Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc.
Annual Report 2013

STRONG & Vibrant

Hills Community Aid Aid
Providing Support Since 1969
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A CONSTANT IN THE SHIRE

On the 1st of December 1969 Sue Ellis, the first Social Worker appointed by Baulkham Hills Shire, called volunteers together and formed the Baulkham Hills Shire Neighbour Aid Committee. In 2013 the core of what is now known as Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc. (HCA) is still volunteers. At the volunteer luncheon held at the Bull ‘n’ Bush in June, staff were well outnumbered by over 35 volunteers representing many of the programs currently run.

In 1974 the Council built a purpose built Community Centre on Windsor Road to house Neighbour Aid. At this point Neighbour Aid was morphing into two separate organisations; what we now know as Hills Community Care and HCA. In the 70s the information service was a simple card system, but today information is all stored digitally, internal databases and tools like Google really have sped up the information delivery process.

The growth in community services in the area brought an increased need for better referral and coordination between services and 1978 saw the Neighbour Aid and the Citizens Advice Bureau officially merged into Baulkham Hills Shire Community Aid & Information Service.

Emergency help, home visits for those in need and transportation were still important but information became a major focus in the new organisation.

At the AGM in 1982 Baulkham Hills Shire Community Aid & Information Service reported that they had responded to 87 neighbour aid requests and 1800 calls for information. Today these numbers have increased substantially with HCA responding to over 473 aid requests and 5513 calls for information. With new technology HCA also gets a similar number of information enquiries through the website www.hca.org.au.

While our impact in the community has grown in volume it has also grown in the variety of programs HCA provides to the community. HCA now provides over 20 programs covering Financial Welfare, Community Engagement, Families, Children & Youth and Senior Engagement.

With plans for substantial growth in coming years HCA expects to see an increase in programs by up to 25%.
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

It is difficult being a generalist service provider in the community sector, with many community sector organisations specialising to have a better chance to attract government funding. However HCA is proud of its heritage and its ongoing commitment to providing services in whatever part of the community of the Hills and surrounding areas that needs it.

This year saw the start of a change at HCA which will be seen in the way programs are managed in the future. The Community Development Workers have been assigned program portfolios, and each program will have for the first time, its own separate cost centre.

This is a great move forward for measuring the sustainability of HCA’s programs. As HCA moves forward it will be talking about the Financial Welfare Portfolio, Families, Children & Youth Portfolio, Seniors Engagement Portfolio and the Community Engagement Portfolio and how we align these to the NSW State Government’s plan, NSW 2021.

NSW 2021 outlines 32 goals for the NSW State Government to achieve in its vision for 2021. Of these HCA are currently addressing 7 of the 19 goals in the Return Quality Services and Strengthen Our Local Environment and Communities sections of the plan.
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our operational focus during the year has been to ensure that existing programs continued to attract strong community support and to deliver on our Vision and Mission. Our wonderful staff and volunteers have ensured that this was achieved and in fact, a number of programs saw increased support by the community, reflected in increased attendance numbers. These are discussed in detail elsewhere in this report.

The past year was one of considerable challenge for the Board of Governance, not least of which was the need to again recruit an Executive Officer. Following an extended period of recruitment, I am very pleased to confirm the appointment of Ben Jackson to the role in June. We have every confidence that his experience, professionalism and ability will provide considerable value for many years to come.

The Board is a strong, united team of volunteers and all members have made significant contributions during the year, but it is appropriate to specially acknowledge and thank the following people who went ‘above and beyond’:

Yvonne Jones - Yvonne looked after the NILS and Emergency Relief programs during the extended absence of Shyama Perera and has given so much of her time to the accounting and budgeting processes. It is hard to imagine a more dedicated, hardworking and effective contributor.

Daniele Di Paolo and Judith Scott put a lot of work into a complete review of the Policy and Procedures Manual and the alignment of the existing constitution with the new model constitution. Without their commitment, hard work and expertise we would not have achieved such outstanding results.

Ruth Petersen looks after the ‘The Learning in the Hills’ program which runs seamlessly. Ruth took leave during the year and was able to identify and implement very effective relief arrangements so that the program could continue without disruption.

