



## LICOLA WILDERNESS VILLAGE

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### **Operations Manager - Annual Report, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 – March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

Lions Village Licola Inc. (LVL) achieved many major milestones in 2019-2020. It has also been a year for some major hurdles as well. Staffing changes, threat of bushfires and the start of COVID-19.

An inspirational achievement occurred November 2019, LVL turned 50. This milestone was marked with a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration weekend dedicated to Lions Club members from all around Victoria and Southern NSW, who over 50 years, have created an amazing place that disadvantaged, deserving, disengaged, at risk and special needs youth and adults can come to for live changing experiences. The weekend saw more than 70 Lions members come together to celebrate the success of LVL over the last 50 years, it was also an opportunity to pay credit and remember Ian and Ray Stockdale the founders of LVL.

A beautiful memorial garden was unveiled in memory of Ray Stockdale as well as a plaque that now sits front and centre at the entrance to the Village commemorating Ian Stockdale and his incredible vision.

Licola is now on Solar! July 2019 saw the commencement of ground works for the 2 solar array's that now catch the power of the sun and send it around Licola. Rockies Electrical worked tirelessly for months to complete the project, which saw panels installed on the stadium roof and on the hill behind the Village. The project was completed late 2019 (Nov/Dec) by the partnership of Project Manager Peter Mckernan and Rockies Electrical. LVL now enjoys the silence as the generators only run for an average of 3 hrs at night, the sounds of the river and the birds can now be heard with absolute clarity. LVL diesel bill is now pennies in a jar comparative to the last financial year, a very welcome relief given all 2020 has served up so far.

The dining hall refurbishment was officially completed in March 2020 with the Latrobe Valley Authority signing off on the final report. A project that was worth \$361,290. Majority of the works were complete by September 2019 and saw the first school groups and September sponsor camp using the facility, many gasps were made as those who knew the state of the building before were blown away by how modern, up to date and refreshed the space looked. With the bulk of the internal refurbishment coming under budget thanks to the generosity of Woody and his crew, the LVA approved, water tanks, air conditioning and ducted heating to be installed with the last of the funding. This project very much secures LVL's future to be able to compete with other venues for business. LVL very much thanks the Latrobe Valley Authority for their financial assistance to complete this project.

Adam Wake – CEO 2008-2019 departed LVL after 11 years of service to embark on a new adventure and challenge at another Charity – Cottage By The Sea – Queenscliff. A long successful tenure, bringing LVL into the black financially for 7 years running, Adam, along with wife Cherry (program manager and volunteers coordinator) leave a legacy that has ensured the

future of LVL. Their hard work and dedication over the last 11 years to build LVL up to the thriving impactful charity it is today is a remarkable achievement.

Over the past 12-months to 31 March 2020 we enjoyed the company of 149 disadvantaged, deserving, 8-11 year olds on our School Holiday Sponsor Camps, 21 disengaged 'at risk' young men participated in our WILD4 program in December 2019 and 80 special needs children from 5 schools across S.E Melbourne and Gippsland came together for the V3 program, 4 days of fun, activities and excitement. Approx. 90 families and adults attended the week long N4/V6 special needs camp in April 2019. Over 50 Volunteers made sure every moment of the above-mentioned programs were, fun, safe and worthwhile for every child attending. Countless hours behind the scenes by Lions Clubs and their members deserves a special mention this year, a lot of support has been given to LVL and its staff throughout this challenging year. Thank you.

It is a tough year for reporting financial results. With the prediction from the 2018-2019 report being the best single financial year Licola has seen, it is with a great sigh we report that we have had anything but. January 2020 saw Licola come to a complete halt for the first time in many years, little did we know that this would be the theme for the rest of the year. The Bushfires saw no camps or groups at LVL from January 2020 until late Feb 2020, a huge loss financially. Then in March 2020 COVID-19 put a stop to things again, only this time for much longer. As I write this, we are heading into the depths of the second wave, Government assistance (Jobkeeper) is what is keeping Licola afloat. There is comfort knowing we are not alone; it is industry wide.

