



FROM WRAADD TO WRAD

25 YEARS OF HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED

The history of the Western Regional Association for
Alcohol & Drug Dependence - Western Region Alcohol & Drug Centre

1986-2011



CONTENTS

4	From the Director
5	Before WRAD
6	Profile : Rodger Brough
7	Chapter One : WRAADD 1986 - 1990
10	Profile : Dawn Bermingham
11	Chapter Two : WRAADD 1991 - 1995
14	Profile : Geoff Soma
18	Profile : Ian Armstrong
19	Chapter Three : WRAD 1996 - 2000
22	Profile : John McGrath
23	Chapter Four : WRAD 2001-2005
26	Profile : Peter McMillan
27	Chapter Five : WRAD 2006 - 2011
30	Profile : Carmel Brady

Photos on opposite page:

01. **Helen Taylor** Chairperson 02. WRAD fund-raiser Collecta-Bool 03. Committee member **Peter McMillan** and coordinator **Annette Warner** with Murray to Moyne supporter **Gerry Holland** 04. Long serving committee member **James Nicol** 05. WRAD staff 2011 06. Launch of youth card, 2011 07. **Geoff Soma** with VicHealth CEO **Todd Harper**

*This WRAD history was compiled by Rick Bayne of Media Masters Vic
with design work by Fiona Fitzgerald of Hello Design*

“THE STANDARD
REPORTED ON
JULY 1 1983 THAT
IT WAS HOPED A
CENTRE WOULD
BE OPERATIONAL
BY THE END OF
THE YEAR.”

FROM THE DIRECTOR

For the past 25 years WRAD has provided an essential service to south-west Victoria.

From small beginnings in 1986 the Western Regional Association for Alcohol and Drug Dependence (WRAADD) has grown into the Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre (WRAD), a multi-faceted operation that is committed to providing specialist services to individuals and families.

While our core role remains as a dedicated drug and alcohol treatment centre, WRAD today offers a broad range of health services, including a bulk billing medical practice, to the people of Warrnambool and south west Victoria.

Our vision is to advance the health and wellbeing of local people affected by addictive behaviours and to promote optimal enjoyment of life.

We seek to provide comprehensive, holistic support and treatment to individuals and others affected by addictive behaviours and associated issues. The philosophy of harm minimisation underpins the delivery of all our programs.

WRAD has enjoyed tremendous support from the community over the past 25 years. Our staff, our board, our benefactors and others continue to help WRAD to achieve its goals of supporting people in need.

This booklet celebrates some of the successes and challenges experienced by WRAD over its 25-year history and highlights the work carried out by key individuals during this time.

We thank everyone who has contributed to 25 years of WRAD and to the publication of this booklet, and we look forward to continuing to provide an essential service to the local community for many years to come.

GEOFF SOMA, DIRECTOR

November 2011



BEFORE WRAD

The genesis of WRAD stems back to 1974.

As the 'free love' era of the late 1960s ushered in a new decade where illegal drugs were more readily available, the impact of these recreational drugs on the social and physical health of the community was being noticed.

Around the same time the devastating damage caused by alcohol abuse was also coming under greater scrutiny. As hotel trading hours were liberalised new laws were introduced aimed at curbing drink driving.

While the WRAD Centre wasn't officially launched until 1986, community concerns about drug issues in Warrnambool started to surface in the 1970s.

In 1974 the Warrnambool East Rotary responded to those concerns by holding a drug awareness seminar for doctors and community leaders which led to the formation of the Warrnambool Drug Education Committee.

A Warrnambool-based Lifeline was formed as a result of this committee; and many of those involved in the group would go on to play a role in the formation of WRAD a decade later.

Drug use was rife in the region. In 1976 Warrnambool was claimed in the media to be "the drug capital of Australia", and later a similar claim was made about Portland.

The negative reputation concerned civic leaders and a 1979 community drug survey conducted by the Apex Club of Warrnambool found a higher level of drug and alcohol problems than predicted. It demonstrated the need for coordinated and professional management of people with drug and alcohol problems.

Pressure was mounting for formal action to tackle the problem and in 1983 then Warrnambool Mayor Ron Anderson called a meeting to discuss the city's alcohol and drug issues.

From the meeting a steering committee was elected for the Western Regional Association for Alcohol and Drug Dependence (WRAADD). Alcohol and drug physician Rodger Brough was elected president. Dr Brough proposed that an alcohol and drug centre be established in Warrnambool, similar to those he had studied in Ballarat, Geelong and New South Wales.

The committee actively pursued options to support people with alcohol and drug problems and lobbied the state government for funds to open a treatment and drop-in centre.

After two years of negotiations and submissions, the community's drive paid off and a site for WRAADD was purchased at 325 Timor Street Warrnambool with plans to open a counselling, referral and treatment centre.



“AROUND 1988 RODGER LEFT HIS GENERAL PRACTICE AND BECAME THE FIRST HOSPITAL-BASED DRUG AND ALCOHOL PHYSICIAN IN REGIONAL VICTORIA.”

RODGER BROUGH

FIRST CHAIRMAN AND PHYSICIAN 1986-2010

Rodger Brough, one of the founding fathers of WRAD, grew up with the belief that alcohol was evil and that people should not use it at all. His views have since moderated but his dedication to helping people with drug and alcohol problems remains just as strong today as when he entered the field in a professional basis nearly 30 years ago. “I was brought up in my extended family to believe that alcohol was evil and I was always very aware of the issues that alcohol causes,” the drug and alcohol physician said. “I was always an abstainer which may have made me more aware of the issues surrounding alcohol. I tried alcohol once and just didn’t like it.” Today, Rodger says he is “not anti-alcohol”, providing it is consumed in moderation. “I have no problem with drinking in moderation.” Rodger’s observation as a GP of the health and social problems caused by alcohol abuse led him to work in the field. “I started out thinking I would be a family GP,” Rodger said. Melbourne born and educated at Monash University, Rodger came to Warrnambool in the mid 1970s after his graduation. After two years working at Warrnambool

Base Hospital Rodger moved into private practice at the Cambourne Clinic where he became a partner and worked until 1988. After a public meeting in Warrnambool about community drug and alcohol concerns, Rodger became part of a committee seeking to address the problem. In 1984 Rodger took six months out of his general practice to undergo training in the alcohol and drug field. When WRAD was established as a counseling service Rodger became the first chairman of the committee, and continued to play an important role in the establishment of the counseling service, which did, with support from local groups, include a drop-in centre for a few years.

The clinical part of his work was based at WRAD but he was employed by the hospital. Rodger has continued to work as South West Healthcare’s alcohol and drug physician. He was actively involved with WRAD until late 2010 in providing a Hepatitis C service and he remained on the committee for 20 years. WRAD recognised Rodger’s contribution by naming its conference room in his honour.

WRAADD

1986-1990

The opening of the first WRAADD Centre was a low-key affair but it paved the way for an important service which continues to meet a strong demand in south west Victoria.

In February 1986 Carmel Crowe was appointed as the centre's first co-ordinator. State and federal government funding allowed for 2.5 staff members and counsellor Anne Parkes and part-time receptionist/clerical assistant Dawn Bermingham completed the team. Mrs Bermingham remains with WRAD as office manager and Ms Parkes continues to work in the alcohol and drug field.

The WRAADD Centre at 325 Timor Street opened its doors in June 1986, initially offering counselling, and assessment and referral services. Within three months more than 30 clients were receiving support.

