friendly staff were very responsive to our family's needs and were reassuring when seeking help. I would recommend any parent to reach out to Menslink if your young man needs someone to talk to."*

**Parent / Guardian**

*"The first time I went to Menslink I felt like no one knew what I was going through or felt like I did, but after I left I felt not only better but realised every guy needs access to a service like this no matter the age, and that young men need good role models outside of their friends and family."*

**Young Guy**

*"Menslink Counsellors have been working with young men at 'our' School and making a big difference in their lives. The topics covered are essential for positive growth and development with counsellors often able to cover content our staff cannot. Thank you for your work and supporting our young men to achieve big life goals."*

**High School Teacher**

of other youth mental health providers in Canberra. It seems many factors are still impacting our clients focus on counselling and in particular session attendance for our younger clients; early disruption to the start of the school year, and ongoing health issues for clients and their families have often impacted their commitment to counselling.

We tackled cancellations and no-shows from a system perspective as well as with the trial of our 'remote' CIVIC location where we offered counselling sessions at this new location providing greater public transport accessibility; reducing the transport time and cost impost on parents/guardians. The CIVIC option was a success, as such we have sought further opportunities on other locations to increase our accessibility.

Support for pre-teens continued to be in demand, with 75 young guys aged 10-12 receiving free counselling support this year. 10-12 year olds are now consistently around 10% of our total counselling client base. As the demand and the level of complexity in this demographic increases, our Counselling team continues to seek training to help further support this age group.

We have a number of clients who often find it difficult to make appointments due to their work hours. As such we introduced some late afternoon appointments for each counsellor to decrease the friction we felt may have been an inhibitor for such clients to seek help. These 'Low Viz for High Viz' appointments, referencing the 'Tradie' cohort that often take up these appointments, have become very popular.

We continued to offer video sessions to existing clients who had to isolate due to COVID. We also made adjustments to our online booking system to make it easier for existing clients to take up appointments that had been cancelled or rescheduled by other clients (often at last minute).

## Positive Case Studies

The young person came to us initially for help with school issues, attending counselling for around 6 or so sessions and things settled. Then they were brought back by their parents a year or so later because the young person was very distressed but it was not obvious to them why. Sufficient safety was established by the Counsellor to allow the young person to reveal their wish to transition genders and share that they had felt unable to tell anyone despite having felt not themselves their whole life.

***Outcome – The Menslink Counsellor was able to provide assurance for the young person with where they were at and help them communicate and elicit support from their parents, offering the parents relief that their child is able to share with them again.***

A young person brought in by parents for having been abusive towards them and his siblings whilst making the household live in fear of him was counselled quite quickly (3-4 sessions). He was encouraged to be mindful of those around him and to handle his emotions by detaching from a need to express them in favour of behaving in ways that help himself to be his best self.

***Outcome – Our client was personally relieved to have learned greater controls of his emotions and to have a calmer homelife whilst his family is equally relieved with his changes and more able to relax at home without fear of when they may be on the end of his abusive outburst.***



## Menslink in Schools (Education) Programs

Our Menslink in Schools' 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 over nearly a decade delivering these programs is that young men open up and can often be more receptive to storytelling and examples from adult men who are importantly external to the 'school system' who have "been there and done that" – combining lived experience with professional expertise.

Importantly, they 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.

In the second half of this year we took the decision to offer the individual modules from the PRIDE program to schools as individual sessions. Allowing them to 'design their own program', whilst acknowledging that it can be difficult for teachers to find 8 weeks in a row to host our formal program. We wanted to ensure they could access specific modules as the need for particular topics arose. (see details below)

### Filming of the Silence is Deadly Advertisement at Raiders HQ.



## 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 to 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.



The Raiders offer us incredible support every year. Their key players together with our young Mentees to promote the importance of speaking out and sharing with a mate in our joint annual TV advertisements. This year offered special milestones for both organisations; Menslink 20 years, the Raiders 40 years and their support for Menslink and our Silence is Deadly program is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year. We celebrated by recording an extra 'Raiders Legends' version of the *Silence is Deadly* TV ad for use on social media in addition to our traditional advert. The other legends in this equation are Threesides Marketing who film for us, and WIN Television who run these adverts more than 6,000 times annually reinforcing the message that "it ain't weak to speak."