We also have strong stakeholder engagement and relied on a number of them for assistance during the year. Particular thanks go to:

- Donina Va’a from FaHCSIA
- Gaynor Corfield from the Hills Shire Council, for their counsel and contribution to the recruiting process
- Margaret Tipper from Community Resources Network for her contribution to the review of our Constitution; and
- Brian Smith from LCSA for his ongoing support and advice.

Although the future is not without its challenges, we can have confidence that HCA is well placed to meet them and to continue to grow and provide value to the Community it serves.

Rob Dicker-Lee
President, Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc.
FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc. have been without an Executive Officer for eight of the twelve months of the 2013 Financial Year. This has placed a large burden on the operating staff and volunteers to keep the ship afloat and they have done an admirable job of that.

The President, Rob Dicker-Lee, also made significant sacrifices to keep HCA moving in the right direction and sat in the Executive Officer’s chair for some time. It is this type of commitment from staff and board that makes my transition into HCA such a rewarding and welcoming one.

Respect, trust, care and support, inclusiveness and the contributions of all people are great values for an organisation to work by and in my short time here I have seen much of it.

As a rule people at HCA are ready to go above and beyond. One such person is Ruth Petersen who has been a volunteer coordinator at Learning in the Hills for seven years. With sadness Ruth has resigned from the position. Her contribution has been invaluable and HCA will struggle to find a volunteer as committed to replace her.

Looking forward, the coming year has many challenges for HCA as we strive to have each of our programs more accountable and fiscally responsible. This will be a real learning curve for HCA which to date has only put the magnifying glass over a half dozen of our major programs. The financial report will look considerably different next year.

HCA will also start to restructure its operations into program portfolios which will allow us an opportunity to grow some specialities in our programming and drive our value to the community.

HCA have had a sound year financially, and in our programs, which gives us a great foundation to springboard into 2014.

Ben Jackson
Executive Officer, Hills Community Aid & Information Service Inc.
PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It has once again been a challenging year for the Foundation and although only enjoying limited success with fundraising, a number of strategic milestones were reached, which stand us in very good stead for the future. Chief among these are outlined below.

Our inaugural Cocktail Party fundraiser was held at the Bella Vista Hotel with great success and is sure to become a fixture in our future fundraising calendar. Our heartfelt thanks go to Ross Colosimo of Australian Brewery for providing the venue, finger food and drinks which made the event possible.

We established an income stream to meet our limited administration costs, thus ensuring that 100% of all donations continue to be returned to the community. We have at long last secured our own premises in Wrights Road with the help of Hills Shire Council, and our particular thanks go to Raquel Bloom, Communities Halls & Facilities Coordinator, for her professionalism and support.

None of these milestones would have been achieved without the energy, enthusiasm and drive of our Treasurer Gailsusan Clarke; my fellow Directors and I wish to acknowledge her contribution and thank her most sincerely for her tireless work on behalf of the Foundation.

We remain in a sound financial position and are pleased to report that our 'Bridging the Gap' program achieved a number of positive outcomes in support of the disadvantaged in North Western Sydney.

Having finally obtained our own premises means we can work to really grow the Foundation in a more sustained manner, and we look forward to a very exciting year ahead.

Rob Dicker-Lee
President, Community Foundation of North Western Sydney

REMEMBERING A DEAR FRIEND

It is with great sadness that we remember the loss of our dear friend R.W. (Bill) Dixon, who passed away in August this year.

Given Bill’s long history with Hills Community Aid and its subsidiary, The Community Foundation of North Western Sydney, we felt it appropriate to dedicate this space in our Annual Report as a tribute to his contribution as a volunteer over many years.

Bill set the standard for what a good volunteer should be: a very capable man who was generous with his time and ability, always ready to jump in and help, selfless, non-judgmental and passionately dedicated to improving the lives of the less fortunate in our community.

Both directly and indirectly, Bill touched the lives of many, including fellow volunteers, staff at HCA, stakeholders, politicians and of course the many folk who used our services. His can-do approach and willingness to tackle and overcome all obstacles had a positive impact on all of us. He was one of a kind, irreplaceable, and he will be greatly missed by all of us.

Image (above): Bill about to take on the Hills Relay for Life
2013 PROVIDES A STRONG PLATFORM FOR GROWTH

As can be seen in the accompanying graphs and tables HCA has had a strong year financially. This is primarily attributable to the hard work that Rob Dicker-Lee, as President, in the absence of an Executive Officer, has contributed.