It is very hard to predict how LVL will fair over the coming 12 months financially, there is no end date to COVID-19. This is a time to tighten the belt, put the head down and work the proverbial off.

### **SPONSORED CAMPS**

- **LSCs** – A devastating year for these camps. April and September 2019 were the only sponsor camps run by LVL for April 2019 to March 2020. The January bushfires saw the cancellation/postponement of the 3 camps, 2 were rescheduled for the April holidays, when unfortunately COVID-19 derailed that plan, as COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc we are patiently waiting for January 2021 to come round so that these deserving young kids can have their week on camp at LVL.

We continue our wonderful partnership with The Gippsland Country Music Club, a change of leadership sees Rod Owen organising members to come up on camp to provide an amazing experience. Type "*Licola Music Program*" into your search engine and check it out on YouTube.

The 123Read2Me project has continued to provide hundreds of books to the children that come. This continues as a very worthwhile extension to the program. Lions Clubs are now donating books as well as word spreads about the success of the program

- **Special Needs** – April saw another successful N4 special needs extravaganza, many families young adults and kids enjoyed a week at LVL participating in many activities from tractor rides, flying fox, badge making, arts and craft and canoeing. Neil Ware and Colin Ryan deserve a special mention for the hours of organising they put into this program. October 2019 saw a very successful V3 Special needs camp run. 5 schools attended with approx. 80 participants over 4 days enjoying all LVL has to offer. The 'all access' canoe ramp continues to receive praise from all.
- **Wild4** - Adam Wake passed the batten of WILD4 to Dan Abikhair or 'Bushy' as he is better known, take on the role of WILD4 Coordinator. Dan had been involved with the program for the last two years as an instructor.

21 of the 22 young men selected turned up on Day 1 for their 10-day adventure. Another successful year of attendance. It was a hot program this year with minimal water in the river, this meant a few program changes throughout the 10 day journey, in the end the two groups made their way back into LVL by floating down the river for the final couple of Km's, this was a big relief to the boys who had slogged it out for 8 days prior. A changing of the guard always comes with its teething problems, the measure of success is in the little moments on program that will ultimately change the lives of these young men, there were many of them throughout the journey and many more that will happen at home after time to process what they achieved.

Mentors were again within each group and this is proving to be a very effective peer mentoring strategy, participants who got so much out of it the first time, willing to come back and guide their peers through the difficult challenge that is WILD4. This program has impact.

Without donations from various Clubs and organisations Wild4 – 2019 would not have been possible. Thank you to The Paul Family Foundation and Lions Clubs; Geelong & Corio Bay, Vermont LC, Sandringham LC, Drouin LC, Maffra LC, Loch Sport LC, Ashwood Mt Waverley LC, Nunawading LC, Blackburn LC, Glenroy LC, Churchill LC, Sale LC, Lilydale LC, Boronia LC, Endeavour Hills LC, Macalister Valley LC, Maffra Lioness Club, an Lachlan Moore and family. Your support continues to change lives.

### **Other Programs & Camp Use**

- Our annual 5-day expedition program that Outward Bound Australia partnered with LVL to run was another success. 160 odd students arrived on the doorstep of Licola, split into 8 groups they hiked around the area and spent a day white water rafting on the mighty Macalister River. The St Francis Xavier school were very impressed by the professional staff and the amazing outcomes for the students.

This program proved again to be a massive task for one staff member to organise on their own so we proposed that OBA use LVL as a venue, and do the organising themselves and staff the program themselves, for Licola the fee for hiring the venue is the same amount of profit as organising it ourselves, and it gives back months of time to our staff to focus on programs like WILD4, sponsor camps, special needs. OBA agreed to this for 2020. Some comments from school staff are:

*'Enya taught students that challenges could be overcome with resilience and supported them each step of the way' (SFX Teacher)*

*'Adam helped our high needs kids with such care and empathy' (SFX Teacher)*

*'it was a fantastic week with students being exposed to a variety of conditions and experiences' (SFX Teacher)*

- 'The Town' festival continues to be a massive success, Michael Scarlet and his team are so incredibly respectful of the Licola site and the values we live by that it is a partnership that will likely be long standing.
- Weddings feature heavily on the 2020 calendar, this is an increase from previous years, seems word is spreading for what a great venue LVL is.
- Weekend bookings continue to be a strong aspect to LVL business, this continues to be a great low fuss way to underpin our Lions Sponsored Programs.