### Feedback for Silence is Deadly Presentations

*"The Menslink program is one I feel all young men should be a part of. Having the presentation today sparked conversations and allowed the students to recognise they aren't alone and there are avenues they can contact and reach out to"*

**Primary School**

*"Do your boys a favour. Menslink help boys identify how their choices have consequences and that it is cool to ask if you're ok. It's cool to say I need help"*

**Primary School**

*"From start to finish, working with Menslink is an absolute pleasure! They embody the values that we try to create within our students and staff and are able to pitch their message to a wide range of audiences. The Menslink team is professional, well equipped, and are armed with the secret ingredient – genuine care for those they are working with. Thank you Menslink for partnering with our school. I look forward to working with you into the future."*

**High School**

*"Thank you! As a teacher I've heard of many support groups for men. I understand that it is a hot topic than needs to be shared and I appreciate that the students are given the opportunity to be exposed to this support at such an early stage. I personally felt as though the program has made me question whether I have the support I need around myself too".*

**Primary School**



## PRIDE Program

This year we continued to extend the *PRIDE* program, with both the small group and classroom formats taken up in higher numbers, yet sadly to less students overall compared to last year. Illness impacted the class sizes. During the financial year (spanning two school years) we delivered 23 *PRIDE* programs to 402 young men; 6 to Primary Schools in large group classroom format which is particularly suitable for younger students as they are more comfortable discussing personal topics in larger groups. 17 were delivered to High/Secondary School students.

In the first half of the year, Term 3 we had 9 programs commenced prior to lockdown and all had to be cut short, with students missing half of the program due to inability to recommence. In Term 4 2021 and Term 1 2022 had very minimal programs booked as schools were still restricting external visitors.

Many schools have embraced the *PRIDE* program for years for both small and large cohorts of their male students. Menslink is high on their list of extracurricular programs, with some booking the year prior to ensure their students don't miss out.

*PRIDE* was delivered

- at St Eddies as part of a larger Menslink engagement with the College aimed at incorporating Menslink in Schools program into their wellness program at all year levels. .
- at Orana school as part of our continued collaboration. A further example of a school that has incorporated *PRIDE* into their curriculum.

The Youth worker at Caroline Chisholm school was approached by a group of lads asking how they could get on the program. These lads were not on his radar as "problem" lads so had not been included but after learning about the program from other students they wanted to have access to the same important content.



**PRIDE**

What do you want to be known for.

### **Feedback for *PRIDE* Groups**

*"This program always gives the students a new perspective on their relationships with their peers and especially how their behaviour can impact the females in their lives.... The content matter is seldom discussed in a school environment and the program always has a huge positive impact on the young people that participate"*

**High School**

*"Thank you Menslink for creating a safe space for our boys to feel empowered."*

**Primary School**

*"The *PRIDE* program has made a difference to the way my students view themselves and each other and respond in social situations. It has paved the way to open and honest discussions about who we are and how to get along with others during different stages of development. There are so many great "takeaways" from each session for the participants that can really have a very positive impact on individuals and on a group".*

**High School**

*"Thank you so much for providing this service. It is extremely valuable for mid primary school students. I hope we can continue with the program in 2022."*

**Primary School**

*"We have been struggling with negative behaviours between the boys, and particularly towards the girls in our school. The Presenter's talk inspired our boys to see another path, where both them and their peers all feel empowered and supported."*

**High School**

## ‘Design your Own’ Menslink in School Program

Given the difficulty for some schools to allocate 8 sessions for a group of young fellas, we took the decision to offer the PRIDE modules individually, so if the school only had time for 1 session or only a few, they could choose the ones they felt most relevant for their cohorts.