In the donation of his time and hard work, combined with the ongoing commitment from long term staff, it has created an opportunity for financial efficiency. This can be seen in the adjoining graph, where an increase in income and a reduction in expenses has meant a growth in the surplus from the last financial year.

The increased surplus has had a parallel increase in accumulated funds. This level of accumulated funds in combination with stability in management will prove to be the foundation for growth in the coming financial year.
GRANTS KEY TO ONGOING SUCCESS

Most of the programs that HCA runs are funded by government grants. However there are some exceptions to that rule. Learning in the Hills and the Community Bus both have significant overhead costs and so recoup some of these costs by charging below commercial rates for the service.

Under the Financial Welfare Portfolio, the NILS program is supported by FaHCSIA federally and the Department of Commerce at a State level for the operational side of the program.

For the loans the primary supporter is NAB, but it is also supported by Sydney Water and the Community Foundation of North Western Sydney.

The Emergency Assistance Program is operationally supported by FaHCSIA also but aid funding is supplied by FaHCSIA, Telstra, Sydney Water and the Department of Trade & Investment Resources and Energy.

Many of the programs in the Families, Children & Youth, the Seniors Engagement and the Community Engagement portfolios are funded by Community Builders funding through the NSW State Department of Human Services Community Services. The obvious exception being the Our Rouse Homework Group which was seed funded by Lend Lease as part of their community program in the Hills.

With income diversification a slow process, government grants are the key to ongoing success for HCA in the short term. The challenge for HCA will be to build other income streams in coming years so as to reduce our reliance on government funding that must be regularly tendered for and potentially lost.

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<td>Net Cash Used in Operating Activities</td>
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<td>Net Cash Used in Investing Activities</td>
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<td>Net Cash Used in Financing Activities</td>
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NILS BUILDS FINANCIAL CAPACITY

The No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) provides low-income earners with flexible and affordable credit for the purchase of essential items including items such as white goods, furniture, computers, medical equipment and household repairs. NILS is supported by NAB and the Community Foundation of North Western Sydney, who provide the loan capital and cover any defaults, which by commercial standards is very low.

SINGLE PARENTS AND THE FRIDGE

The NILS Scheme at HCA provided 199 loans to those in need this year and as can be seen in the adjacent pie charts some obvious trends have emerged. While NILS varies from loan provider to loan provider, at HCA, we try and be as flexible as possible. One trend is the increasing number of clients accessing loans for car repairs and purchases but unsurprisingly the fridge remains the most popular single item for these NILS loans.

It is clear from the Household Status information that families are the main clients for NILS loans. Again this is unsurprising with the ongoing increases in cost of living and the additional cost burdens that bringing up a family brings to the income earners. Single parents with children are the main segment and this is indicative of other social issues like domestic violence, high divorce rates and difficulty in getting fair maintenance payments.

TURNING LIVES AROUND

Ron contacted HCA through the local member. He was experiencing financial stress after losing his job through redundancy. This caused some mental health issues for Ron and he was unsure where to turn.

HCA was able to have an immediate impact by accessing emergency relief funding for Ron to help him with outstanding bills and put food on the table. Referring him to HCA’s on site Financial Counsellor also had immediate results with the Financial Counsellor able to renegotiate his financial commitments with his banks. This was a critical step to financial and emotional well-being for Ron as the debts were stacking up and the stress he was under was creating many secondary emotional well-being issues.

Ron is now back on the job hunt and, although he fears his IT skills are a little dated, he is exploring his old industry along with many new opportunities for employment.
Program Reports
Community Engagement Programs

THE COMMUNITY BUS

The HCA Community Bus’ wheels continue to go ‘round and round’ as many a kindergarten student would sing, but for many in the community it is the destination not the journey that is important.

The HCA Community Bus is a cheap alternative to commercial bus hire for many community organisations. Ranging from one off day trippers to regular drop off and pick-ups community organisations are delivered to their destination thanks to volunteer drivers. Without these drivers, HCA would have to charge near-commercial rates.