- Our relationship with Kurnai College has continued again this year, the tractor ramp got widened and painted by Brett and his team of enthusiastic students, this will be most welcome when we run the N4 special needs camp.

### **Staffing:**

It has been a rocky road for this 12-month period with staffing, the effect of Adam leaving was heavily felt, perhaps more than estimated. The winter months saw a skeleton crew 'hold the fort' while the new CEO was appointed. August 2019 saw the appointment of Tony Davis to CEO and the training and rebuilding of the staff team began, it was a short lived honeymoon with Tony at the helm, it became evident after a few months that his business and personnel manner were not aligning with LVL values and purpose the way LVL had expected. March 2019 saw the removal of Tony Davis from the role of CEO due to the large underlying issue that he was not able to build strong community minded relationships, something that LVL is built on. A bold decision was made by the Board of Directors to remove Tony, effective immediately at his probation review, a decision I congratulate them on as the future of Licola was looking shaky with his Leadership. Within a week of this COVID-19 hit our industry hard and the staffing plan to replace Tony was put on hold momentarily as I agreed to 'hold the fort' once again whilst we weathered the COVID-19 storm.

The full-time team this year in Licola comprised of;

- Tony Davis (CEO/ Operations Manager Aug 2019 – Feb 2020) – E: [manager@licola.org.au](mailto:manager@licola.org.au)
- Alex Oxnam (Program Manager) – E: [programmanager@licola.org.au](mailto:programmanager@licola.org.au)
- Brooke Jackson (Admin+Bookings) – E: [camping@licola.org.au](mailto:camping@licola.org.au)
- Cameron Stroud (Maintenance Department)
- Jodie "Casper" Scanlon (Cleaning Department)

These staff were backed up by part time, contract and casual staff including;

- Cherry Wake (Training and LSC Volunteer liaison) – E: [volunteerslicola@hotmail.com](mailto:volunteerslicola@hotmail.com)
- Nuala Cunningham (Program Mgr/LSC Coord) – E: [campcoordinatorlsc@outlook.com](mailto:campcoordinatorlsc@outlook.com)
- Mick "Horrie" Allman (Maintenance)
- Greg "Greasy" Fluck (Maintenance)
- Colin Mathies (Finance) – E: [colinm@dcsi.net.au](mailto:colinm@dcsi.net.au)

### **Maintenance**

In 2019-20 Capital Improvements have included.

- Solar Array, inverters and battery bank installed creating a solar powered Licola.
- Dining hall refurbishment completed, looks amazing, real jaw dropper for returning and new schools and clients.
- All access concrete pad laid under Flying Fox shade sail, eliminating the awful dirt patch that turned to mud when it rained.
- Demolition of old Flying Fox platform with plans to erect a new all access area to bring the flying fox back to an activity that is wheelchair accessible.
- Shade sale erected by Latrobe Valley shade sails over the flying fox platform area – this will ensure LVL continues to provide appropriate levels of shade to staff on hot days.

**Lions & Lionesses** – We thank you all this 2019-2020 year for every hour of support you have provided, it has been a challenging year, however it is very nice to see long standing supporters of LVL come and support the change over from Adam to Tony and now to myself, sharing history, skills and stories in this time of transition. Amazing support was received by all clubs

involved in the LSC Sponsor Camps bushfire postponement as well, for which we are truly grateful.

As always, we encourage you and your club to visit us here at Licola, we are proud to be the employees of a venture that has so much positive social impact. Whether you come for a 'Low key, working bee' or for a drive to see the sights, we love seeing you and connecting with you.

