

2019/2020

ANNUAL REPORT


Arthritis
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
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pain
support

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Well what can we say about 2019/2020? It certainly been an interesting year for everyone! We thought as the TCH pool issues continued to rumble along, and then finally decisions were made to ensure certainty for our future, and the future of hydrotherapy for the southside of Canberra, that we would be able to sit back and enjoy more certainty going forward. Little did we know what world events had waiting for us.

Whilst we knew that not everyone was going to be happy with decision we made regarding supporting the Government to close the TCH hydrotherapy pool, we didn't feel that we could risk manage the ongoing uncertainty any longer, and whilst we had tested out relationship with the ACT Government and pushed to have the best outcome for our community, we also knew that we were also going to have to make some concessions. We were well aware that the pool could fail at any time, and whilst it seemed somewhat presumptive to literally pull the plug on the pool whilst it was still operational, we also understood that we would loose our bargaining power if we waited for the pool to fail prior to making a decision, both in terms of funding to provide an alternative pool, but also in availability of other facilities. It was a hard decision, but it had to be made. Now as

history would show, the timing was fortuitous as COVID descended upon us just weeks later, resulting in the closure of all facilities.

Operating a community health organisation through an unprecedented pandemic is certainly not something any Board members puts their hand up to do. I'd like to thank our staff team for their patience and ingenuity throughout the first lockdown period. The way they were able to turn programs around to ensure as many people as possible gained support for the pain was amazing and a credit to them all. Within a week of close down we had a calendar full of online programs including support for those who were scared and isolated, exercise programs, education sessions and ongoing written advice that kept us all up to date. Whilst other organisations were quoting a 3 month turn around to be able to establish support programs, our staff just did it. Many of these are continuing to this day and we've discovered a way to support many of our members that had not been previously available. Some of our staff even did home visits to help our members set up zoom on their phones or computers to enable them to participate.

We are now located both in Bruce and Pearce, which is proving to be very popular with our members. The delivery of a range of programs is constantly being extended and it is great to see good uptake and full programs once again. The team works hard, and are a credit to the leadership of the CEO, Bec Davey. We had commenced the financial year with the plan to be totally self-sufficient through our fee for service programs and although history had another plan in store for us, we have remained very much viable and most importantly relevant to the community. From the time lockdown ended our community was coming back in droves to participate in the programs again.

Thank you to our Board members for remaining steadfast through this trying year, it does go to show what can be achieved even through this difficult year. I want to thank Bec Davey for her courage and leadership, good humour and professionalism throughout the year. And also, thank you to our staff team for keeping your focus on our clients.

Carol Mead

FROM THE CEO

Over the years I have been able to lead this wonderful organisation I thought I had come across just about every challenge that could be thrown at me, but apparently not! I felt broken hearted when we finally made the decision to support the Government in the closure of the TCH pool. Broken hearted because I knew so many had fought so hard to avoid this happening. Broken hearted because I felt I was letting so many of our members down, that they wouldn't understand why in the end we had to do what we had to do. Until mid-February my work for the year had been completely dominated by that one word again - pool. Little did we know what was about to descend upon us.

The Collin's Dictionary word of the year is 'Iso'. It's very Australian to take short cuts with our language. What we have really found this year though is there's been no shortcuts for dealing with the particular challenges the year has thrown at us. From fires and smoke, to storms then a pandemic. It's been a year where more than ever every word, every deed, has mattered. It has been a pleasure to be able to walk beside our community at such a difficult time. Whilst none of us would have ever want this, would have ever dreamed of this, it certainly has been a year where we've really had the opportunity to see the best in everyone, and it's been a pleasure to have been witness to the wonderful acts of kindness and care I've witnessed from our members, the greater community and my staffing group.

I'd finally just like to say a big thank you to all those who have worked with us this year, especially our pool volunteers who have assisted us with the transition from volunteer lead services to staff lead services with amazing volunteer community builders. Thank you as well to our Board who have been an amazing support through the year and without whom we wouldn't exist.

Rebecca Davey



Hydrotherapy

Arthritis and Pain Support ACT delivered 1343 self-lead exercise sessions of hydrotherapy in 2019/2020 and an additional 339 instructor lead sessions. Despite the pandemic this was an increase on the previous year. People attend hydrotherapy to assist with pain. Participation in hydrotherapy reduces pain without increased need for analgesia. This means less medicines for pain consumed, less presentations to A&E because people had a cost effective choice for relieving their pain, a significant reduction in the level of type 2 diabetes for those participants engaging in regular hydrotherapy, a reduction in the amount of surgery required to improve joints, and an increase in the satisfaction of those who have had joint replacement because of this therapy. Hydrotherapy is not a lifestyle choice, it is a matter of no choice for many of our participants. For many, it is the pool or it is full time care, extended hospital stays. It means broken families, reduced social participation, increased mental health distress. Most importantly our hydrotherapy program has given many of our participants an escape from their daily battle with pain, and a community who understands. What are you doing to improve your pain?

