

**Men's Link Incorporated**  
**Annual Report 2023-24**





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

This commissioned painting represents the work Menslink does to 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 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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# Menslink in Brief



## What we are about



# Chair’s Report – Michael Battenally

Over the past year, the Canberra and regional community have again embraced the value of providing services targeting the wellbeing of young men and boys. The Board recognises the significant importance of the range of community, corporate and government partners’ contributions to the sustainability of Menslink services.

We thank this collective support for working with our CEO, Ben Gathercole, across his first of many years in the role. Ben has acknowledged to the Board that working with key stakeholders is extremely rewarding professionally and that these collaborations strengthen Menslink as an organisation. He is looking forward to building on these partnerships. Over this past year, Ben has also strengthened our staff team through targeted recruitment and carefully gearing roles to service delivery.

Our 2024 Annual Report provides evidence of the impact that the operations of Menslink have on the community, unpacking how this team provides dynamic access to wellbeing services and a range of school-based education programs for young men and boys. Of particular significance is the financial commitment of our combined government, corporate and community ensuring delivery of these programs. The audited financial reports reflect a resilient financial position the Menslink organisation has subsequently established and we thank PWC for the financial audit report.

The Menslink Board directors throughout this year have brought forward their individual skills and knowledge to engage with our CEO, Ben Gathercole, fostering a strong governance culture. Of note this year has been a lengthy review of the Menslink risk profile, culminating in significant improvements in risk controls including cyber security and policies overseeing the safety of vulnerable young people who participate in our programs.

The Board also conducted a director skills review, using this process to strengthen our work with the CEO and ensure diversity and capability are maintained at a level cognisant with governance expectations for a not-for-profit Board in the community and education sector.

In addition, directors have been involved in supporting key events and contributing to the work of sub-committees, including the Big Night Out and the Menslink Great Walk. As Chair, I sincerely thank my board colleagues for their conscientious approach to all matters and availability to Menslink throughout this reporting year.

## 2024 Menslink Board

Board Member	Role(s)
Michael Battenally *	Board Chair
Justine Saunders APM	Board Vice-Chair
Bruce Papps CA	Treasurer
Daniel Oyston	Board Secretary
Frank Lo Pilato	Chair Audit & Risk Committee
Paul Eccles *	Member Audit & Risk Committee
Katy Balmaks	

Lucie Hood	
Craig Allen *	
Ben Gathercole	Chief Executive Officer (non-voting)

\* Seeking re-election at 2024 AGM

The Menslink Board acknowledges the **ACT Government** for their sustained support from the beginning and the following **Principal Sponsors** for sustaining years of commitment.


<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACT Policing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snow Foundation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass Foundation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital Chemist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southern Plumbing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lennox Volkswagen</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEOCON</li> <li>• Canberra Data Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Village Building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boorer Foundation</li> </ul>

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

The Menslink Board would like to thank Ben Gathercole (CEO) and the Menslink staff for their contribution to the lives of young men and boys across our region.

We also acknowledge the volunteer brigade of mentors who provide thousands of hours of support to young men, including **counselling, mentoring, education, and awareness programs** that can make a life-changing difference to young men across years 10 to 25.

And to all in service to the community, thank you for being a part of nurturing our young people, from allied services, school education, club affiliations, training and employment, as they benefit greatly from your care – we thank you.

	Michael Battenally Board Chair Menslink November 2024
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2023 Great Walk team photo

# Treasurer’s Report – Bruce Papps CA

I am pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2024. Key highlights from the financial statements are as follows:

	FY24	FY23
Total revenue	2,040,163	1,905,881
Total expenditure	(2,027,185)	(2,069,482)
<b>Net operating surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>\$12,978</b>	<b>\$(163,601)</b>
Total assets (what we own)	1,326,221	1,386,585
Total liabilities (what we owe)	179,762	244,314
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>\$1,146,459</b>	<b>\$1,133,481</b>

Of note in this year’s financial report:

- After a difficult financial year in 2022/23, we have returned the organisation to earning a surplus. Significant work was done by the CEO and the management team in sourcing additional income, restructuring our operations and decreasing costs. We expect these efforts will be further demonstrated in the 2024/25 financial year results.
- Menslink continues to be sustainable and in a sound financial position. As of 30 June 2024, we have net assets of \$1.14M backed by liquid assets of \$1.25M. Our current ratio of 7 is very strong.
- For those members with a keen eye, you will note that total income for the 2022/23 financial year differs by \$20,390 from the previous year’s published Annual Report. This is due to a correction in relation to the disclosure of the change in value of investments.

