



2020 Annual Report



Prepared by Iris Foundation
December 2020

Message from the Chairman

It is hard to imagine a more challenging year than 2020 for businesses and for charities like Iris Foundation. This past year has seen devastating bushfires, floods, and then lockdowns, social isolation and distancing required by the COVID pandemic. It is a testimony to our staff ably led by Sue Liptrott, our facilitators and our supporters that Iris Foundation has lived its purpose of fostering resilience, hope and connection in our community.

Through this annual report, you will read how Iris Foundation has achieved the strategic goals it set for 2018-2020:

Supporting Resilience: You will learn how Iris Foundation has delivered a five-fold increase in programs that support resilience

Embracing Hope: You will discover how Iris Foundation has shared stories of hope such as through supporting research and networks into the challenging mental health impacts of perimenopause

Cultivating Connections: You will rejoice in the power of networks and connections through the Community Women's Business Network

Resilient Organisation: and underneath it all you will find out how dedicated board members, staff and workers have sustained iris Foundation though the pandemic and grown its impact.

I want to thank each and every board member, the amazing staff, and our generous supporters. Without you Iris Foundation would not be able to meet the challenges of a post-pandemic community. Yet together we can and will rise to these challenges and foster hope, connections and resilience in each person we encounter, and so reduce the risk of suicide in our community.

Thank you.

Andrew Tuck
Chair, Iris Foundation



Executive Summary

We are confident that by working together across businesses, community groups and with individuals, we can strengthen our community, better identify and support people in distress and save lives.

*Suicide and its impact are felt by many people in many ways
and we acknowledge everyone who has been impacted by suicide.*



Iris Foundation is a grassroots charity working to reduce the risk of suicide on the Central Coast. Established in 2006, we remain the only such organisation specifically dedicated to the needs of our rapidly growing local community.

Our Model

We pursue our mission by fostering Resilience, Hope and Connections which mental health research has identified as key protective factors against poor mental health and suicide.

Our Focus

Amidst the current public health crisis, our priority is to support preadolescent mental health. Local parents and educators are reporting very significant increases in anxiety and disengagement amongst young people.

If left unchecked, these problems can become chronic and lead to more complex mental illness further down the road.

Why Early Intervention Is Vital

It is estimated that one in seven Australian children experience mental health issues and approximately 50 per cent of all serious mental health issues begin around the age of 14.

Preadolescence – from ages 9 to 14 – is a time of transition and change. These children are maturing physically, emotionally and socially, while also taking on greater responsibility at school and at home. It is a vital stage in the formation of identity, values and attitudes towards self and other people.

Mental health support provided at this time can prevent young people falling into crisis or developing more complex issues later in life.

The Silver Linings of 2020



Given that the mission of Iris Foundation is to foster Resilience, Hope and Connections in our community, perhaps it is not especially surprising we managed to find silver linings amidst the dark clouds that hovered over all of us this year.

It took a while for these bright spots to emerge. A rampant bushfire season gave way to a global public health crisis that rendered planning documents created only weeks earlier completely irrelevant. School lockdowns placed our resilience programs on hold in Term 2. Our thriving Community and Business Women's Network was unable to gather for months. Fundraising opportunities dried up almost entirely. At the same time demand for mental health support was skyrocketing.

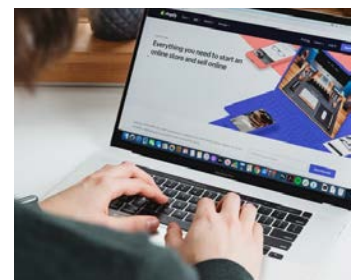
Crisis at this level is deeply unsettling but it can also be an opportunity to learn, adapt and grow much quicker than usual. This year has brought forth many new ideas and partnerships that have generated very positive outcomes for Iris Foundation and the community we serve. Here is a few of the highlights:

Despite significant challenges, Iris Foundation delivered **resilience programs and workshops** valued at more than \$90,000 in Central Coast schools - representing a five-fold increase in outreach.



We developed a new **two-day workshop** format which enabled us to introduce the fundamental tools of resilience – such as identity building, problem solving and gratitude – to a broader range of young people more quickly.

Adapting to school closures, Iris Foundation piloted a six-week interactive program, **Cool Connections Online**, for a group of year 5 and 6 students learning from home.



The Silver Linings of 2020



CBWN members rallied together online, holding weekly **Zoom meetings** and supporting each other through a period of great uncertainty. (They also came up with a range of innovative fundraising ideas.)



Even without a public event, this year's **Tree of Dreams** campaign in the lead up to World Suicide Prevention Day drew significant coverage with its message of hope resonating deeply in the community.

We supported the launch of a new local organisation, the **Debbie Gaunt Foundation**, which works to fund research into the challenging mental health impacts of perimenopause on women.