Overall, the bus travelled 23,010 kilometres over 173 days of bus hire compared to 171 days in 2011-2012 with more than 3633 community members using the service. Many thanks to the Keenes for continuing to allow us to garage the bus on their property, to the HCA office volunteers who maintain the bus records and Mary Boshell who coordinates the program as a volunteer.

40+ YEARS OF LEISURE LEARNING

Leisure Learning started in 1982 with no premises, no funds and no equipment. By February 1983 almost 300 students had been enrolled. This was an amazing feat for those early pioneers of what is now known as Learning in the Hills.

There was a lot of blood sweat and tears that went in to making sure the Leisure Learning program got off the ground, and if you believe the stories there was even the odd husband conscripted into repairs and maintenance to ensure premises were in good enough condition for the first classes. Today, three rooms are hired out to deliver classes to over 145 students every term who are involved in painting, sewing, needlework and a variety of other courses.

This year Learning in the Hills conducted 74 different courses with a total of 6048 hours. While Ruth Petersen thanked “everyone who has been involved in Learning in the Hills for the last 8 years including the office volunteers, teachers, tutors, and kitchen volunteers for their tireless help”, it will be her that HCA will sorely miss.
THE HUB OF ALL INFORMATION

The Rouse Hill Information Hub enhances community, information and referral services providing local organisations and causes to carry out information awareness campaigns. Campaigns that promote services, community programs and health issues, as well as provide Justice of the Peace services. The service operates the second and fourth Thursdays of the month from 1pm to 5pm at Rouse Hill Town Centre.

Through this activity HCA will identify and implement specific strategies for joint initiatives with other services that support families, children and communities.

To date the Hub has been on location seven times and reached out to 274 clients in the area. HCA distributed some 1350 information fliers for HCA and other organisations’ services.

HILLSCARPAL DRIVING INDEPENDENCE FOR SHUT-IN SENIORS

HillsCarPal is a transportation service for Sydney Hills seniors that is provided by police-checked Volunteer Drivers who make a detour to pick up a senior and take them where they want to go around Sydney. Currently, the service uses secret Facebook groups to connect seniors with drivers so that ride requests can be filled.

Seniors who no longer drive can find themselves shut-in away from their community, particularly as they age and struggle to use public transport. They can easily suffer “Shut-in Syndrome” and withdraw entirely from their community; succumbing in the process to the horrors of loneliness and depression. HillsCarPal helps seniors get out and overcome many of these barriers to healthy socialisation.

Charlotte regularly drives a senior to the local IGA and to a shopping mall a bit further afield. Their relationship developed from the very reason HillsCarPal was started. Having stopped to chat to an elderly woman on her early morning walk she learned the senior was walking to Dick Smith to buy her grandchildren a game console for Christmas. Her house being just around the corner from their chance encounter, she offered to get the car and drive her. Charlotte drove her there and to her home again and it began a mutually satisfying arrangement.
COMPANIONSHIP & A CUPPA

The One to One program is one of HCA’s longest running programs. This year saw the program highlighted in the Hills Shire Times and other local and digital media and with good reason. The program gives predominantly seniors an opportunity to socialise without having to leave their home. Many residents of the Hills and surrounding areas are limited by mobility or safety reasons to their home which can be isolating and lead to mental health issues like depression. It is the One to One program volunteers that come to the aid of these residents by sharing their time and offering companionship.

These volunteers are a dedicated bunch, with some visiting their clients for over 15 years. This year they aim to increase the group’s size and their capacity to visit more residents that are finding it hard to get out and socialise, and solve many of the world’s problems over a cuppa.

PLAYGROUP CLIENTS GROWING & GROWING UP!

The Supported Playgroup held every Tuesday at Wrights Road Community Centre has doubled in size this year. This year the program has been held in partnership with Children First and has seen a high level of retention of clients and new client growth. This increase has meant the program has expanded from one session to two sessions each Tuesday.

HCA has found new siblings have joined the group which is a great opportunity for parents to let each child do age appropriate activities, all under the watchful eye of qualified staff. The children are growing up too; there have been many return from term to term with an extra inch on top. It’s not just about the children though, parents also find it a good time to connect with other parents over morning tea and a cuppa.

In the last term of 2013 HCA’s partnership with Children First will be transitioning to our new partner Early Ed. HCA acknowledges Children First for all that they have done in the Kellyville area which is outside of their normal operations. HCA also looks forward to working with Early Ed as our new supported playgroup partner.