### **Publicity/ marketing**

- Facebook continues to be a valuable marketing tool for LVL, hitting 3,300 followers, (up by 800 from last year), it is proving to be a very effective way of keeping our broader community informed about the amazing things we are achieving.
- The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration caught the ear of local TV and radio stations, channel 9 and the ABC both did stories on LVL and it's proud history.
- The solar project has really put Licola on the map too, we have featured in some broader Solar advertising, Licola is being used as an example for what is possible. How exciting.
- The new Triton is due to be wrapped with Vinyl in the next 12 months so that it is as eye catching as the van.
- A lot of work was put in by the Board and I to rectify relationships lost or damaged by Tony Davis. With great pleasure I report that all affected by Tony's behaviour have been very understanding and accepting of our apologies and acknowledgement of how they were treated and are keen to continue their relationship with us. This includes staff of LVL as well.

### **Major Supporters:**

- **Geoff Dahlsen** continues his generous support to LVL.
- **Brian Edward** – Unrivalled dedication to secure funding annually for youth in the Geelong and surrounding areas to attend Sponsor Camps and WILD4 programs.
- **The Paul Family Foundation** continue their support of LVL programs, financial support for the WILD4 program and access to Glen Falloch station enables our programs to be exceptional.
- **Staff at Glen Falloch Station** continue to be an amazing part of the LVL community.

### **This years stated 'major aims' were:**

- Switching to renewable energy for most of our power generation.  
This is 100% complete, a huge milestone for LVL, delivered on time and within budget, a diesel bill that is pennies in comparison to previous years, LVL is bright and sunny and ready for the next 50 years.
- Complete the dining hall refurbishment to a high standard.  
All works are now complete with the final instalment from the LVA coming through in April 2020. Whilst the timeframe blew out by many months the result is that it is finished to an incredibly high standard, Woody and his team went above and beyond original designs to add on so many extras, within budget, like table slides under the stage, storage for chairs outside on the veranda. Not only was this project delivered on budget we were able to add extra items like water tanks as well as heating and cooling. Like the solar project this refurbishment will secure the next 50 years for LVL.
- Operate a viable and "in the black" overall operation.  
With bushfires removing two of the busiest months of the calendar it was not the year that was predicted. See financial report.
- Benefit kids' lives.  
Even though our numbers were down on other years due to bushfires affecting the start of the 2020 calendar, LVL continues to benefit kids lives in ways we can only be proud of. With a staff team that believes in each and every child that walks through our gates, striving to give them the best experience possible, to learn and grow, feel safe and cared for. If anything, the downturn in numbers has highlighted just how much impact we have and how important these programs are.

**Major aims for next year include:**

- Have some form of a non-cash budget surplus for the 2020-2021 year given the COVID-19 situation
- Continue to have positive social impact during COVID-19
- Focus on 'Site Maintenance' working on areas that get little attention when we are busy as they are always in use.
- Keep staff engaged in the workplace during COVID-19

I will leave you with some amazing quotes from 2019-2020 programs and events:

'The Gippsland Country Music Club wish to sincerely thank the Licola Wilderness Village Management for the fabulous weekend that we all enjoyed very much. You have a wonderful facility there!'

*President Rob and Secretary Kerry, Gippsland Country Music Club.*

'Fantastic activities and staff, the way they challenge students to try new activities and experiences is great.'

*Maffra Secondary College.*

'I just wanted to thank you for an amazing camp, the students and staff enjoyed every second of it. The effort and support that was put into it by you guys was amazing and staff loved the way you all had such a positive and energetic attitude which made the camp flow very smoothly.'

*Officer Specialist School.*

'The Village certainly opened the imagination of a lot of people who will hopefully come and visit in their own time.'

*Lewis Croft, Marketing Manager, Suzuki Motorcycles.*

'Thank you so much for the amazing hospitality over the weekend, was very impressed with the whole camp!'

*Hailey, President, Melbourne Uni.*

That's a wrap,

Warm Regards



Nuala Cunningham  
Operations Manager  
Licola Wilderness Village