Exercise Physiology including Tai Chi and Yoga

When you are living with chronic pain, when you are struggling to do the basic requirements of life, when everything is a struggle, the thought of exercise is tough. What we know, though, is exercise is the key to a long, happy, and health life. Our team of exercise professionals live and breathe the support they provide. They are caring, but they can be rough when you need them to be! Most of all, they just want the very best for you. Our exercise physiologists can offer you one to one support, support in hydrotherapy, group classes, home programs, they can support you at your local gym to work out what is best for you, or they can teach you how to use your own environment to use your body to best of it's ability. We also regularly support student exercise physiologists to learn about musculoskeletal and pain conditions so they will go out into the world as better practitioners in the future. Thank you Sophie, Hannah, Gwen, Blake Eli and Tash for supporting our community!

Dietetics

Food is medicine, and the sharing of food is inherently social and we are hard pressed to think of a culture in which sharing a meal is not an essential part of life. Whilst there is endless wisdom to be found in books and on the internet about our diet, it is inherently personal and our program is just that - personal. No judging, no unrealistic expectations. We all know that a good diet leads to better health outcomes. It's the personal touch that makes it more attainable. Talk to Erica our TimTam eating dietitian!



Strength & Balance



Our program has been supported through an AusSport initiative in conjunction with Arthritis Australia this year. This program has become integral to the care we provide to the community. As COVID hit, Strength and Balance clearly couldn't continue face to face. Not to be daunted our fantastic team of EP's and Exercise Scientists took the the big screen, recording sessions for those who could not attend live screened events, and telecasting a daily session for those who could attend live events. This has meant even through shut downs people have been able to connect digitally. We did home visits to those who needed assistance setting up 'zoom', and for some we did home visits to provide them with a written program so they could keep exercising.

GLA:D

Arthritis ACT was one of the first providers of GLA:D in the ACT. GLA:D®, or Good Life with Arthritis: Denmark, is an education and exercise program developed by researchers in Denmark for people with hip or knee osteoarthritis symptoms. Arthritis ACT has been in a unique position where we have been able to offer Dietetic, Counselling, Occupational Therapy and social participation as a part of GLA:D. Again not to be daunted by COVID, GLA:D went virtual in the latter part of the year with our physiotherapists offering 1:1 sessions via telehealth. Ongoing good health depends on continual behaviour change, not just intermittent interactions. A big shout out to Jacqui Couldrick, Physiotherapist, who has so single-mindedly ensured that Arthritis ACT maintain a strong focus on osteoarthritis and ensuring the best outcomes for those living with osteoarthritis. A big thanks to Richard and Nathan who also undertook the GLA:D training to ensure our community's needs are met.



Whilst GLA:D is an amazing program for people living with hip and knee osteoarthritis, we started seeing people who were needing further support. With thanks to Nathan Burns and Sophie Bullock, we developed 'My Exercise', a program that targets upper body pain, lower back pain and/or lower limb pain for anyone with any diagnosis. It's not just osteoarthritis that causes pain! These programs have changed people's quality of life for the better! Completely tailored to meet your needs, they include education as well as exercise classes that improve the musculoskeletal system and reduce pain levels markedly.

Occupational Therapy

Access to Occupational Therapy remains a significant issue in the ACT. We have been so fortunate to obtain the services of Rohit Batra after our previous OT Jacqui returned to her family in Sydney. Rohit is not only an exceptional OT, but he has a real passion for assisting those most in need in the community. With a growing need for functional reports for access to any type of disability support we seem to have become experts in co-ordinating a thorough response to various Government agencies to assist our members who are most at need of support to gain access to these supports. Unfortunately access to the NDIS is becoming more and more the purview of 'those that can afford expensive reports'. Thanks to our generous donors we've been able to support some of the most in need Canberran's to gain support to the NDIS that would have been otherwise denied to them.