Each school group, class, and year can be different. We understand Silence is Deadly and PRIDE may not be appropriate for all situations. You can choose one or more sessions\* from our list of modules below and develop a program tailored to the needs and ages of the young guys in your school. The Menslink in Schools Program addresses learning outcomes of the following elements from the Australian Curriculum

There are 14 modules as part of the Design your Own program, we will measure the interest in each module closely; given the modules will be demand driven rather than prescriptive as part of a program, the interest will provide important insights into what Teachers feel their student cohorts need at any point in time.

### Modules

#### **Mental Health**

Silence is Deadly – Mental Health Presentation Recommended as Foundation Module  
Mental Fitness

#### **Positive Behaviour Modules**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Your Values – The real you           | 7. Your Digital Tattoo                        |
| 2. Building Self Esteem                 | 8. Dealing with Anger                         |
| 3. Creating Strong Personal Connections | 9. Your Body – Your Rules                     |
| 4. Making Good Choices                  | 10. Communication – So much more than talking |
| 5. Positive Masculinity                 | 11. Risk – Some good, some bad                |
| 6. Positive Coping                      | 12. The three sides of Bullying               |

The availability of these modules was not formally launched to schools this year, as such we only presented the modules in limited numbers. For our unit cost report we are comparing these to the historically recorded PRIDE large group presentations.

During the financial year (spanning two educational years), we delivered 12 sessions to 580 young men at Primary Schools across Canberra. Moving forward we anticipate trend reporting to be available for these modules to help further track the key issues facing our young boys in school according to their teachers.



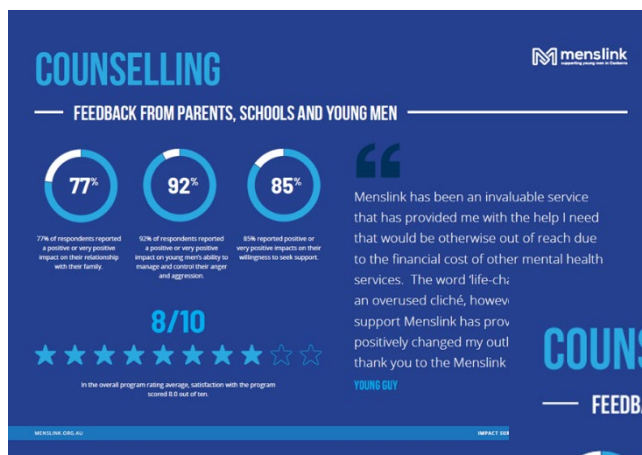
## Impact Results – What we do Works!

*Increasing young men's resilience improves their overall wellbeing and their ability to grow and get through the tougher times in life. We also know that it improves relationships – with their family, with their partner, and with their classmates or work colleagues. Martin Fisk, CEO*

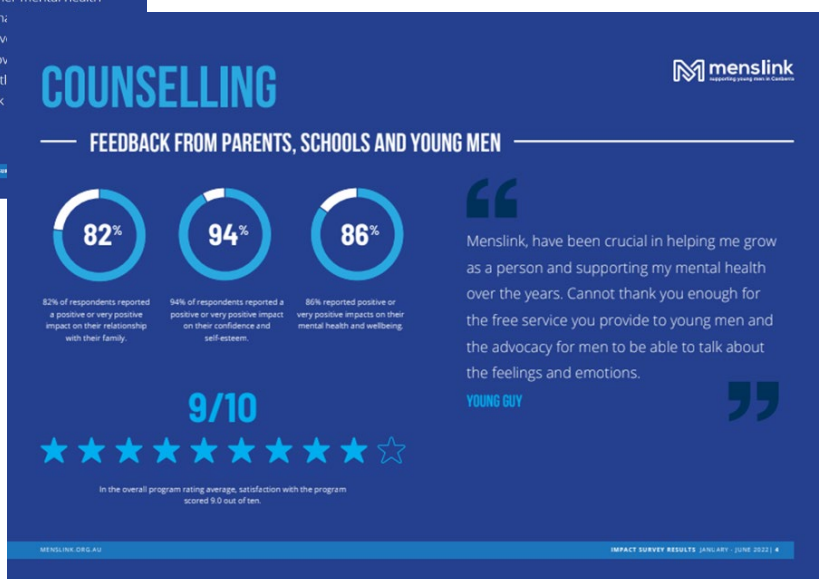
Every six months, we survey schools, parents and young men (over 18) themselves on the impact they believed our programs had had on sixteen personal and social areas. Survey results continue to demonstrate the impressive impact our work has across all our programs:

- 86% of respondents (schools, parents and young men) reported positive or very positive impacts of Menslink **counselling** on their mental health and wellbeing; 94% reporting positive or very positive impacts on their confidence and self-esteem;
- 80% of parents reported positive or very positive impacts of **mentoring** on their son's confidence and self-esteem;
- 96% of schools reported positive or very positive impacts on their students' help seeking behaviour as a result of attending **Silence is Deadly** presentations; and
- 100% of schools surveyed reported positive or very positive impacts on their students' peer and staff relationships, 80% also reported positive or very positive impacts around their ability to manage and control anger as well as positive impacts on their students' attitudes towards women after participating in the **PRIDE** program.

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



### Counselling Impact Survey (COVID) Results July – Dec 2021



### Counselling Impact Survey Results Jan - June 2022



*Continual Improvement over 12mths despite difficult times, our clients see and appreciate our Team's efforts*

## Advocacy and Community Awareness

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

With support for our community being our focus, specifically during lockdown we reached out to support our Sponsors delivering 10 online Mental Health sessions as well as running workshops at an online national family violence conference. We secured positive radio coverage throughout the same period on ABC Canberra, MIX 106.3, and 2CC, with news articles appearing in RiotAct, City News and Canberra Times keeping Menslink front and centre across the community.

Once out of lockdown, we slowly moved back to our usual pace delivering 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.

Additionally participating in over another 10 interviews across all mainstream media, from local television, radio print and online media channels.

In the middle of our unexpectedly extended lock down 12th Aug – 15<sup>th</sup> Oct our annual Business Breakfast was again held online for a second year running. Featuring Beyond Blue Chair and former Prime Minister Hon Julia Gillard AC, as she presented on mental health, resilience and leadership challenges to over one thousand (virtual) guests. We had over 75 businesses, Federal and State Government Departments, as well as private individuals dial in to join us. Many hosted small events for staff in their own offices, or enjoyed a home cooked breakfast as they listened in. <https://youtu.be/uMix9PNpzBw>

**Menslink** supporting young men in Canberra | **Menslink Business Breakfast** Tuesday September 21 2021

Special Guest Chair of Beyond Blue & Australia's 27th Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard AC.

**Major Partners**

**Principal Partners**

**Supporting Partners**

**Thank you for your support Canberra!**  
<https://menslink.org.au/>

We were privileged to celebrate our twentieth anniversary as an independent organisation with the Chief Minister and other senior dignitaries from Canberra and across the border, as well as our principal and major sponsors who - along with the ACT Government - financially support our organisation to do the great work we do.



We enlisted the support of some of our stakeholders to share on the night; clients, a mum and a school principal discussed their experiences with Menslink over the years. Our former clients - both described the impact we continue to have on their lives even decades later with the mum describing the life-changing and life-saving impact we had on her son six years ago, whilst we heard from the school principal about the critical work we have delivered in her school(s) over the past decade or more. It was a powerful evening, and a nice way for many to bid Martin a safe and enjoyable break.

We were again hampered from fundraising at large events such as the Handmade Market and Raiders games, but things were looking positive in this regard as we moved into the next financial year with such events already locked in.

We were unfortunate to only offer one *Midweek* talk before COVID put them on permanent hiatus until 2023. Magistrate Robert Cook joining us in July for what was another great evening.



# Partners and Supporters

## Sponsorship & recurrent Government Funding

Menslink has incredible sponsors who have again stood by us during this difficult economic climate.