The centre was officially opened on November 27, 1986 by Regional Director of Health Tony Ryan. The WRAADD executive committee at the time consisted of Rodger Brough, Peter McMillan, John McGrath, James Nicol, Peter McGregor and Graeme Holdsworth. Mr Nicol became secretary and Mr McMillan treasurer, roles they would hold for more than two decades.

Chairman Rodger Brough said that foundations had been set to make a significant and positive contribution towards tackling "the much publicised alcohol and drug problems" in the community.

"One of my hopes for the centre is that it can rapidly develop services which will lead to a wide community use and acceptance of the centre," he wrote in WRAADD's third annual report, the first since the opening of the centre.

"The important stage of this association's development is just starting."



“THE WRAADD COMMITTEE WAS CONTINUING TO EYE NEW OPPORTUNITIES. A DROP-IN CENTRE REMAINED A TOP PRIORITY AND THERE WERE LONG-TERM PLANS FOR A RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT ESTABLISHMENT.”

Ms Crowe said in the report that 33 clients had registered in the first three months of operation and more than 100 phone calls had been received seeking advice. Alcohol was the most common reason for referral, a trend that continues to this day. Fifty three per cent of clients were men and most were aged 20-29.

The WRAADD Centre assumed responsibility for Warrnambool's Drink Drive Program and started a community education program.

Early in its existence WRAADD sought to service the broader region and appointed a .5 counsellor at Portland.

“People in the country frequently feel comfortable with the notion that dependence happens to other people in other places and it is hoped that through WRAADD we can foster understanding and caring attitudes in people with dependency problems much closer to home,” Ms Crowe said in her report.

The WRAADD team set about developing a variety of resources and services to support clients, and regularly drew on the expertise of alcohol and drug physician Dr Rodger Brough.

In its first year of operation WRAADD had a budget of \$172,874.

In 1987 Warrnambool MLA John McGrath became WRAADD president and welcomed the establishment of a medical service provided by Dr Brough for eight hours per week.

The service was further expanded with the employment of counsellor Georgina Parry to service the Hamilton and Portland areas.

WRAADD's involvement in the community continued to grow. Ninety two new clients came to the centre for counselling in 1987, 40 people completed the Drink-Drive Program, and support groups were established for families and Aboriginal people along with the self-help group Women for Sobriety.

Community education was becoming a key priority for WRAADD with staff involved in speaking engagements, providing information for schools and hosting student placements.

Community links were also being strengthened with the formation in 1988 of a Friends of WRAADD Group which played an important role in the centre's community awareness program.

WRAADD was involved locally with the Regional Alcohol and Drug Advisory Committee and state-wide with the Victorian Association for Alcohol and Drugs Agencies (VAADA).

During 1988 Dr Brough was appointed as alcohol and drug physician for the centre. The position was funded through the Victorian Health Department and made by the Warrnambool Base Hospital, though Dr Brough was based at the WRAADD Centre. He resigned from

CHAPTER ONE

the committee at this point and was replaced by Warrnambool pharmacist Ian Soulsby. The hospital also appointed a drug and alcohol nurse to complement existing services at the WRAADD Centre.

Inaugural coordinator Carmel Crowe left in August 1988 to undertake further study. She was replaced by Netta Hill, who had a background in medicine and community work.

At the same time demand was increasing for existing services. In 1988 there were 708 counselling contacts, including 112 new clients. There was increasing concern about the number of people aged under 20 accessing the service. Fifty one people completed the Drive-Drive Program and there were 35 hospital admissions for detoxification.

Funding issues were starting to emerge in 1989. As the workload increased with additional medical and counselling staff and more than 300 new clients, the clerical support position remained at .5. President John McGrath said this needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The following year more funding was made available to allow an additional .5 position.

The committee was seeking funds to extend 325 Timor Street to cope with the additional demand.

WRAADD also played a role in launching an appeal for the establishment of a Life Education Program in south-west Victoria.

Continuing concern in the region led the Glenelg Regional Consultative Council to allocate funding for a repeat of the 1979 Apex survey to look at the attitudes to and use of drugs in the region.

WRAADD was doing its bit to increase community awareness with an advertising and media campaign highlighting issues of concern.

Internally, WRAADD instigated training courses for staff on issues as varied as substance abuse and AIDS and a Narcotics Anonymous group started in Warrnambool during 1989.

The year 1990 brought with it fresh funding concerns. President John McGrath feared budget cuts to remove half the acute hospital beds for drug and alcohol patients would have disastrous impacts on services. He warned that turning these people back into the community would condemn many of them to a life of hopelessness or in some cases death.

Warrnambool policeman Senior Sergeant Ian Armstrong joined the committee, replacing Ian Soulsby, starting a close association between WRAADD and the police.

WRAADD's regional perspective continued to grow with a visiting service to the Camperdown area being trialled, along with the continued expansion of counselling in Hamilton and particularly Portland.

For the first time WRAADD was required to enter a health service agreement with the Victorian Health Department.



DAWN BERMINGHAM

OFFICE MANAGER 1986-2011

Not only is WRAD celebrating its 25th anniversary, so too is office manager Dawn Bermingham.

Dawn was one of three inaugural staff members when WRAADD opened its doors in June 1986.

Her part-time clerical and reception duties have since grown into a full-time office manager role.

Throughout the years of change and growth Dawn says the core purpose of WRAD has remained intact.

“It is there to provide services and counselling to help people get their lives back together,” she said.

“IT IS STILL VERY MUCH NEEDED BY OUR COMMUNITY. WRAD OR SOMETHING SIMILAR WILL ALWAYS HAVE TO BE HERE; THE PROBLEMS OF ADDICTION ARE NEVER GOING TO GO AWAY.”

Dawn said she would like the expertise of WRAD staff to be harnessed to benefit the wider community. “I think WRAD could become more of a teaching organisation to make sure that skills of its staff can be passed on. Of course funding is always the biggest issue.”

Dawn had worked in a legal office and taken time off to raise children before moving into her WRAD role.

“It was very small at the start but as it grew my role went more into finances and eventually office manager.”

“WRAD has always been a very good place to work. I enjoy helping people and meeting the clients and the knowledge I have learned along the way has helped me to grow with the organisation.”

Dawn is part of a stable administration team which has a combined 75 years of experience. Medical administrator Joy Shannahan and Carol Main have both completed 20 years of service and finance officer Debbie Maguire has been with the organisation for 10 years.

WRAADD

1991-1995

The demand for WRAADD's services continued to grow in the early 1990s. In 1991 there was a 17 per cent increase in the number of clients, with alcohol still the main problem. In fact, 85 per cent of clients in Warrnambool sought help for alcohol-related problems and in Portland/Hamilton the figure was 92 per cent.

By this time WRAADD had grown to six permanent staff, supplemented by close associations with drug and alcohol specialists at the Warrnambool Base Hospital.

The WRAADD committee was determined to maintain specialist delivery of drug and alcohol services in the south-west, despite ongoing debate about health services amalgamation.

The lack of detoxification beds was also concerning president John McGrath. "It is important that drug and alcohol patients be given appropriate priority consideration when determining admission...the availability of detoxification can be critical in the potential recovery of these patients," he wrote in the 1991 annual report.

In October 1991 WRAADD organised a seminar about the issue which resulted in formation of a sub-committee to work towards a residential centre in Warrnambool. By 1992 WRAADD was agitating for a permanent detoxification unit.