Juvenile Arthritis

The ACT continues to be poorly serviced for children with musculoskeletal conditions and pain. Government continues to ignore our calls for increased local resourcing. For many years Arthritis ACT have been educating the Government on both the need for specialist paediatric rheumatology services in the ACT and have even offered solutions. During this year we participated in a review of paediatric services through Health Consumers. Whilst the research has been accepted by Government we are yet to see any improvement in paediatric services in the ACT, and the majority of ACT families continue to drive up and down the Highway to Sydney, sometimes every month, to receive care.

Arthritis ACT continues to assist families on an individual level however without adequate services in the ACT we will never have a 'community' who receive care here. This leads to families being even more isolated without a sense of having others around them who are living the dream as well.



Pain Support

Pain Support ACT commenced it's new relationship with Arthritis ACT during this financial year. With activities co-ordinated by a reference group who meet regularly and better co-ordination of all programs to increase the focus on pain, former pain support members have been able to get the great support they gained through membership of Pain Support ACT as well as the increased benefits of membership with Arthritis ACT.

A big thanks goes out to Margaret, Dennis and Kathy in particular who are a wealth of knowledge on where to access supports across Canberra (and interstate for those who need to make that choice).

When it comes to Arthritis, it is Pain that brings people to seek support. The melding of both organisations was a natural synergy, and has allowed the organisation to organically grow as a result.



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Health Practitioner Education

An important role for Arthritis and Pain Support ACT has been the nurturing of allied health students through clinical placement. This year we have had Counselling, Exercise Science, Exercise Physiology, Physiotherapy from UC and interstate Universities as well as Community Service students from CIT. Our staff team are integral for ensuring the next generation of health care providers and importantly, our clients are the essential link. Unless our next generation of health care providers gain the experience of dealing with real clients, they don't learn how to work with people just like us once they graduate. Thank you to everyone who has been generous enough to share their experience and life.

Finally a big thank you to our Administration team for all the wonderful work they do! They are the front line of everything and deal with everything, everyday. You are all superhero's in my books! Thanks Nat, Elsa, Grace and Ben

Treasurer's Report

Arthritis and Pain Support ACT had set a goal this year to establish financial self-sufficiency through our fee for service programs. It is difficult to rely solely on donations and Government grants and the Board had made the decision a number of years earlier to establish the fee for service program to not only provide a better service to the community, but to also allow our Foundation to have that element of self-sufficiency which meant it could better meet the needs of the community without having to depend on funds that often don't adequately cover the true costs of program delivery. By February the Foundation had met that challenge, with fee for service being completely self-sufficient. Then the world changed. It is always important for a business to be fiscally responsible. Whilst a surplus is a goal, allowing there to be funds for future unfunded activities (piloting new programs to establish their worth) and ensuring there are funds for unexpected financial hits, we can't always achieve a surplus at no risk to our business. This year we were hit by that unexpected and unimagined financial hit.

Good planning, generous Government stimulus, and a belief in our staff have allowed us get through the worst of this year without too great a hit to our bottom dollar. As a not-for-profit, it's also important to remember that we are not in the business of making a profit. We are in the business of providing a community service. As the initial lockdown hit, and most of our services ceased essentially overnight, the Board made a decision to not follow the lead of many businesses in standing down our staff. We have invested in our staff to both attract and retain the best people to provide the best services to our community. Users of services such as ours deserve the best, and the best is who we believe we have on our staff team. We did not want to have to lose their passion for the community nor their skill base which makes them all so unique. Initially we hoped the lockdown wouldn't last too long, and then we found we would be eligible for a number of Government programs designed to keep business intact, and through the various stimulus payments and Job Keeper, we were able to keep all our staff meaningfully employed, meeting the needs of our community, and most importantly, there as soon as doors began to open again to be able to resume immediately with services as soon as the community was ready to come out again. Throughout the financial year we have received funding for the following:

ACT Government funding provides support for 614 hydrotherapy sessions per year, information services, community education and support groups.

AusSport provided us with funding to continue our Strength and Balance Program and the Nordic Walking program.

We have had generous support from the Shakespeare Family Trust for a number of years who allow us to support those who can't afford to pay for services but are in fact those who need services the most.

We had a couple of larger donations from community supporters who believe strongly in the programs we operate and their benefit to the community.

Our membership and fee for service payments have allowed us to continue to offer more and more support to the community.

Our regular smaller donors without who's support we could not continue to support those in need.

We are grateful to all our funders for their continued support through us of the community.

Thank you to the support of Nexis Accountants and to our Auditors Hardwickes for their support throughout the year.

I commend the annual financial reports to our membership.

Adam Cooper