We created the **Box of Hope** for those times when we want to reach out to someone but are not sure of the words to use. These simple gifts travelled to Victoria and South Australia during lockdown and as far afield as Columbia and the USA.

In a year that has forcefully reminded us of the importance of staying connected, we would like to thank all the organisations and people who have offered their time, money and goodwill to Iris Foundation.

We look forward to new challenges and opportunities in 2021 - with hope.

PROGRAMS

Iris Foundation's Connections programs aim to foster resilience among young people on the Central Coast. Preadolescence – from ages 9 to 14 – is recognised by researchers and educators as a key period of transition and change. Mental health support provided at this time can prevent young people falling into crisis or developing more complex issues later in life.

The emphasis on creative expression reflects recent mental health research on the most effective ways to foster hope and self-confidence in young people. Studies suggest that engaging in art-based activities can help young people develop a sense of belonging and to cope with difficult feelings.

Cool Connections in School

- Eight-week program for Years 5 and 6.
- Weekly topics include personal identity, connection, safe places and people, problem solving and gratitude.
- Online program successfully piloted in response to COVID-19 school shutdown.

120 students supported in 2020

Y-Connections in School

- Eight-week program for Years 7 and 8.
- Built around coaching, emotional intelligence and positive psychology frameworks, Y-Connections aims to create a supportive space where ideas and stories can be shared.
- Weekly topics include personal identity, problem solving, relationships and emotions.

17 students supported in 2020

CONNECTIONS 2x2 Workshop



WORKSHOPS

Iris Foundation developed Connections 2x2 Resilience Workshops to connect with a larger group of young people who benefited from extra support in the wake of school closures and other disruptions caused by COVID-19.

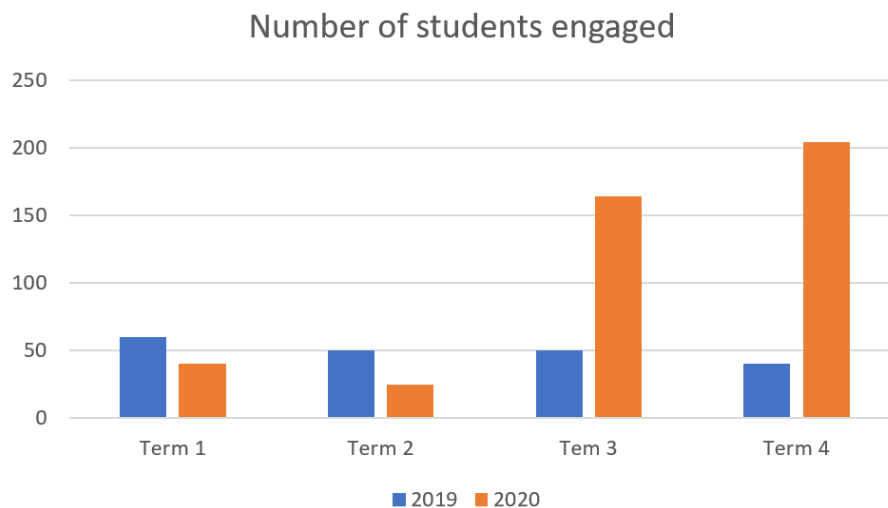
Piloted in Term 2, the workshops provide a flexible format with activities readily adapted to suit the needs of each participant group, for both primary school and high school students.

- 2-hour workshops, held over 2 consecutive weeks.
- Week 1 session focuses on personal identity, skills, strengths and values.
- Week 2 session focuses on coping strategies, problem solving and gratitude.

293 students reached in 2020

The workshops have been well-received by local schools and parents and help staff identify students needing more intensive support.

PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS 2019/2020





Tree of Dreams

The Tree of Dreams is an annual campaign to raise awareness of suicide prevention on the Central Coast. The campaign recognises the impact of suicide and works to create conversations about mental health in the lead-up to World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10.

The Tree of Dreams, situated at the Wyong Milk Factory, was adorned with hundreds of messages of hope, strength, remembrance and support collected from people across the region. The tree has become a memorable tribute to those we have lost but is also a positive display of hope and support to remind us all to encourage life and reach out to each other when times are tough.



Social distancing guidelines meant that no public gathering could be held in 2020. The Tree of Dreams message of hope nevertheless resonated more deeply than ever in the community. Dozens of people placed messages in the tree and organisations including Westpac and ABC Radio Central Coast helped spread the word.

History

The first Tree of Dreams event in 2016 was inspired by four local Budgewoi women who had been impacted by suicide. Their losses forged a determination to make a difference in support of the prevention of suicide on the Central Coast.

The annual tradition continued for its fifth year at the old fig tree in front of the Coast Hotel at Budgewoi.

Throughout December message tags are sold and donations accepted through this grassroots fundraiser which has supported the delivery of our programs across the region.





Community & Business Women's Network

The Community and Business Women's Network was founded in 2018 with a straightforward purpose – to connect women on the Central Coast. Through a mix of networking events, business showcases and professional development opportunities, CBWN has expanded rapidly to include more than 300 active members in 2020.