Realisation of a dream to help drug victims



Warrnambool alcohol and drug physician Dr Rodger Brough and chief secretary of the Salvation Army southern territory Colonel Frank Linsell at yesterday's official opening of the Fairy Street rehab centre. Picture: SIMON O'DWYER

By ANDREW MEATH

THE south-west region has its first residential rehabilitation centre for alcohol and drug dependent people.

The Warrnambool Bridge Centre was officially opened yesterday and should take in its first residents during August.

Up to 15 people can be accommodated in the Fairy Street centre and receive confidential treatment for alcohol or drug abuse.

In officially opening the centre yesterday, Warrnambool MLA John McGrath said the facility was the realisation of a dream.

"The centre offers short to long term care for people with alcohol and drug problems who need time out from the demands of life, family and work," Mr McGrath told a crowd of about 75 people at the opening.

"They need to get their life back together, to get a better perspective and this care enables them to understand the basis of the illness and what it does to them."

In the past people with alcohol and drug-related problems have had to travel to Melbourne or other centres for long-term rehabilitation treatment.

Mr McGrath said that residents' length of stay at the centre could vary from six weeks to six months, possibly a year.

"The program will take six weeks to complete, but others may need a longer time," he said.

The need for a regional residential rehabilitation unit was discovered in November, 1991, during a seminar organised by the Warrnambool Regional Association for Alcohol and Drug Dependence.

Mr McGrath said that WRAADD, The Salvation Army and Warrnambool City Council should be commended for their commitment to the project.

WRAADD has provided committee and staff time, resources and funding for the centre.

Warrnambool City Council gave an interest free loan for two years for the purchase of the \$210,000 Fairy Street building.

The Salvation Army is paying for the program and program directors.

Mr McGrath thanked the many other local groups who had donated money, labor or time to the program.

Chief secretary of the Salvation Army, Colonel Frank Linsell said the army was committed to helping alcohol and drug dependent people.

"By providing access to care in a non-judgemental environment, it is possible to repair the body, mind and soul of the addict," he said.

**WRAADD
BECAME WRAD
IN 1994 WHEN
THE CENTRE'S
OFFICIAL NAME
WAS CHANGED
TO THE WESTERN
REGION ALCOHOL
& DRUG CENTRE.**

CHAPTER TWO

A drop-in centre at 5 Hider Street was providing a caring atmosphere for people needing support and was also the home for several self-help groups. By 1992 it was under the management of WRAADD and being run entirely by volunteers. The service was proving so popular that additional volunteers were being sought.

Extended liquor trading was a big issue in the Warrnambool community in the early 1990s and the WRAADD committee weighed into the debate. The committee developed a policy opposing applications that would increase the availability of liquor through extended hours and submitted objections to the Liquor Licensing Tribunal.

A 'Drink 'Til Ya Fall' event planned for September 1991 earned particular ire, being described by Dr Rodger Brough as blatantly irresponsible. The 'happy hour' concept adopted by several Warrnambool hotels was slammed by WRAADD chairman John McGrath as an "offensive incentive for young people to abuse alcohol".

The addition of a part-time administrative assistant boosted staff numbers as WRAADD continued to see more clients. For 1991-92 the total number of contacts in Warrnambool was 777, Portland 284 and Hamilton 230, along with 156 in Warrnambool's Drink-Drive Program. More than 80 per cent of new clients were males.

The needle and syringe exchange program had 31 registered clients with an average of 200 syringes being distributed each month.

The expansion of demand prompted the WRAADD committee to start initial moves to establish a rehabilitation program and with the support of the local community and Warrnambool City Council secured a property at 52-54 Fairy Street for a rehabilitation centre.

The Warrnambool Salvation Army Bridge Centre was officially opened in September 1993 as a two-year pilot. WRAADD and its residential sub-committee had played a leading role in advocating for the centre, which was being run by the Salvation Army. It offered short to long term care for up to 10 people with alcohol and drug problems. A fund-raising committee was established to help develop residential services in the south-west. An outreach 'bridging centre' was later set up by the Salvation Army in Merrivale Drive.

WRAADD moved in a new direction with its support for the Glenelg Games. With WRAADD as a sponsor the games adopted the theme 'Booze Less – Be Your Best' with support from the Alcohol and Drug Foundation.

DICE (Drug Issues Concern Everyone) was formed in 1993 to address issues involving young people and alcohol and drug use.

HIV/AIDS was also an issue of concern, with 64 people attending an awareness evening held in conjunction with Lifeline and the

CHAPTER TWO

Warrnambool and District Base Hospital. A HIV support group was established as a result of the meeting.

WRAADD underwent several administrative changes during this period. In late 1992 Bill O'Keefe was appointed co-ordinator, replacing Netta Hill. However, more changes were just around the corner. Carmel Crowe had returned to Warrnambool and was seconded from South West TAFE in May 1993 as acting coordinator.

Later that year Annette Warner joined the team as co-ordinator. She set about addressing issues such as developing a detoxification centre and a suggestion that WRAADD become incorporated under a community health and support service.

She also aimed to introduce the service to more women, fearing that their lack of involvement was a 'hidden' issue.

WRAADD also threw its support behind a campaign for smoke-free areas in public places and buildings. Workplaces and restaurants were among the centres targeted in the campaign.

The 1994 WRAD annual report revealed the worrying statistic that more than 90 per cent of drink driving offenders thought they were capable of driving. WRAADD became WRAD in 1994 when the centre's name was officially changed to the Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre.

Coordinator Annette Warner was also concerned about the number of young people presenting with alcohol or drug problems. The 20-24 year age group represented 35.3 per cent of clients for the year. WRAD initiated a youth awareness festival in April where information was provided to more than 1000 young people.

WRAD worked with the Warrnambool and District Base Hospital to secure the tender for a Warrnambool-based withdrawal support service in 1995 and launched a pilot community-based team which aimed to help clients in their own living environments.

The Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative appointed an alcohol and drug worker in a move supported by WRAD. Drink Drive Program leader Jean Hunt reported in 1995 that 162 clients had completed the education program, while the WRAD Centre helped 352 clients with 1792 contacts.

Mixing it without the booze

By LORNA EDWARDS

COCKTAILS galore were served up at the Gateway Motor Inn yesterday with the local health workers.

The drinking session marked the end of a workshop program for district health and welfare workers on the impact of alcohol and drugs.

Despite their exotic names and cocktail umbrellas, the range of drinks had one thing in common — they

were all alcohol-free and designed to show how people can have fun and enjoy drinking without consuming alcohol.

The collection of health and welfare workers from as far afield as Portland celebrated the completion of the program with Mrs. Jones, Shirley Tipples and even policeman.

WRAADD co-ordinator Annette Warner took to duty as

a bartender for the day. Mrs. Warner said the health workers were focused in ways of detecting alcohol and drug problems in their clients and educated on what other these problems have on them.

Next month, a similar two-day workshop will be conducted for agencies involved through the Supportive Accommodation Assistance Program.



The Standard, Friday, October 22, 1993

GEOFF SOMA

DIRECTOR 2000-2011



I FOUND THE CLIENT GROUP WAS MARGINALISED, MISUNDERSTOOD AND NEEDED A VOICE TO MAKE SURE THEY HAD ADEQUATE SERVICES TO MEET THEIR NEEDS.



When Geoff Soma started his career he quickly developed an affinity with patients battling drug and alcohol problems.

Since then Geoff has dedicated his working life to helping those people. After working for 16 years at Odyssey House in Melbourne and New Zealand, Geoff joined WRAD as director in August 2000.