As noted in this report, our sustainability heavily depends on the support of all the businesses, individuals and the government for their wonderful contributions. 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.

Finally, Menslink would again like to express its appreciation to Sarah D’Arcy and the team at PwC for providing pro bono audit services and expert advice regarding changes in reporting requirements relevant to Menslink. Thank you, PwC.

Bruce Papps

## CEO Report – Ben Gathercole

To say we are in challenging times is an understatement. The pressures on our young men are evident each and every day we deliver our services. It's no exaggeration to say that times are tough in all facets of our community. This is why, with great pride and appreciation, I, along with our wonderful staff group, very hard-working board, and many, many sponsors and contributors, continue to help young men through these times.

There are many challenges still ahead. While this report represents the 23/24 Financial year, we are also aware that we are the sum of more than just one year. We strive and continue to reach many more lives than the size of our organisation suggests. Our basic premise is to "help one young fella at a time." That will never change, whether it's tough times or not.

In black and white terms, we have the reports and thus the numbers that define the output of the 23/24 financial year as laid out in this report. Our financial performance has improved over the past financial year.

Helping young guys in Canberra is what we've done since our inception in 2001 and that remains as relevant today in 2024 as it did when we were founded. The ripple effect of our help is difficult to measure and isn't so black and white as numbers suggest in reports, but the benefit to mothers, sisters, brothers, family members, school communities and the broader community is too important not to recognise and acknowledge. We know we play a huge role as a positive influence in a young guy's life, sometimes the only positive influence in their world. If we stop and think about that, then we know we are more than just numbers in a financial year report. Each young fella is valued, listened to and supported. As I've said before, one young fella at a time.

Times continue to change fast, and there seem to be many more challenges for us all, not just our young men. It's critical we continue to evolve but also remember our core. Put simply, when a young guy needs a supporting hand or a friendly word, we will always be there. We will continue to face our many challenges as an organisation with the professionalism, clarity, goodwill, and empathy that have been the hallmark of Menslink over the years.

We will, based on the previous financial years' deficit budget, restrain our costs further and expenditures to align with our income and projected income for the coming financial year. As we have done in the past, this will be done with a fine-tooth comb through each budget line, rationalisation of costs and staffing positions. Whilst these can seem throw-away statements, I fully understand the task of running an organisation within its means. Put simply, we need to be more restrained in our ongoing spending whilst continuing the quality of our servicing. This will not be easy at times, but it's a task that is at the very core of our sustainability. Before we can grow, we must ensure we operate within our funding forecasts (government/events/benefactors) and continue the quality of service.

Whilst this report is in reference to the 23/24 FY, I pledge, as I did last year, we will not only continue the quality of service provided but we will also refresh our core program further as we go forward in the 24/25 FY while we extend our reach as Canberra and the region grows.



**For clarity and assurance to the Menslink members, we will continue with the following:**

**Education Program:** In our education space, we will evolve our current programs to meet the fresh challenges that young guys face. We will help young guys understand and meet those challenges through fresh education models and peer-based support. These program updates will be evidence-based, peer-reviewed and academically supported. In particular, we address the ever-growing social media and influencer environment that can be so detrimental. These programs (Unplugged and Tribe) have been rolled out, reviewed and refined in the first half of this calendar year.

This is in addition to our benchmark Silence is Deadly program, which is on a continuous evolution loop, ensuring its relevance in today's environment. In fact, it's important to highlight that we have presented to over 12,000 young guys in the Canberra community over the past year. Our growth has been remarkable; this success is solely due to our team of educators led by Mark Wadie and supported by David Parkes, Will Molloy and Chris Midegs, who continue to deliver more than ever expected.