We are grateful to the ACT Government who continued their strong support with additional COVID health related funding and a range of business relief grants ensuring we had the financial assistance to continue to offer service for our young guys and bolster us against our fundraising losses.

Our seven Principal Partners continue to lead the way in providing significant funding for our programs. Excluding Government Funding, they maintained their contribution at just over 16% of our total income for the year, with a number of them again increasing their support this year. 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 held their sponsorship at just over 16% of our total funding and much needed services for which we are very grateful.

Major partners this year included ActewAGL, ACT Veterans Rugby, Allbids, Bendigo Bank, Boorer Foundation, Canberra Raiders, Capital Recruit, CBR Brave, Cricket ACT, DDCS Lawyers, Independent Property Group, Much More Than Money, Proximity Legal, PWC, Region Group, Southside Physio, Thinkplace, ThreeSides Marketing, Vantage Strata, Village Building Co, Viva Leisure, WIN Television. Thanks to all of you!

Other corporate supporters this financial year include Advantage Advertising, BAL Lawyers, Blackshaws, Bonsella Business Solutions, Canberra Data Centres, Canberra FM, Cantlie Recruitment, Centre Red IT, Circuit Networks, Clonakilla Wines, Clynrod Foundation, Detlevs, Elite Event Technology, Excelerated Consulting, EY, Galilee School, GPG Lawyers, Hands Across Canberra, Independent Liquor Retailers, Lawrance Private Wealth, Morgans, Nexus, Nuix, Pass Foundation, PSC Insurance Brokers Canberra, Providence, RSM, Shaw Wines, University of Canberra, Watts McCray and Zoe Routh Leadership.

We acknowledge and thank our sponsors who rallied their internal teams and associated suppliers / customers hosting events to raise funds for Menslink;

- Cricket ACT - Comets Team who held a 'Chase the Comet' fundraising event where each team member undertook a variety of tough mental and physical challenges of their choice, seeking individual sponsorship for donation to Menslink. The team raised over \$14,000 for Menslink through such things as running marathons, hosting DJ events, Ocean swims etc.
- Geocon for again organising the StairChase with 9 organisations (sadly down on targeted no. of teams due to COVID) tackling the 27 floors of the High Society Building in Belconnen and raising over \$11,000 for Menslink. The overall winner completing the run in 2 minutes and 48 seconds!

### Geocon StairChase – May22



Our Menslink Team of Cookie and Dave; Before & After, with a stunning view from the 26<sup>th</sup> Floor of Geocon's High Society Apartment complex in Belconnen. (top left)  
Organising Team Geocon (above)  
Our wonderful supporters from Team Region finishing the Geocon StairChase. (left)

### Fundraising

We have been very fortunate this past year to have maintained strong fundraising capability despite the impact on networking opportunities. Our regular donors have continued their generous support, and we have attracted some new funding from a few larger private Foundations that bolstered the impact of the cancellation of one of our major fundraising events; Big Night Out.

The first half of the year started well from a fundraising perspective with both our Business Breakfast and inaugural Menslink Great Walk 2021 contributing significantly to our revenue. By holding our Business Breakfast online, we returned greater revenue to Menslink than we would normally achieve which given the impact of COVID was important, but we did miss the networking opportunity that is so valued by all.



Acknowledgement must go to our important Fundraising Committees - more volunteers who give selflessly of their time, effort and experience to Menslink;

- Big Night Out Fundraising Committee - led by Peter Munday OAM from Lennox Volkswagen and our other amazing volunteers including Fiona Sanfrancesco, Ron Shepherd, Jim Rice OAM and Rick Davis who spent countless hours preparing for our Big Night Out that never happened as sadly we had to take the unfortunate decision to cancel the event. You all just picked up and started planning for 2023!
- Menslink Great Walk Committee – Martin Fisk, Todd Wright, Bjarne Kragh who worked tirelessly prior to and during the lockdown... iterating and reiterating, taking the initial concept from an idea to the delivery of a wonderful event and huge fundraising achievement for Menslink. An incredible first year outcome - thank you for your belief and guidance.