From the outset he was keen to develop a broader range of services for WRAD's clients.

One of his priorities was developing a specialist medical service and attracting doctors to work at WRAD.

Geoff also aimed to raise WRAD's profile in the community.

WRAD underwent a period of sustained growth under Geoff's leadership which required moving from the centre's original home in Timor Street in 2002 to an office in Fairy Street and finally to a purpose-built centre in Merri Street in 2006.

"We were able to secure a number of Commonwealth funded projects during this time, such as a youth outreach project and improved services project to help people with drug and alcohol and mental health problems."

Projects such as pilots for an Australian Rural Centre for Addictive Behaviours and WRADlink were also instigated but were unable to secure ongoing funding.

Geoff still sees the establishment of a specialist training centre to educate GPs, nurses, social workers and staff across other disciplines as a high, unfulfilled priority need for the region.

Geoff cites networking and improving services and the profile of WRAD as key achievements.

"I am very lucky to work with staff who have so many skills and to have the support of the committee of management. I get a lot of satisfaction in seeing WRAD staff develop better systems to operate our services and then see how these have helped clients make inroads on so many levels."

Now 58, Geoff is content in his role and looks forward to a strong future with WRAD.

Geoff said he could also look back with pride on the developments at WRAD over the past decade.

"I have seen people make amazing changes in their lives.

From left: Lyn McGrath, John McGrath, Ian Armstrong



01. **Photo:** (From left)
Geoff Handbury,
Matt Handbury, Helen Taylor
and Geoff Soma.

02. **Annual Report**
2008-2009 Front Cover

03. **Article**
The Standard

04. **Annual Report**
2006-2007 Front Cover

05. **Photo:** (From left)
Geoff Soma, John Thwaites,
John McGrath, Ian Armstrong,
Peter McMillan at WRAD
Centre opening.

06. **Photo:** (From left)
Long serving administration
staff Debbie Maguire,
Carol Main, Joy Shannahan
and Dawn Bermingham.

07. **Article**
The Standard

08. **Photo:**
Murray to Moyne team

09. **Photo:**
WRAD staff 1990s.

10. **Article**
The Standard

11. **Photo:** (From left)
Peter McMillan and
Gerry Holland,
Murray to Moyne organiser.

12. **Photo:** John McGrath
speaks at the opening of the
WRAD Centre.

13. **Annual Report**
2009-2010 Front Cover

14. **Annual Report**
2007-2008 Front Cover

15. **Annual Report**
2004 Front Cover

16. **Annual Report**
2002 Front Cover

17. **Logo**
WRAADD Logo

16



WRAD issues a challenge: Give up grog for a weekend

By JARED LYNCH

A LONG weekend without any grog – can you do it? The Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre (WRAD) has challenged south-west residents to give up alcohol over the Labour Day long weekend.

Director Geoff Soma hoped the campaign would encourage people to rethink their drinking patterns.

"If people can go without alcohol for one weekend and then think about reducing their alcohol intake and changing their drinking habits in the future, it would prevent a lot of health problems and have a positive impact on our community," he said.

"This is not about stopping people from drinking it's about changing the way we drink and the impact on ourselves and others."

Mr Soma said people who took up the challenge were asked to donate the money they saved to the WRAD building appeal.

He described tackling alcohol as WRAD's main challenge and said the long-weekend was perfect for launching the campaign. Police Acting Inspector Peter Nichols and three Warrnambool school principals are spearheading the campaign.

All will take up the challenge and not let one drop of alcohol past their lips over the weekend.

Acting Inspector Nichols, who is also a WRAD board member, said joining the campaign made perfect sense.

"As leaders in the community we need to practise what we preach," he said. Warrnambool College principal Mary Pendergast said she was pleased to support the campaign.

"We do have a problem in this community and we need initiatives like this to tackle it," Ms Pendergast said.

Her fellow principals, Brauer College's Julie Myers and Emmanuel College's Philip Morrison, will also take up the challenge.

People can register to join the campaign at WRAD's website, www.wrad.org.au.



BIG DRINKERS

Warrnambool's alcohol use soars above the state average

By EVE LAMB

DRINKERS in Warrnambool and districts are consuming 32 per cent more alcohol than the average Victorian, new research has found.

The draft Local Alcohol and Drug Action Plan found alcohol-related hospital admissions in the south-west are up to 67 per cent higher than the Victorian average.

The draft report also reveals the region has some of the highest drink-driving levels in the state, that people aged 15 and over are drinking at alarmingly unsafety rates and that alcohol consumes more court time than any other drug.

The report also reveals that some young women are deliberately binge-drinking in vain to reduce their calorie intake.

Nicotine-related deaths and drug-related crime are highlighted in the report – a consistent project for Warrnambool, Moyne and Corangamite local government areas.

It will be available for people to read and respond to in the next fortnight.

The average Warrnambool City resident consumes the equivalent of 10.3 litres of pure alcohol a year while the average Victorian consumes 7.82 litres.

Research found the average Warrnambool City resident consumes 10.3 litres of pure alcohol per year while the average Victorian consumes 7.82 litres.

The average Warrnambool person is drinking 32 per cent more alcohol than the average Victorian and no-one knows why, the report's project worker, Susan Morey, said.

The report's executive summary states that the three local government areas involved 'have some of the state's highest alcohol-related hospital admissions and some of the most alarming levels of individual alcohol consumption'.

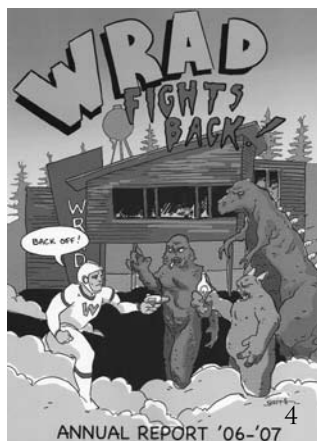
It states: 'drink-driving is rife and there are considerable consequences linked to other local drug-related crimes'. The level

of alcohol-related hospital admissions in Warrnambool, Corangamite and Moyne is the highest for the entire Barwon Health Region.

In Warrnambool it is 67 per cent above the state average, with 51.5 admissions to hospital per 10,000 people.

The rate of alcohol-related hospital admission is 34 per cent above the state average in Corangamite (41.7 per 10,000 people) and 28 per cent above the state average in Moyne (42.1 admissions per 10,000 people).

Continued Page 2.





8



9

Reduce alcohol outlets, says WRAD

FROM PAGE 1

"If you triple the number who have come forward, that's about how many people in Warrnambool have an alcohol problem." Mr. Soma said there was a need to reduce the number of liquor outlets, or the competition would drive prices down and alcohol problems up.

He said pubs and clubs should trial different closing times to see if affected how much people drank.

"Some people believe the longer you leave them open, the better, while some say the earlier they close, the better," Mr. Soma said.

"One of the things to look at is trialling different closing times - and involving the police and council."

Australian Hotels Association south-west representative Peter Walsh said shutting pubs and clubs earlier was not the solution.

"In this day and age, shutting at 12 o'clock wouldn't work," he said.

"Young ones want to stay out so it's understandable why places like Whalers and The Gallery stay open until 2am."

Mr. Walsh, who owns Mac's Hotel, said the city's increasing alcohol consumption



WRAD's Geoff Soma, Carol Main and Dr David Richards are concerned about the availability of alcohol and its impact on Warrnambool residents.

levels were because of competition.