Whilst gatherings were restricted for part of the year, members continued to connect and support each other online via Facebook, Zoom and a new member directory.

CBWN is open to all women who want to network, make friends, learn, share ideas and support local business.

CBWN 2020 Resilience Awards



The second annual CBWN Women's Resilience Awards on August 19 represented an uplifting return to in-person events.

Sharon Cheer, a local champion of workplace diversity and personal determination, was a worthy honouree among the nine nominees.

Peninsula Launch



CBWN held its first networking event on the Peninsula in October overlooking the beautiful water at Margarita Daze.

The sold-out event was such a success CBWN returned for a Christmas luncheon in December.

Member Directory



Online Connections



Fundraisers

The onset of COVID-19 in March caused the immediate cancellation of all our social and fundraising gatherings - the essential 'bread and butter' events that support the administration of our organisation and its programs. Iris Foundation is fortunate that our supporters found some unique ways to fundraise on our behalf.

High Teas and Auctions

La Carta Art Gallery, Cafe and Hand-Crafted Gifts owners, Robert and Silvana, held multiple art auctions and served up some amazing high tea fundraisers in 2020. This fabulous couple have supported Iris Foundation for many years.



Mystery Raffle

Hotondo Homes Central Coast owners, Jon and Lyndsey, created a Mystery Raffle - with the lucky winner taking home a very generous surprise!



Cookies for a Cause

Sunshine Gifting owner, Laura, found a delicious way to help spread the R U OK? message on the Central Coast. The Cookies for a Cause range continues throughout the year with all profits donated to Iris Foundation.



Stroll, Sip and Sample

Rotary Club of Brisbane Water found a fun way to meet their neighbours with a Stroll, Sip and Sample tour in support of Iris Foundation.



Founded in 2006, Iris Foundation was built through local fundraising and in 2016 was granted the status of a Public Benevolent Institution.

Over the past four years Iris Foundation has delivered in excess of \$350,000 of resilience-based programs into our community and local schools.

Supporting Local Grassroots Organisations

Men Care Too



Iris Foundation continued its support of Men Care Too, an independent support organisation for men in unpaid, informal caring roles.

Founder Greg Smith left the Central Coast for Tasmania in December 2019, where his efforts to support isolated men through regular BBQs, walking groups and other social connections have been well received by locals.

<https://www.mencaretoo.org/>

Debbie Gaunt Foundation



Iris Foundation is proud to support a new local non-profit organisation, the Debbie Gaunt Foundation.

Launched on World Mental Health Day (October 10), the Foundation is dedicated to raising funds to better understand the mental health impacts of perimenopause – the transition during which a woman's body prepares for the end of her reproductive years.

Founder Craig Gaunt was spurred to action after losing his wife Debbie to suicide in 2019. Debbie became severely mentally unwell shortly before her death; an episode that has been partially attributed to the hormonal effects of perimenopause.

The Gaunt family has since contributed \$20,000 toward a comprehensive online course for doctors about women's health. The immediate priority of the Debbie Gaunt Foundation is to raise a further \$24,500 to assist finalisation of the midlife module of this course.

Iris Foundation collaborated with many local organisations throughout 2020 to improve mental health outcomes across the region.

Our valued partners include:

Central Coast Local Health District
Central Coast Council
RUOK? Day
Rotary Club of Brisbane Water

Phoenix Youth Support Service
Northlakes High School Leo Club
Rotary Club of Northlakes Toukley
Charmhaven Lions Club

IMPACT GIVERS

Major Program Funders

\$50,000+

Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation

\$10,000+

Wyong Community Bank branch of Bendigo Bank

Doyalson Wyee RSL Club

Wyong Rugby League Club Group

\$1,000+

C & D Constructions

Rotary Club of Northlakes Toukley

IMPACT MAKERS

Iris Foundation Ambassadors

\$1,000+

La Carta Art Gallery Cafe

Hotondo Homes Central Coast

Royal Hotel Wyong

TrendPac

Mark Lawler (Gift in memoriam)

IMPACT SUPPORTERS

Sharp DS Central Coast

Fortunity

Southern Cross Austereo

BBX

Central Coast Unity Bank

Oddball Marketing

Loyal IT

Web Adjusted

Advice Co.

Your Guide Central Coast

Event Cinemas Tuggerah

Nexus Smart Hub

Greater Bank Central Coast

Sunshine Gifting Co.

Essence Images

Forever Floral Designs

Wyong Milk Factory

Bunnings Lake Haven

BPW Central Coast

Woolworths Wyong RDC

Ray Hinds

Iris Foundation is a grassroots organisation that depends on the generosity and commitment of local people to continue our work.

As well as major supporters listed above, we would like to acknowledge all the individuals and groups who contributed via donations, fundraising, volunteering and other gifts throughout 2020.