###### Achilles Sydney - President’s Report 2020

It is my pleasure and privilege to present this 2020 President’s report at the 24th AGM of the Achilles Running Club, Sydney. We come to the end of a most extraordinary year due to COVID 19. Despite Achilles Sydney having to suspend Sunday training for two separate periods during the year and the Club being able to participate in only one community event (Orange), member engagement in Achilles remained as strong as ever. This is a true reflection on commitment of our members.

Here is a brief outline of 2020 for Achilles Sydney.

1. **Membership**

Despite the disruptions wrought by COVID-19, 121 different members, including 34 members with a disability, attended our training sessions in 2020.

**2. Sunday training**

Achilles’ Sunday training sessions are the mainstay of our Club. The aim is to keep people fit and healthy in a social, friendly and encouraging atmosphere.

The training sessions have been the occasion for all members to gain the benefits of exercising together, to network and meet new people, and for guides to receive training and develop their guiding skills.

Sunday training sessions have been effective because of the support of many others in addition to our guides. We thank all dog handlers and volunteers who gave lifts to and from training sessions, and we also thank the Botanic Gardens Trust for organising and supplying parking permits for our volunteers.

For much of this year, Achilles Sunday training has operated in a significantly different way from previous years..

The Achilles committee’s decisions on operations this year were based on new government health regulations. We introduced processes designed to ensure the health and safety of our members.

To ensure social distancing we adopted an Arrive-Exercise-Leave principle for Sunday training. An RSVP system was introduced to allow people to be paired ahead of time and avoid congregating.

Only 26 Sunday training sessions could be offered this year, compared with 40 in 2019. Despite various restrictions, attendance rates were still good. Average weekly attendance was 36, compared with 40 in 2019

We certainly look forward to a post COVID19 resumption of a more relaxed and sociable Sunday training.

Thanks go to all members for working with us on developing and operating the new procedures.

Thanks to Cindy Skacel, COVID-19 coordinator and member of the COVID19 sub-committee, which also included Brian O’Dea, Majella Knobel and myself.

**3. Finances**

Event entry fees have always been Achilles’ biggest expense. Other ongoing costs include insurance, website and association fees etc. This year, however, with community events not permitted during the pandemic, expenditure was greatly reduced.

The financial status of the Club continues to be sound. Income has been received from membership fees, bank interest, the sale of clothing and merchandise (socks, caps and buffs), and event sponsorship fundraising platforms as well as significant and very welcome donations. Many thanks to Andrew Fox, Lynette & Graeme Geary, John McIntyre, the Ravine Foundation and a number of anonymous donors.

We thank all donors and sponsors for their ongoing support for and contribution to the wellbeing of Achilles.

Thanks once again to our very treasured Treasurer Ian Cohen for his dedication and excellent work in keeping the accounts up to date and the books balanced.

**4. Events**

The Orange Running festival weekend was the only community event for Achilles Sydney and once again was a lot of fun and a great success. Achilles Hunter Central Coast joined us at Orange and again it was a great opportunity to meet up with Achilles Canberra.

Virtual events were a feature during the pandemic. Online fitness classes were a feature, including those organised by our colleagues in Canberra. A number of members took part in virtual races such as the City2Surf and more off-beat events such as the Push-up Challenge.

Evolving Covid-19 regulations also allowed some members to meet in pairs during the times that larger gatherings were not allowed.

The Achilles Cup was organised by Achilles International New York (Achilles International head office) as a way of bringing together the worldwide Achilles family. Team Australia was made up of members from all Australian chapters and they put in a terrific effort, logging their distances run or walked, their time doing exercise workouts or time spent swimming. We ended up with the excellent result of coming second behind Achilles Japan.

We certainly look forward to the resumption of community events in the near future.

**5**. **Guiding**

Guiding is integral to the success of Achilles. Every year I repeat the same important message about guiding and being guided.

First, we remind our members with disabilities not to be shy about requesting variations on the standard guiding techniques in order to suit their own needs. Guides should expect to vary their guiding techniques according to the individual’s preferences.

Second, I encourage all guides to look over the “guiding tips” on the website and to keep watching and listening to other guides. We do continually learn from observing each other.

Third, please remember the importance experiencing guiding or being guided by different people. Not only is it good to meet and interact with new people, but it is also important to become versatile at guiding and being guided.

Having said this, guiding in 2020 has generally been working very well, and I congratulate all members for the good spirit in which you have exercised together.

**6. Awards**

Sadly, there will be no Andrew Bristow Memorial Awards this year. This is because of the disruption to training and events during the year.

The award winners in 2019 were Gerard Rooney (Disability award) and the Arena Family – Julie, Anthony, Molly and Nick (Volunteer award).

**7. Website and social media**

The website has been and will continue to be an integral part of Achilles. The national website has individual sections for the local chapters of Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, Brisbane and Hunter Central Coast and incorporates their individual Facebook sites.

A Club registration system enables members’ information to be entered directly into the Club database, generates a message of acknowledgement and issues a receipt for payments. Thanks to Martin Ruane for maintaining it.

Social media is the mainstay as a vehicle for communication between the Club, its members and the outside community. Thanks once again to Kay Joyce for keeping Facebook sites very active. We have been complimented frequently on Achilles Sydney’s dynamic social media presence.

Also, thanks to Martin for the ongoing weekly training reminders and news updates which are emailed to members.

**8. Achilles Australia**

The very pleasing collaboration with the other Australian chapters continued this year. The Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane and Hunter Central Coast chapters kept in constant contact and helped each other with various areas of mutual interest including fundraising and merchandising initiatives, such as the wonderful Steigen socks organised by Melbourne.

Our NSW sister-club Achilles Hunter Central Coast is now formed and active (despite the challenges of COVID19). Full credit goes to this chapter which is so ably lead by Claire Northrop and Alex Lee.

**9. Thanks**

Thanks go to both individuals and groups:

To the Committee for the excellent work they have put into the running of Achilles, and the time and effort they have generously given. Brian, Martin, Majella, Anne, Kay, Cindy and Ian have been mentioned already. I also thank Anne Powell (minutes secretary), Julia Wenner and Charlie McConnell for their invaluable input as part of the committee. As always it has been an absolute pleasure working with all of you.

Kay, who has made such a big and valuable contribution, will unfortunately but understandably be standing down from the committee. I wish her all the best and look forward seeing her, Mathilda and the new baby back at Achilles training.

Thanks to John McIntyre who unfortunately has not been able to be at Achilles for health reasons, but continues to keep contact and give his support to Achilles.

I thank my family for always supporting me in my involvement at Achilles.

And of course thanks to all Achilles members for your excellent contributions and great enthusiasm.

I know that there are a large number of people who have derived an enormous amount of benefit from their involvement with Achilles. Achilles has become a cornerstone organisation in the community and I feel very positive about its place and the contribution it makes.

I wish Achilles Sydney and Achilles Australia every success in 2021 and for the future.

## Ellis Janks - President