"There are cheap drinks everywhere mainly because of the supermarkets," he said. "They make it hard on bottle shop owners who have to lower their prices to maintain their business."

"I'm guilty of it, but until the Government wakes up and puts a price regulation on the supermarkets selling drinks, it's going to get worse."

Mr. Walsh said the number

of outlets in Warrnambool was a concern.

"If you go to a place like Colac, there are only four pubs, so it's better," he said. Senior Sergeant Paul Hargreaves, of Warrnambool police, said the majority of street crimes were alcohol-related.

"As we get later into the week and later into the night, alcohol features more prominently," he said.

would be to stagger the closing times of the licensed premises so we don't have that influx of people into the CBD at the same time.

"At the moment we might have 1000 or 2000 people going out on a Friday or Saturday night but only have five or six incidents, sometimes even one or none."

Senior Sergeant Hargreaves said educating students about the dangers of alcohol

help.

STYLING: PICTURE: GLEN WILSON

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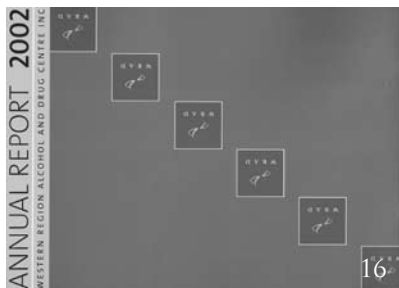
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IAN ARMSTRONG

COMMITTEE MEMBER 1990-2007



“WE WENT FROM BEING A SMALL COMMITTEE AND CENTRE TO BEING AN ORGANISATION WITH A MUCH BROADER VISION WHICH LOOKS AT ALL ASPECTS OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL.”



Ian Armstrong describes his connection with WRAD as “a good marriage”.

In 1990 Ian became the first member of Victoria Police to join the WRAD Board, starting a tradition that continues to this day.

“I think it is beneficial to both sides, police and WRAD, and I hope it continues,” he said.

“I was able to go back to my work and pass on information and knowledge from WRAD that could influence policies and attitudes, and I think it benefits WRAD to have the perspective of someone from the police.”

“There are a lot of issues involving people with alcohol and drug that have police input so there are benefits both ways.”

Ian had moved to Warrnambool as a Senior Sergeant in 1985 and was keen to become involved with community groups.

In 1990 the then WRAD chairman and Member for Warrnambool John McGrath invited him to join the WRAD committee.

“It was a good marriage,” he said. “I was keen to become more involved in the community and WRAD saw that I could have an input from the police perspective.

“I had a passion for alcohol and drug issues because of the way they affect the community so I took up the offer.”

Ian spent 17 years on the committee, including seven as its chairman from 2000-2006.

WRAD underwent massive growth during this time and Ian’s involvement helped to adjust police and public attitudes towards people with drug and alcohol problems.

“The introduction of medical services, programs for youth and programs to address the mental health side of addiction have been very beneficial to the community.”

“I think we have also made a difference in how police perceive drug and alcohol issues,” Ian said.

Now retired and living in Kinglake, Ian looks back on his time with WRAD with nothing but positive memories and sees it having a growing role.

“WRAD is going to be more important rather than less so. The issues are still there.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed my years with WRAD. We were able to spread the word about the issues and raise the profile of WRAD.

“To see people successfully turn their lives around made it all worthwhile.”

WRAD

1996-2000

After a decade of operation, WRAD was continuing to expand and make its mark on the local community.

Staff members at the time were coordinator Annette Warner, counsellor Stephen Edge, counsellor (Portland/Hamilton) Jim Holmes, counsellor/therapist Peter Punch, drug screen manager Julie Hughson, recreation officer Linda McKenzie, office manager Dawn Bermingham, administrative assistant Carol Main, administrative/Drink Drive Program assistant Joy Shannahan, counsellor/Drink Drive Program manager Jean Hunt, special programs planner Joy Billings, senior counsellor/therapist Bill Carta, Drink Drive Program manager (February-October) Georgia Pitt.

The committee of management consisted of John McGrath (chairman), James Nicol (secretary), Peter McMillan (treasurer), Senior Sergeant Ian Armstrong, Heather Hall, Dr Daryl Pedler, Lt Bruce Stevens and ex-officio Dr Rodger Brough. Joy Billings and Major Harry Webb had resigned during the year.

Resources continued to worry WRAD. Mr McGrath said there was an “explosion” in demand from the community for more information but WRAD was unable to meet this demand without overloading staff. He was also concerned about the adequacy of resources for the withdrawal support service.

Despite the funding concerns, WRAD was involved in new initiatives, including a sobering up service funded by the Department of Human Services at the Port Fairy Folk Festival. WRAD also won a VIC HEALTH award for its dual strategy work with the Glenelg Games.

A new position was created for a recreation officer to give clients activities to remove them from their usual living environment. These included fishing, sightseeing and sports.

A urine drug screening program had been operating for 12 months, with about 60 contacts per month.

WRAD was also promoting its recently adopted philosophy: “The WRAD Centre is committed to providing a service to individuals and families to deal with the diverse needs and problems created by problematic alcohol and drug use within the regional community. The principle of harm reduction guides the work of the centre where ongoing education and evaluation are considered fundamental to quality and professionalism in service delivery.”

CHAPTER THREE

“IN 1996 THE CENTRE HAD 13 STAFF, 420 CLIENTS AND 2742 CONTACTS, AND AN OPERATING BUDGET OF MORE THAN \$350,000.”

In December 1996 WRAD successfully tendered for outreach problem gambling and counselling services in the Moyne, Glenelg and Southern Grampians municipalities. WRAD also went through an exhaustive process of tendering for all of its services, retaining all its core functions. It also added a drug and alcohol service for young people co-located with Brophy Family and Youth Services and a supported accommodation program.

A new emphasis was emerging on the dual diagnosis of people with drug and alcohol problems who also experienced mental health issues. Steps were being taken between the WRAD Centre and Warrnambool-based Psychiatric Services to develop a relationship to better service these clients.

In April 1997 Brian Trenery was appointed to the newly titled position of manager, replacing previous coordinator Annette Warner who was on sick leave. Mrs Warner took on a community development role but later resigned due to ill health.

John McGrath paid tribute, saying Ms Warner's stamp had been left on the centre's activities, in particular in her valuable work promoting the variety of services provided by WRAD.

After her death in 2000 WRAD named the guest speaker presentation at its annual meeting in honour of Mrs Warner to recognise her commitment and instrumental role in the development of the organisation.

A review of health services in Warrnambool and the Shire of Moyne recommended establishment of a community health service, of which WRAD would become a part.

In June 1997 the residential services sub-committee folded. Its outgoing chairman, Warrnambool policeman and WRAD committee member Senior Sergeant Ian Armstrong, said there was no longer a need for the sub-committee due to the close ties between WRAD and the Salvation Army Bridge program.

WRAD also employed its own supported accommodation worker to help people who had undergone a withdrawal program to reintegrate into community living.

Manager Brian Trenery noted a shift in emphasis for the overall service. "A review of how and what services are being delivered suggests that the traditional approach to treatment is shifting and that the emphasis should be channelled toward prevention and education," he wrote in the 1998 annual report.

A 12-month pilot project over 1997-98 provided support for drug and alcohol acquired brain injury clients.

CHAPTER THREE

The views of clients were considered in a satisfaction survey carried out in 1999. The results were positive, with 83 per cent of those surveyed listing the service as very good or excellent.