The finish! 142km over 5 days (top)  
Not all days were sunny nor easy, but added to the challenge (left)  
Some of our walkers celebrating with us for our 20<sup>th</sup> Year (above)



## Organisation and Governance

Earlier this year we again 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, and then worked our way back to face-to-face service delivery.

Our Board meetings, staff meetings and client delivery again 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 implemented a range of business and continuous improvement initiatives during 2022 including:

- Review and update the Mentor training manual
- Review and validation of our insurances compared to operational activities and requirements, resulting in tightening of our online IT protocols
- Continued work on Salesforce CRM and its integration with client facing systems to improve client service and strengthen the all-important checks, balances and safeguards that support the wellbeing of our young guys, mentors and staff. Reporting capability was enhanced, with this work meaning we were able to relinquish other licences at a cost saving to Menslink.

### Government Funding and CRM Reporting Capability Development

Menslink actively participated with the ACT Government's new Commissioning Process. The release of the Commissioning Process Roadmap in August 2021 saw the two key Directorates who have contributed funding to Menslink over the years; The ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) and Community Services Directorate (CSD) work closely together and with NGO sector partners to deliver on the agreed Approach to Commissioning. The meetings involved in this process did impose an unbudgeted time impost on the organisation. We are grateful that both the Directorates have engaged with smaller organisations directly and through our peak ATCOSS on this issue and are exploring ways to work with us to minimise such impacts.

There is no other organisation in Canberra that deals exclusively with young men 10-25yo with such a wrap around service offering other than Menslink, as such it's vital we participate actively in this Commissioning process. We must ensure we share our knowledge and advocate at every opportunity for the needs of young men. Equally important is reinforcing the importance of, and the trust in the work we undertake with these young men, to ensure Menslink is well positioned for funding consideration beyond 2024. We thank CSD and ACTHD for their 2 year commitment of funding until June 2024.

In addition to the Commissioning process the ACT Government in 2020 introduced the ACT Wellbeing Framework which further nuances the need for increased sophistication of data collection and management in order to validate an organisation's Social Impact as it relates to the 12 domains included in the Framework.

*"We must not fall into the trap of seeing wellbeing as being just about 'today'. We need to have a keen eye to longer-term balances across the major 'systems' within which we live and engage. This will be a key factor in the Government's consideration of progress reports in shaping priorities for Government decision-making and Budget investment."* Extract from Andrew Barr MLA - Chief Minister's Foreword from the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

Menslink has always had a strong monitoring and evaluation / reporting background, focused on reporting our Impacts to provide confidence to our funders. We have evidenced prudent use of funds and provided validation that the services and programs Menslink delivers are valued and effect positive change for our clients. (See Impact Results) Yet despite our historical focus, to meet this perceived need for trend and social impact reporting we have increased the sophistication of our scope of development for our Salesforce CRM to move us towards a stronger capability in this area. Strategically establishing a more automated system that we anticipate will stand us in a stronger position to meet these anticipated Government requirements for reporting. More work is still required, and we are looking to secure further resource in FY22/23.

This CRM development work had been underway since FY20/21, but sadly the external provider had little understanding of our organisation and nuances of our work were missed in the development. Thankfully a new staff member who joined Menslink in July 21 had a background in such work and was able to divert his CRM development work efforts full time during the lockdown and subsequently as part time inputs until June 22. This offered Menslink an incredible saving and his understanding of our processes made system development more targeted, efficient and additionally saved Management time input into the process, as formal scoping of works was negated. We thank Andrew for his commitment to this work, despite it not being the primary reason for joining Menslink.

## Our People & Culture

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 felt valued, supported and engaged and that Menslink was well run and managed.