**Mentor Program:** Our mentoring of young guys without a significant male role model in their lives is a keystone to what Menslink is about and who Menslink is. In fact, in my short period of time, we continue to see volunteer mentors contribute many hours of service simply because they see and feel the effects that a mentor through the 2-year program can have on young fellows. This will remain as part of our core along with our Outdoor Wilderness Experience. Our mentoring lead is David Parkes, who is supported by Will Molloy and Chris Midegs, who deliver our mentor program with an incredible amount of pride and care for our young men. We had 86 young men in the mentor program in FY 23/24.

**Counselling Services:** Our Counselling program continues to provide that safe space for young guys between the ages of 10 and 25 in the form of a professional service, a caring ear, and space to work through the challenging times and issues we all face. We will not only continue at our Holder HQ, and we also take our services to our outreach centres in Kippax, Lanyon and now Gungahlin to make access a little easier for young guys. Our counselling team, which consists of Matthew Taylor, Rolf Einhaus, Jason Britten, and our new addition, Jackson Enright, continue to help our young men calmly and professionally. I'm proud to report that throughout FY 23/24 we delivered free counselling services to 542 young men in the Canberra region.

As you well know, all these services are free to our young men and will continue to be free to our young men – it's the Menslink way.

**Showpiece Events:**

**Business Breakfast (Sep 2023):** Our Business Breakfast continues to be, as it has always been, a key component of our exposure and awareness to the business community, with our event from 2023 attended by 420 of Canberra's leaders and experts. We had the incredibly poignant keynote address by Michael Coutts-Trotter, which reminded us all of the importance of acceptance and redemption. These are core values we stand by each and every day at Menslink.

<https://omny.fm/shows/menslink-midweekers/michael-coutts-trotter-business-breakfast-2023>

**Great Walk (Nov 2023):** Our walk continues to be one of Menslink's critical events for awareness to the Canberra community. In 2023, we had 26 walkers complete the 5-day, 142k walk, raising our profile, awareness of our service, and much-needed financial uptick. In fact, we are very proud to say our walkers raised more than \$ 330,000 for Menslink services.

**Big Night Out (March 2024):** Our showpiece event this year is a full house with a heartfelt keynote address by Duncan Brede in memory of his brother Dale, who we lost to suicide. Whilst incredibly emotional, it provided a moment for us all to reflect on our why and what is important to us. To me, that is the true value of Menslink and one of the purposes of our showpiece events. The generosity of spirit generated that one night was simply incredible, and I would like to thank Duncan again for his honesty and support of us.

**Our sponsors and supporters:** Simply put, the free service we provide wouldn't happen without the major contributions of some of the finest organisations and generous people in Canberra.

ACT Government, ACT Policing, Geocon Building Canberra, Capital Chemist Group, Lennox VW, Pass Foundation, Snow Foundation, Southern Plumbing Plus, Village Building, CDC, Canberra Raiders, and the Boorer Fountain provide the core of our funding.

We also acknowledge and thank all the organisations who generously provide service in kind. We simply would not be able to operate without that important support. A simple thanks never seems enough, so please be assured your generous assistance never goes to waste. It stays local, and with your help, we help one young fella at a time.

I said last year, but now, with another year as the custodian of Menslink, I believe we have a very strong and professional board that has the very best interests of young guys in Canberra at heart. The board works tirelessly in its volunteer capacity, and its work is greatly appreciated. I personally thank the board for their ongoing generosity, kindness, and support for each Menslink staff member and all the young men we help.

Without a doubt, we have a terrific staff group that always works as one and ensures Menslink continues to provide young guys with the help they need now and into the future. In particular, Fiona McDougall, and we acknowledge previous staff members Andrew McGowan, Roni Walker, Grant Mackay, Biraj Dhital, Alec Corcoran, Penny Burns, Des Linehan and Todd Nelson.