There were more changes at the helm of WRAD in 1999 when Mr Trenery announced his retirement as manager. Geoff Soma was appointed WRAD's new director in August 2000

Foundation member John McGrath also retired from the WRAD committee of management. He was replaced as chairman by Ian Armstrong.

Dawn Bermingham had also progressed into the role of office manager. and shared management duties with senior clinician Peter Punch while a new director was recruited.

In his final report Mr Trenery noted that WRAD was benefitting from more financial support from community organisations to boost its programs.

Gambling became a strong focus of WRAD when it launched its Have You Crossed the Line? responsible gambling community awareness campaign. A six-month project culminated in a Problem Gambling Week, the first of its kind.

WRAD was also extending its care to support the families and partners of clients, amid concerns from counsellors that 'quick fix' treatments were being advocated on a wider scale while human service agencies were still struggling at the coal face.

In his first annual report as chairman, Ian Armstrong said WRAD was looking to diversify services to include more community education programs that would take it in to schools and workplaces.

There was increasing emphasis on the tragic impact of cigarettes with WRAD producing statistics showing 174 Western Victorians died annually from smoking. This led to a public campaign 'Ditch the Addiction, Live Life Instead' which included placing 174 white crosses on Warrnambool's Civic Green to represent those who lost their lives to smoking.

At the same time alcohol consumption figures were worrying WRAD. The Victorian Alcohol Statistics Handbook showed the average Victorian consumed 7.82 litres of pure alcohol per year but Warrnambool people drunk a mighty 10.33 litres. WRAD was using the statistics to secure more funding to address the problem.

New doctor to stamp out drug misconceptions

By LEAN HENNING

A LACK of education has led to the misconception that drug addicts and people with alcohol problems will cause problems for road support services, Warrnambool's newest drug and alcohol physician says.

Dr David Richards will work at the WRAD Centre and with Dr Rodrigo through at South West Healthcare as part of a 12-month posting aimed at drug and alcohol services.

Dr Richards, who has worked in rural Victoria for 11 years, said he would work with GPs and health professionals to help them understand the needs of recovering drug addicts and help develop new programs.

Dr Richards has worked in isolated communities in Victoria's north-west where it is difficult for people with drug and alcohol problems to get support because of a lack of services in the health sector.

He said services were "very thin on the ground" and that people with drug and alcohol problems were not willing to deal with people with drug misconceptions they would cause trouble.

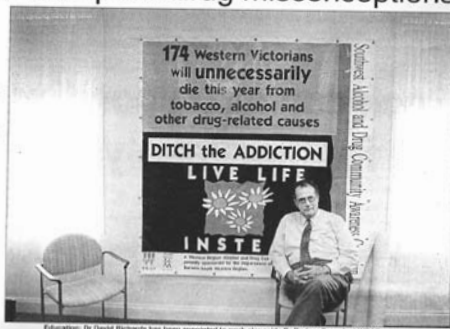
Funding and support for road doctors would help them better meet the needs of patients with drug and alcohol problems, he said.

"People in rural Victoria so often can't access the services they need."

"GPs are in the frontline and provide a non-judgmental and flexible setting in which people can get complete, discussing alcohol and drug related concerns."

Dr Richards said the through target to develop an educational model that could be used elsewhere in Victoria, to help health service professionals understand how drugs or alcohol affected people so they would be more willing to help.

Dr Richards, who has a special interest in helping people with chronic pain, would also establish a Pain Clinic at South West Healthcare's Allied Health building.



Education: Dr David Richards has been appointed to work alongside Dr Rodrigo through at WRAD.



JOHN MCGRATH

COMMITTEE MEMBER & CHAIRMAN 1986-2000

Former Warrnambool MLA John McGrath clearly recalls the significance of the day he took a friend to Melbourne to attend an alcohol and drug detoxification program. John collected the man about 5am and then dropped him at the rehabilitation centre in the north-eastern suburbs. At the time John was still a tyre dealer and had yet to enter the world of politics. He went off for his day of meetings with others in the tyre industry before driving home only to find the man sitting in his lounge room back in Warrnambool. "He had escaped and caught the train to come home to Warrnambool. He just couldn't face up to being away in Melbourne doing this program," John recalled. That was the day that John realised Warrnambool needed to have its own drug and alcohol service. John had been through his own experiences with a drinking problem and had found help. Now he was determined to help others. He was involved in the Warrnambool Drug Education Committee and soon became a foundation member of the Western Regional Association for Drug and Alcohol Dependence, which would later become the Western Regional Alcohol

and Drug Centre (WRAD). "I had been interested in alcohol counselling and had a long-standing interest in supporting people with alcohol and drug problems so I became involved," John said. He went on to become one of the longest serving WRAD committee members and served as chairman from 1986 to 2000. He remained with WRAD after becoming the State Member for Warrnambool for the National Party in 1985, a position he held until retiring in 1999. "I had to leave some boards but WRAD was totally voluntary so there was no conflict. I stayed on the Board until 2000 when we moved to Melbourne. I stayed because I fiercely believed in WRAD and what it does...I still do." John remains in contact with WRAD leaders and was actively involved in the fund-raising campaign for establishing the WRAD Centre in Merri Street.

WRAD

2001-2005

'Our Community, Our Problem' was a theme adopted by WRAD at the start of the new millennium and the centre itself was adapting and growing with the times.

Dr David Richards joined WRAD to allow the provision of a comprehensive clinical service.

New business and action plans, the development of the first Western Victorian Local Drug Action Plan (LADAP), and the addition of new staff in youth home-based withdrawal and methadone outreach programs, a youth information service and pre-employment drug screening service led the committee of management to seek a new location for WRAD.

Chairman Ian Armstrong explained that the Timor Street location could not match the organisation's development. A new site at 26 Fairy Street, the former Community Connections building, was purchased to cope with the expansion in programs and staff (by 2001 WRAD had 16 employees).

The new centre was opened in May 2002 by Minister for Health John Thwaites and was named in honour of former chairman and driving force John McGrath.

WRAD was now running on an annual operating budget of more than \$700,000 to cope with an ever-growing number of client contacts.

WRAD broadened its presence in the local community, developing its first website, liaising with local organisations and maintaining a high profile in the media. During 2001 a WRAD 'clown' roamed the streets of Warrnambool with a breathalyser to draw attention to drug and alcohol awareness as part of Drug Action Week.



The Standard, Thursday, December 1, 2005

CHAPTER FOUR

“FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS WRAD WAS NOW PROVIDING SERVICES TO 1600 CLIENTS PER YEAR. MEN WITH ALCOHOL PROBLEMS CONTINUED TO BE THE MOST REGULAR CLIENT.”

The lack of funding for detoxification beds at South West Healthcare (formerly Warrnambool and District Base Hospital) was again highlighted when a homeless man was rejected from the overburdened detox program due to a lack of beds.

WRAD was responsible for the development of the LADAP plan which was released in June 2002 and highlighted the impact of legal substances (cigarettes and alcohol) on the health of Western Victorian people. For every 1000 deaths in the region 148 were caused by smoking, 23 by alcohol and 13 by roads crashes. The plan proposed various strategies to tackle the problem, including nicotine replacement therapies and more funding for adequate prevention, intervention and treatment services.

A community strengthening initiative was introduced to promote social cohesion, participation in community activities and improved understanding in the community of drug issues.

Seed funding was announced by the Department of Human Services for a pilot Australian Rural Centre for Addictive Behaviours which operated out of the WRAD Centre. WRAD had been advocating for the centre since 2000 and its pilot was the first of its type in Australia.