**Menslink Team 2022;** *Grant, Des, Dave, Cookie, Mongo, Rolf, Roni, Penny, Richard, Jason, Biraj & Matthew. Absent: Mark*

Like everything else this year, staffing levels were subject to significant change. We welcomed Andrew McGowan and Mark Wadie to our Menslink Team in July 2021. It was a rough start for both as they arrived only weeks prior to lockdown. Both adapted well to the unusual circumstances and simply got on with contributing what they could despite limited induction.

Sadly however we bid farewell to Rebecca Swan in November after all her hard work with our fundraising events; including supporting the move of our September Business Breakfast to an online format. Bec kept the teams in check and was incredible support to Martin, with the team really relying on her steady hand during COVID to keep everyone up to date with requirements and importantly safe. We wish her well with her future.

While we were unable to hire additional counsellors in 2022 due to COVID financial restrictions, we were very pleased to have Jason Britten join us on a Student Placement in February 22. Thank you to Rolf for primarily overseeing Jason's work at Menslink during this time.

### Training

With COVID lockdown and absenteeism due to illness combined with the cancellation of many courses, our investment in training and support fell slightly to \$28K or around 2.5% of payroll, down from expenditure in previous years.

Key outcomes from the team's training include;

- All counselling staff completed required training (formalised and self-directed) and achieved PACFA renewal;
- Roni Belden was awarded a scholarship through the Office of Women on the Audrey Fagan Leadership and Communication Program.
- David Parkes attended the Rite of Passage Framework Leadership providing positive feedback and confirmation of key learnings being incorporated into our programs.

## 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. Even in isolation you kept in touch with your mentees and ensured these young fellas had a connection and someone who cared outside of their family. We cannot thank you enough;
- Hon Julia Gillard AC who was our keynote speaker at the 2021 Business Breakfast and who helped promote the work we do to so many;
- Genevieve Jacobs who hosted our Business Breakfast and worked tirelessly during the Great Walk using her innovative flare and passion to promote via RiotAct;
- 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 I thank them personally for the additional and practical supports they provided me as I needed to leverage their specific skillsets whilst Acting CEO.



## Cost Control - 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 specifically due to restricted access to schools and low volunteer rates for Mentors meaning we couldn't grow the program as planned. Therefore, our unit costs increased for all programs as we continued to pay staff wages even while our programs were either suspended or dramatically reduced.

Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	1 Yr Change (FY20-21)	5 Yr Change (FY16-17)
<b>PROGRAM OUTPUTS</b>								
<b>Silence is Deadly campaign (single session)</b>								
Number of sessions	78	77	102	79	107	120	12%	54%
<b>Total number of young men reached</b>	<b>9,572</b>	<b>8,924</b>	<b>10,125</b>	<b>5,431</b>	<b>8,794</b>	<b>7,000</b>	-20%	-27%
YOY growth		-7%	13%	-46%	62%	-20%		
<b>Mental Fitness and Positive Behaviour Programs (multi-session)</b>								
Number of individual sessions	n/a	n/a	5	48	126	84	-33%	
<b>Number of students (multiple sessions)</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>600</b>	9%	
YOY growth				441%	-15%	9%		
<b>PRIDE Small Group Program (eight session fixed duration)</b>								
Number of groups	2	5	9	10	18	14	-22%	
<b>Number of students (multiple sessions)</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>140</b>	12%	
YOY growth	-	344%	68%	9%	71%	12%		
<b>Mentoring</b>								
Mentors trained	31	36	50	44	41	40	-2%	29%
Number of active mentoring matches	53	63	87	87	79	75	-5%	42%
<b>Counselling</b>								
Number of sessions	1,200	1,645	1,949	1,912	1,628	1,700	4%	42%
Number of clients	422	548	662	662	633	600	-5%	42%
<b>Total number of young men directly supported</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>675</b>	-5%	42%
YOY growth	33%	29%	23%	0%	-5%	-10%		
<b>PROGRAM EXPENDITURE AND UNIT COSTS</b>								
<b>Total Expenditure (excludes fundraising costs)</b>								
Expenses funded by ACT Govt Contracts	377,132	449,600	477,533	496,945	475,528	533,865	12%	42%
Expenses funded by ACT Govt COVID Funding					184,000	260,226	41%	
Expenses funded from own sources	369,473	557,304	665,700	851,947	750,731	803,600	7%	117%
<b>Total program expenditure</b>	<b>746,605</b>	<b>1,006,904</b>	<b>1,143,233</b>	<b>1,348,892</b>	<b>1,410,259</b>	<b>1,597,691</b>	13%	114%
Percentage of costs provided by ACT Govt Contracts	51%	45%	42%	37%	34%	33%		
<b>Unit cost of direct support</b>								
Unit cost per young man (all direct support)	1,242	1,269	1,255	1,441	1,545	1,799	16%	45%
Unit cost per young man (mentoring)	5,635	5,434	3,982	4,651	6,069	7,030	16%	25%
Unit cost per young man (counselling)	690	790	896	1,019	980	1,145	17%	66%
Unit cost per counselling session	243	263	304	353	381	404	6%	67%
<b>Unit cost PRIDE and Positive Behaviour Programs (not funded by ACT Government)</b>								
Unit cost per session	2,333	2,266	1,143	1,370	1,469	2,527	72%	8%
Unit cost per small group attendee (PRIDE)	4,148	2,266	1,314	2,402	1,692	1,769	5%	-57%
Unit cost per classroom attendee (PB)	n/a	n/a	734	270	383	413	8%	
<b>Unit cost Silence is Deadly campaign (not funded by ACT Government)</b>								
Unit cost per session	1,531	1,831	1,132	1,195	923	1,132	23%	-26%
Unit cost per attendee	12	16	11	17	11	19	73%	55%