Please contact me directly at any time if you have any concerns, suggestions, or feedback. We are all Menslink champions, and it's critical that everyone has a voice and a chance to be heard.

We are stronger together.

Ben Gathercole



*Menslink 2023 Team at the Business Breakfast*

## Program Delivery – Mentoring

We finished 2023-24 with **45 young men in our 2-year mentoring program**. This is a reduction due to the timing of our inductions; we had an additional group in FY22/23 and will have an additional group in FY23/24.

Across the course of the financial year, there were **86 young men involved in the program** at some point.

Demand for the mentoring program remains high – we had 100 eligible applications for young guys to join the program in the financial year. **22 of these young men made it through to join the program**.

The challenge for Menslink remains finding dedicated mentors. We had 77 mentor applications in the financial year, with **40 making it through to the point of completing training** and a further 15 mentors graduating and agreeing to start the 2-year journey again. The majority of these mentors will be matched with mentees in FY24/25.



*Mentor Training Weekend, July 2023*

We ran **58 'Link-Up' events** across the financial year, with **more than 700 people** (young guys, mentors, staff) in attendance across those events. This included new experiences at the Canberra Raiders and a monthly BBQ for the community to engage with Menslink. We also ran our tried and tested link ups, such as dragon boat racing, cooking competitions, laser tag, archery, community clean up at Narrabundah Wetlands, and many other mentor led experiences.

This also included **4 ‘Menslink Wilderness Experience’ camps** where we take young guys into the bush for 3 days to give them an experience (often their first ever experience) of hiking and camping. We again ran our **ever-popular summer camp** which has now become a family and community day to great success. Each camp is an invaluable opportunity for ten young men to participate in and we were proud to introduce 40 new boys to this experience. The mentor team is supported in running this experience by a member of our counselling team and one of our mentors.

We had **five graduation events** during the year, with **41 young guys and mentors** graduating from the program. It is at these events that we really see and hear the impact of the mentoring program. We see the physical maturation of the young men, but more importantly, we witness and honour their emotional growth. For many of the young guys, the program has been their first experience with a positive male role model. It is a life-changing program – for both the young guys and the mentors.



*Menslink Wilderness Experience, November 2023*

## Program Delivery – Counselling

Our Counsellors saw **542 young guys** in 2023-24, a 6.8% decrease from the 579 we saw in 2022-23.

**1883 counselling sessions were attended in 2023-24.** This was a decrease of 329 sessions from the 2212 attended sessions in 2022-23 (a decrease of 14.87%). 115 sessions were ‘double sessions’—running substantially longer than the standard appointment time of 50-60 minutes.

In this reporting period, there were staffing changes in the Counselling team with one redundancy being made, Grant Mackay, and the resignation of another full-time counsellor, Biraj Dhital. This led to the recruitment and training of Jackson Enright to our team. Rolf Einhaus also reduced his working hours in this reporting period.

We had a total of 2,613 booked sessions across the year. 540 (19%) were cancelled by a client, or the client did not attend the session without notice. Being a no-cost service, late cancellations and ‘no shows’ continue to be an issue for us and other no-cost services in the sector. We are looking at expanding our strategies in 2024-25 to improve the attendance rate and ensure our counsellors are as well-utilised as possible.

We saw the majority of the 542 young guys at our Holder head office, but a significant number, 188, were seen at remote sites. We again provided services at eight high schools during the year (Amaroo, Calwell, Gold Creek, Lanyon, Lyneham, Melba Copland, Namadgi and Queanbeyan).

From November 2023 we started offering sessions at Lanyon, in partnership with Lanyon Community Centre. We will be offering sessions in Gungahlin at the Gungahlin Community Youth Centre from July 2024.

We offered a total of 6 sessions via phone or video for the full year. This is a conscious decision from our organisation – we believe that face-to-face support is the most effective method, especially when so many young guys spend most of their days looking at screens.