The centre aimed to develop a package of rurally-relevant responses to a growing list of addictive behaviours. Its director Dr Rodger Brough described it as “a not-for-profit, community-based, rural public health research and training organisation”. It attracted funding for a second pilot year and made an impressive impact but was unable to secure ongoing funding and the concept was reluctantly abandoned by the middle of the decade.

A third doctor, Clare Mooney, joined the centre as it continued to expand its medical services and programs and respond to demand.

WRAD was also investigating a GP training project to assist with specialist medical training in Warrnambool. The centre continues to push for this.

Honour for years of helping

RIGHT: Doctor Rodger Brough has received the Best Of The Best Contribution Award at the Rural Victorian Alcohol and Drugs Awards for Excellence.

**The Standard,
Saturday,
August 14, 2004**



By EVE LAMB

RURAL people are different. They have their own culture and code regional towns is itself a distinct sub-culture, and this, says Warrnambool addiction-medicine specialist Dr Rodger Brough, needs to be recognised when dealing with drug and alcohol issues.

After 30 years helping people battle addiction, Warrnambool's Dr Brough, has received a major state award for being attuned with the needs of his patients and their communities.

The affable doctor who founded the Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre was named recipient of The Best Of The Best Contribution Award at the Rural Victorian Alcohol and Drugs Awards for Excellence in Warrnambool this week.

The award recognised Dr Brough's "integrity and vision to see into the future, to identify gaps and produce solutions resulting in better services for rural Victorians".

Dr Brough founded the Warrnambool Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Committee.

"Our argument is that rural communities aren't all the same. They've got their own culture and social context and if you are really going to do things effectively

"Our argument is that rural communities aren't all the same. They've got their own culture and social context and if you are really going to do things effectively you need to understand the culture."

— Dr Rodger Brough

you need to understand the culture," he said. "For example we don't have a big problem here with heroin but we do have an issue with prescribed morphine and this is different to the situation you get closer to metropolitan Melbourne."

"One of the things we really want to do is to take a public health approach to looking at what we can do in the country to target the community as a whole (in preventing and treating problems)."

"I'm very honoured to receive the award but one of the things I learned very early in my career is that no one person can do it all and I've been very fortunate to have a fantastic team."

CHAPTER FOUR

The year 2003 marked 20 years since the formation of a steering committee which eventually led to the establishment of WRAD.

The centre continued to chart new territory with the appointment of a practice nurse, introduction of GP training programs to support doctors in delivering pharmacotherapy, a new support program for people with an acquired brain injury, collaboration with Brophy Family and Youth Services on an adventure-based learning, counselling and vocational support program for young people, and a pain management service.

By 2004 pressure was mounting on the new WRAD premises in Fairy Street. After only a few years the building was already operating at capacity and WRAD instigated plans for a new purpose-built double-storey facility on vacant land at 172 Merri Street.

It was described by Mr Armstrong as a strategic investment to accommodate expanding services and meet client, community and staff expectations. The land purchase would be partly funded by sale of the Fairy Street property.

New programs, including a problem gambling project, treatment in custody and personal support packages, added to the centre's functions.

By 2005 WRAD had a staff of 23, an operating budget of \$1.35 million and 13 different programs tailored to the client base.

WRAD was behind the 'There's More to Life' expo in 2005 which encouraged people to be active in the community. The event, which included Raelene Boyle as guest speaker, won an Outstanding Rural Health Promotion Award at the 2005 Rural Victorian Alcohol and Drug Conference. WRAD was also a finalist in the South Coast Regional Business Awards in the community enterprise category.

'Tears of Hope' a booklet detailing the journey of alcohol and substance related acquired brain injury, was also launched during the year.

There was mounting concern about pharmacotherapy services, with WRAD joining other agencies in campaigning for more funding for this essential service.

A WRAD open day introduced the centre to a wider cross section of the community and the centre continued to be involved in community development programs and joint initiatives with other community agencies, including membership of the South West Alliance of Rural Health.

The planned new \$1.85m WRAD Centre in Merri Street was given the go-ahead in 2005, with funds from the AER Foundation and Department of Human Services to be supplemented by WRAD funds and public support. The move was timely with plans to redevelop the site of the existing Fairy Street building and the purpose-built centre was seen as the next logical step in the development of WRAD.

The centre would include 25 offices and conference facilities and would be a milestone in the organisation's history as its first purpose-built facility.

PETER MCMILLAN

FOUNDATION MEMBER 1986-2011



Peter McMillan is the sole remaining foundation member of the WRAD Board. His involvement came about through his friendship with one of the driving forces behind the establishment of WRAD, John McGrath. “John was the initial chairman of WRAD and he asked me if I would be the treasurer when the formal committee was being established.” “John and I went back a long way as friends and he thought I could be able to help out as Treasurer. Peter was a natural for the role of Treasurer with his background in accounting. He has worked for Sinclair Wilson Accountants, where he is now a partner, for nearly 50 years. WRAD has undergone tremendous change since its humble beginnings.

“IT IS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT OPERATION TODAY WITH A LOT MORE SERVICES BUT IT STILL ESSENTIALLY PERFORMS THE SAME ROLE”

“When it started it was basically Rodger, Carmel Crowe as the first co-ordinator, Dawn Bermingham in administration and a counsellor. “It has certainly grown and offers more services to the community.” He has noticed many changes over that time. “I guess the biggest change has been our moves from Timor Street to Fairy Street and now to our own building in Merri Street. The new building was necessary because WRAD works in much broader fields today. We have made good investments and that has helped the organisation grow and consolidate.” Peter says the role played by WRAD is as valid today as it was 25 years ago but he remains concerned about ongoing government funding. “We are in constant battle with government to maintain funding for our services. “We have to make governments understand that the needs of rural areas are different to those of the city. Although he has stepped down as Treasurer, Peter remains as deputy chairman of the Board and looks forward to continuing his lengthy association with WRAD. “I still enjoy it and think we are making an important contribution to the community.”

WRAD

2006-2011

The modern era of WRAD was ushered in with the opening of the new centre at 172 Merri Street in July 2006. It was well received by staff and clients and gave WRAD a higher profile in the Warrnambool CBD.

The community also got behind a public appeal to help the building project, with local foundations particularly generous in their support. One outstanding donation of \$100,000 from Western District philanthropist Geoff Handbury was the sign of great things to come. Mr Handbury would repeat the donation several times over the coming years and in 2008 the WRAD boardroom was named in his honour.

The new building was also recognised as a finalist for the best new development category of Warrnambool City Council city design awards. Accreditation of the WRAD Centre by the Quality Improvement Council was confirmation that proper systems were being followed.

While WRAD was moving ahead in many areas, including a new Koori diversion program, the long-established Drink Drive Program was discontinued due to financial reasons. The program had been a staple of WRAD for nearly two decades.

Ian Armstrong retired as chairman and was replaced by Helen Taylor, and two long-serving staff members, counsellors Stephen Edge and Chris McAlley, ended their links with the organisation. Daryl Fitzgibbon had taken on the role of clinical manager.

Community ties were also strengthened through WRAD's involvement with the new Community South West organisation, an alliance of not-for-profit service providers.

WRAD continued to play an important role in advocating on drug and alcohol related issues. Binge drinking and late night licences were concerning Warrnambool people and WRAD suggested a 1am blanket closing time for liquor outlets.