\*Note we have adjusted prior PRIDE figures historically split between the full 8 session program and small groups, to now include students from 'Design your own' modules; Mental Fitness & Positive Behaviour Programs

\*\* The ACT Government COVID funding is not expected to continue.

## Future Outlook

The 2022-23 financial year has started well both operationally and financially with our sponsors and donors really getting behind us.

Counselling referrals are back on track at pre-COVID levels, yet we are seeing a lot more older clients through our doors. We had seen existing clients seemingly settle back into the rhythm of life and attend sessions with fewer cancellations and no-shows, however at the time of writing this report the latest COVID surge has thrown this again. Both individual clients and parent/guardians responsible for our clients are enjoying the option to access appointments at a range of locations closer to them; taking advantage of the time and travel cost savings. We are grateful to the other community organisations partnering with us to share their space for this purpose; minimising the cost impact of providing this option for our clients.

Constantly on the lookout for “Good Blokes” to be Mentors for our young fellas who don’t have a significant male in their life, having tried many campaigns to attract interest since July. We are still however finding it challenging to secure a commitment from our potential volunteers. We anticipate that once we get the festive season out of the way we are likely to see a positive change in the second half of the year. Conversely, we are receiving ongoing referrals for young guys who would desperately love to have a Mentor support them as they traverse their turbulent adolescent years.

Menslink in Schools has really picked up, with our ability to deliver PRIDE programs in both Term 3 and 4 of 2022 fully booked. Silence is Deadly, often something schools tackle early in the year hasn’t been as popular, but sessions are still keeping us busy. The ‘Design Your Own’ program seems to have been a positive change, with schools choosing modules relevant to the issues facing their school cohorts.

Our Business Breakfast, the first in person event for two years was a huge success with 400 of our business and government community joining us to hear Dr Zac Seidler present on the challenges faced by Men with regard to Mental Health. He was highly complementary of the work Menslink undertakes encouraging Canberra to ‘fiercely protect Menslink’ as it’s offering young men in Canberra something other states only wish they had available. Many of the audience commenting on how much they enjoyed being together again.

Our Great Walk 2022 was again a huge fundraising success, and we are so grateful to the 33 walkers and their organisations, as well as the almost 1600 donations we received from our Canberra and surrounding community.

I’ll be handing the reins back to Martin early January 2023 and look forward to what we can achieve together.

## CONTACT US

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