Some other statistics of interest:

- The most common client age was 15 (81 clients), with 383 young guys aged from 10-17 and 159 aged 18 or older. There was continued demand for pre-teen support, with 82 (15.13%) of clients aged 10-12.
- Anxiety/stress was the most common ‘presenting issue’, followed by anger management, family relationships, grief and depression.
- The most common referral source was Mums, followed by schools and then the young guys themselves.

## Program Delivery – Education

Our school education programs continued to deliver important messages within schools across the Canberra region in 2023-24, reaching **12,165 people** at in-person sessions and many more through our ad campaigns.

### Silence is Deadly:

Our flagship ‘Silence is Deadly’ program was as popular as ever. While the core message of the program is the same (It’s Not Weak to Speak), we are constantly updating the delivery to make sure it is hitting the mark with our changing audience.

We delivered **108 Silence is Deadly sessions to 7375 young people** across the Canberra Region in 2023-24.

In partnership with the **Canberra Raiders, WIN Television and Threesides Marketing**, we again ran the Silence is Deadly television ad campaign – reaching thousands more young people (and people of all ages) across the region. We thank our wonderful partners for their generous support in continuing to promote this important message.



## TRIBE:

Our 8-week, small group TRIBE program had its biggest year by far in 2023-24. **We delivered 54 TRIBE programs to 851 boys in schools across the Canberra region.**

Guiding young fellows on their journey to manhood with Trust, Resilience, Independence, Bravery and Empathy, TRIBE is an experiential 8-week program for young guys (max 12 participants) who are identified as having influence as leaders within peer groups in the school community. Upon graduation, we aim for these young men to be inspired and motivated to share what they have learned with peers and younger year levels, thereby building a school TRIBE that is more inclusive, supportive and accountable.

The youth workers at one participating high school have reported that the TRIBE programs have seen a significant change in the school's culture following the leadership of the TRIBE boys over the past 12 months. They have also seen a remarkable shift in the boys' respect for girls and the younger students.

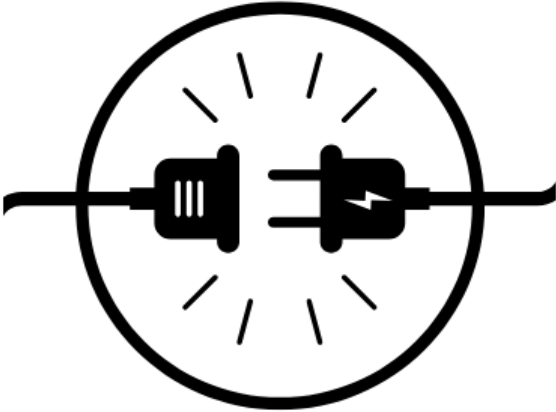
The TRIBE boys typically go on to share their TRIBE learnings with their peers and younger students. School staff are also very appreciative and find great value in the tools, stronger student relationships and facilitation skills they develop when working side by side with our Menslink facilitators.



## Unplugged:

The new one-hour program was launched in February 2024. Between February 2024 and June 30th, **2024, we delivered 37 workshops to 3156 boys.**

Menslink Unplugged is a brand new 1-hour program for 2024 that helps young guys identify where their social media and technology consumption may be affecting their values, decision making and mental health. We challenge the young guys to question the time, content and impact of social media and technology on their lives. Highlighting some of the key trends that are currently influencing our young men, such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, video games and numerous influencers, we create a deeper awareness where young guys are inspired to challenge and question the content and quantity of what they consume while inspiring them to take charge of their lives through conscious choice.



# UNPLUGGED

Unplug to Connect



# Business Partners

As our CEO mentioned in his report, Menslink has incredible business partners who have stood by us and continue to stand by us.

We are grateful to the ACT Government, which has continued its strong support. We look forward to engaging with the Commissioning process in 2024/25 as we seek to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of our services and the value of further investment.

Our ten Principal Partners continue to lead the way in providing significant funding for our programs. We cannot thank them enough for their continued support of Menslink. We also thank the PASS Foundation for its very generous, significant, and ongoing contribution.



We had many, many other Supporting Partners this year who provided generous financial contributions, auction items and other in-kind services. We thank all these organisations as well.

## Contact Us

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