WRAD also campaigned strongly for improved resources for pharmacotherapy treatment. Chairperson Helen Taylor lamented that WRAD was forced to spend too much time on fund-raising rather than its day-to-day role of providing drug and alcohol services.

A black market for prescription tablets was also causing concerns and leading to incidents of crime in the region, but alcohol remained the biggest cause for concern, accounting for 53 per cent of presentations to the centre.

By 2008 WRAD was providing services to more than 2000 clients and

“WRAD...25 YEARS ON AND STILL GROWING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.”

investigating new ways to meet the needs of clients.

It also took its services to the community, providing free health checks and support at the annual Warrnambool Wunta Fiesta, which had been plagued in recent years by alcohol problems.

In 2008 WRAD was saddened by the loss of drug and alcohol physician Dr David Richards who died shortly after retiring. His contribution was an example to all and he dedicated his life to a marginalised client group.

Director Geoff Soma was named as one of five runners-up in the SACS Consulting Award for Leadership in the Not For Profit Sector. He was chosen from more than 60 nominations from across Victoria and New South Wales.

The Local Drug Action Plan was updated to reflect new issues. This project was carried out in conjunction with the South West Primary Care Partnership, which was a new tenant of the WRAD Centre.

WRAD continued to expand its services and was now a bulk-billing medical practice; however funding concerns continued to impact on the organisation. The centre continued to rely heavily on non-government money to continue its services for about 2200 client contacts.

Despite battling these issues, WRAD's drug and alcohol and medical services both received formal accreditation. Accreditation for the medical services was a significant achievement for a drug and alcohol centre.

In April 2009 a new multi-faceted day treatment service to help people with drug and alcohol problems opened for a 12-month trial in the former Bridge Centre in Fairy Street, Warrnambool.

WRADLink was a joint project with WRAD the lead agency supported by Community College Warrnambool, Community Connections and Western District Employment Access.

The centre provided services for job preparation, financial advice, gambling advice, relationship counselling, education, living skills and group therapy for a range of drug and alcohol clients.

However, despite excellent outcomes for several participants, the centre was unable to secure ongoing funding and did not continue beyond the pilot period.

In early 2009 WRAD launched a new fund-raising initiative and community event, Collecta-Bool, a showcase for private collectors. The event has now been staged three times and continues to grow as a local attraction.

CHAPTER FIVE

After years of campaigning, WRAD secured ongoing funding for Warrnambool's only specialist pharmacotherapy service.

The service faced closure by mid 2009 due to insufficient financial support, but \$100,000 funding from the Department of Human Services (DHS) for a pharmacotherapy outreach worker allowed it to continue.

WRAD had proposed a new funding model for the delivery of pharmacotherapy services, which was being considered by the State Government.

WRAD also entered the debate about taxation on alcohol, with director Geoff Soma advocating not only a more consistent taxing regime, including higher taxes on alcopops, but also advertising bans, health warnings, a review of the number of liquor outlets and more funding for treatment services.

Dual diagnosis continued to play a big role in treatment, including employment of a co-morbidity worker, database operator and placement of a psychiatric services worker at WRAD. A poster created in 2010 by WRAD and South West Healthcare Psychiatric Services titled 'Your Place or Mine' and indicating a no-wrong-door approach to care won a state award.

WRAD was also involved in the education of younger people about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. It supported the Warrnambool Secondary Schools Drug and Alcohol Family Resource Booklet in 2010 and the creation of a 'look after your mate' youth card in 2011.

In 2011 WRAD adopted a theme based around 'ice' in its promotional campaign for Drug Action Week. 'Alcohol and Drug Use Isolates You' and 'Cannabis Freezes Opportunities' were two of the slogans adopted for the campaign.

As WRAD celebrates its 25th anniversary, it is still looking ahead, having recently purchased a vacant block of land at the rear of the Merri Street for future expansion.

Tax all alcohol: WRAD

By TINA LIPTAI

THE Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre has renewed its call for a tax based on alcohol content after a parliamentary inquiry revealed it was uncertain if the increased alcopops excise had any impact on binge drinking. WRAD director Geoff Soma said while he supported the price increase on the basis it would make premixed alcohol less attractive to young people, binge drinking was a complex

Move from alcopops to spirits

issue and not just a problem for youth.

"People across the board are drinking to excess," he said.

"The issue is about looking at levels of drinking and increasing treatment services."

The Federal Government increased the tax on ready-to-drink (RTD) alcoholic beverages by 70 per cent last April as part of a range of

measures to tackle youth binge drinking.

To keep the excise on RTD alcoholic beverages, the legislation must be passed through parliament this week.

A parliamentary inquiry on Monday acknowledged it was unable to be certain if teenage binge-drinking had been reduced.

Warrnambool liquor retailers said they believed

the tax had caused an increase in the sale of spirits.

Swintons IGA Liquor Store manager Sam Brennan said most retailers had predicted the shift in sales before the tax was introduced.

"It's pretty much gone the way we thought it would, with RTD sales down but bottled spirits sales gone up," he said.

Warrnambool MP David

Hawker said the alcopop excise was simply an exercise in revenue raising and had done little to curb binge drinking.

"What we've seen is a trend towards substitution, where people are buying straight spirits and soft drink and mixing it themselves which is far more dangerous," he said.

Australian Drug Foundation figures show alcopops sold in Australia dropped by 28 per cent between May and January.

— With AAP





PROFILE

CARMEL BRADY

WRAD'S FIRST COORDINATOR 1986-1988

Carmel Brady (nee Crowe) admits she was a little apprehensive back in 1986 about taking on the role of WRAD's first coordinator.

"I had no background in drug and alcohol issues so didn't know what to expect," Carmel said.

"I remember my brother telling me I should get self defence lessons."

Luckily self defence was not needed and the centre that Carmel helped to establish has gone a long way to demystifying the image of people with drug and alcohol problems.

Carmel's early apprehension soon faded and she now describes her time at the helm of WRAD as "the most exciting and challenging job I've ever had".

"I soon realised it was about people and the challenges they face in their lives. People with drug or alcohol problems are not a separate category of people, they're just people like you and me who for a variety of reasons are sitting on the other side of the desk."

Carmel had been working in the community health disability area in Melbourne when the WRAD position was created in February 1986.

The centre started with 2.5 staff (Carmel, a counsellor and part-time receptionist) and the funding was designed to provide a service from Colac to the South Australian border.

Carmel appreciated the support of Alcoholics Anonymous during the early years of the centre and in her capacity as WRAD co-ordinator attended several meetings.

"AA was a very positive influence in WRAD's early days."

Carmel left in August 1988 to undertake her Master's in Community Health. "The work at WRAD pushed me to want to improve my understanding of life and to look at the bigger picture."

She was reenlisted as an interim coordinator a few years later during a change of management and she returned to WRAD from 2001-2005 to work with alcohol and drug physician Rodger Brough as he tried to establish a rural centre for addictive behaviours. The centre folded when it was unable to secure recurrent funding.

Carmel was involved with other WRAD project work but these days she is concentrating on her Warrnambool business, Piccolo Coffee.

I HAVE VERY FOND MEMORIES OF WRAD, I STILL GO TO THE ANNUAL MEETINGS AND READ THE NEWSLETTERS AND I HOPE TO STAY INVOLVED IN A VOLUNTARY WAY.







THE WESTERN REGION ALCOHOL AND DRUG CENTRE

172 Merri St, Warrnambool, Victoria 3280 / **Phone:** 1300 009 723

www.wrad.org.au