GRANDPARENTS GIVING AGAIN

Grandparents are integral to the support network of many families in the Hills and surrounding areas. However when families break down, for any number of reasons, sometimes they have to adjust their role in the family. Parents Again or Grandparents Raising Children as it is sometimes known is a support group for grandparents who have taken on parental duties for their grandchildren.

The meetings are held at Baulkham Hills Bowling Club on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 10.00 and are regularly attended by six grandparents. “We would like to welcome, encourage assist and support other grandparents raising grandchildren 24/7 to join us”, said Mr Stephenson, one of the regular attendees.

The program aims to mentor grandparents through the process of bringing up their grandchildren and is looking to grow its program in the coming year.
HOMEWORK PROGRAM GETS AN A+

The Our Rouse Homework Group is a partnership with Lend Lease as a part of its community program in the Rouse Hill area. It provides opportunities for High School students to access a tutor free of charge. The group has grown and has a stable number of students attending week to week. It is being considered to extend the program into year 6 so that students have an opportunity to prepare for the step into high school.

As can be seen in Linda’s story while it is not always easy to get kids along the results can be great for all involved when they do. Linda’s son James reluctantly agreed to join The Our Rouse Homework Group, after many arguments with me about him not being organised enough or spending enough time or effort with his school work. To my amazement, he really enjoyed the group from the first week.

James realised he did need a bit of help. He felt comfortable with the style of assistance he received from the tutors and the amount of personal help they were able to give. He liked that he was setting aside structured time for school work and his assignments were generally ready in time and of a much better quality. He enjoyed that there were other kids from his year at school in the group, and even though they were not from his main friend circle, they were working on the same assignments, so they could help each other.

In Linda’s words the biggest reason it was a great outcome for everyone was “I think he mostly enjoyed that his mum wasn’t always arguing with him”. A good indicator of the value of this style of assistance is that James approached his mum asking how he could sign up for next term. “Fantastic service, I hope you can continue the great work”, said Linda on enrolling him next term.

THE AFTERNOON SHIFT

The Afternoon Shift took a change in direction this year. With a number of safety concerns the program needed to move from the scout hall to new premises located at Balcombe Heights Estate. The new premises being smaller meant a rethink of the whole program.

More emphasis was placed on the homework component of the program and additionally it became a supported program which brought parents in as well. The program started small but has now developed a core of over 15 participants and growth is expected in the coming financial year. It has attracted clients from the CALD community which is really exciting for HCA. Parents whose native tongue is not English, speaking in English to their children supporting them to do their homework, but also supporting and being supported by the parent group.

HCA cannot wait to see what more surprises this rapidly morphing program will provide in 2014.
**KIDS, CRAFT & COMMUNITY SAFETY**

The HCA Family Fun Day is run three times a year during school holidays and this year is attracting more and more families to the day. As a free community event it is attended by over 250 people and growing. There has been a steady trend in growth over 2013 with more families booking it into their calendar well in advance.

Karen and her children and have attended the past two fun days with another family. In each instance she was delighted to stumble across an activity that is outdoors, local, affordable, involves no merchandising and offers something for all ages. Karen has three children; two sons 7 and 3 years old and a daughter who is 5 years old. She also took along family friends; girls, aged 7 years, 5 years and 18 months.

Karen was initially surprised at the uniqueness of the Family Fun Day and the way that it offers a little something for all ages. Highlights for the boys were the jumping castles and the emergency services visits. While the girls all loved the face painting and immersed themselves in all of the arts and craft activities on offer. Even the toddler had little test run on the jumping castle and a curious interest in everything happening around her.

“The kids also loved the ‘decorate your own cookie/cupcake’, and enjoyed the complimentary fruit and sausage sizzle, whilst we Mums were just happy to see the coffee van arrive. HCA really do think of everything!”, said Karen.

The first time Karen attended the Fun Day, it was of paramount importance for her to readily monitor and keep all six kids entertained within a secure environment. Thankfully there were lots of approachable and helpful volunteers on hand to make this possible. Karen reported they had such a lovely time that they continued on until mid-afternoon with a play at the park.

Fast forward to the second Fun Day and it was just great to get both of our families out and about to have some fun.
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