

CELEBRATING THE LEGACY OF THE AMA (NSW) CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

By Stephanie Osfield



A/Prof John Gullotta (left) handing over cheque to Can Assist, AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation Gala Dinner 2012

Though the AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation is now coming to a close, its philanthropic work will have impacts for years to come.

From raising funds for life-saving equipment donated to children's hospitals and rural regions, to supporting people impacted by natural disasters, disability and domestic violence, the AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation, which is winding down operation, leaves an impressive legacy.

When 15-year-old Anna Wood died in 1995, the loss of her young life saddened the nation. In the weeks that followed, a group of GPs pledged to do something about the tragedy. Within months, their altruism led to the formation of the AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation which launched the Anna Wood Drug and Alcohol Education Project. Donations flooded in to support drug and alcohol education programs for NSW students. In total, the final tally raised was over \$100,000, including a \$50,000 donation from the NSW government.

Volunteers, Collaboration and Partnership

The same year, the Foundation held a golf day to raise funds for the Fred Hollows Foundation to purchase a diode laser unit to help improve the eye health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Far North Queensland. "At that wonderful golf event I was handed a cheque for \$30,000", recalls Gabi Hollow, Founding Director of the Fred Hollow Foundation.

The Foundation's amazing philanthropic work spanned 29 years and raised over \$1.25 million.

"Throughout its impressive run, we partnered with charities, businesses and community groups to work together and fund projects to meet the real and immediate need of people in crisis or those experiencing distress, disadvantage and challenges impacting their mental and physical health," Dr Danielle McMullen, former AMA (NSW) President, Chair of the Foundation and incoming AMA President.

This important work was made possible by a small, incredibly dedicated Advisory Board comprised of 10 members including the Chair and CEO of AMA (NSW). "Our board included doctors, lawyers, members of the public and people from other professions," says A/Prof John Gullotta, previous AMA (NSW) President and Chair of the Foundation for ten years. "This diverse mix of people helped our breadth of vision".

Sophie Scott, then ABC reporter, was a Charitable Foundation board member. "I felt honoured to be involved, because whether raising funds for braille books for children impacted by vision impairment or life-saving equipment to go on rescue helicopters, we deliberately chose smaller charities that often struggled to compete for funds," she recalls.

Supporting people with disability and health challenges

Over three decades, an impressive rollcall of charities benefited from the Foundation. These included the Muscular Dystrophy Association (electric wheelchairs), Vision Australia (Braille typewriters, reading materials and kits), the House with No Steps (sensory room and exercise equipment) and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of NSW (specialised shower commodes, mobile showering trolleys and reconditioned wheelchairs).

Other charity recipients supporting people with disabilities included the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation (three mobility scooters), Wheelchair Sports NSW (five wheelchairs for their sports rehab program) and the Exodus Foundation (who received a much needed 22-seater bus to transport disadvantaged students). "Our mission was to channel the goodwill

ASSOCIATION UPDATE



2009 AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation Gala Dinner; Grant to Wheelchair Sports NSW

and charitable spirit of the medical profession to support a diverse range of charities," says A/Prof Gullotta.

"When my niece Bernadette was three, she developed meningococcal disease and tragically, lost both her legs," he recalls. "An ECMO machine helped keep her alive, but Westmead Children's Hospital only had one ECMO, so I assured them we would raise funds for another. We helped donate 5 ECMO machines to enable children to fully recover from their meningococcal disease."

Helping children, families and communities

Charities related to children's wellbeing were always a Foundation priority and included Bear Cottage (funds for a new hospice and facility upgrade), and CAN-Assist (which received a minibus to transport rural cancer patients). Raising awareness of 'forgotten' diseases was always top of mind, leading to the 2013 donation of \$66,000 to Alzheimer's Australia NSW, with then National President Ita Buttrose, AO, OBE appearing as guest speaker at the annual Gala Dinner that year. Contributing to mental health organisations was also high on the agenda and led to funds being raised for important needs such as suicide/intervention programs for Lifeline and video conferencing equipment for Headspace.

The AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation was also ready to support those impacted by adversity and crisis. In 2004, a special campaign raised funds for the

Red Cross to help people impacted by the Banda Aceh tsunami. In 2016, \$25,000 was donated to Soldier On, a charity for those wounded while serving in the Army, Navy and Airforce and their families.

At the 2014 Foundation Gala Dinner, Rosie Batty, Australian of the year, was guest speaker to raise money for the Luke Batty Foundation, which she started to help others after the tragic death of her son due to domestic violence. "Australians of the year often partnered with the Foundation and spoke with great passion at our Gala Dinner to raise funds for their charity of choice," A/Prof Gullotta explains. "In 2008, Lee Kernaghan passed his cowboy hat around the room, raising \$6,000 within minutes to support people in drought-stricken bush communities."

Other charities also benefited from funds raised to assist rural and remote communities. These included Aussie Helpers, (donation of a truck used to support people struggling in bush communities) and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, (who received intravenous pump sets and a ventilator).

"With the support of valued donors like the AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation, we keep our aircraft and vehicles equipped and operating, to proudly deliver free access to our services for those living, working and travelling in outback NSW," says RFDS South Eastern Section CEO, Greg Sam.



2022 Gala Dinner; Charitable Foundation raised funds for; The Torie Finnane Foundation for Women, Bravehearts and the MBA of NSW.

Carrying the torch forward

"Though it is sad to say goodbye to the AMA (NSW) Charitable Foundation, we also need to adapt and move with the times," says Fiona Davies, AMA (NSW) CEO. "The Foundation began when people used to put cash on the table and write cheques and now, they are very comfortable donating online. So, the Foundation is winding down and we have passed the remaining funds to the Medical Benevolent Association to provide counselling and financial assistance during times of needs for doctors and their families. The AMA is always mindful of how we can engage in philanthropic work and will continue to bring the Foundation's spirit of community and generosity to all of our AMA (NSW) events and activities."

Dr Andrew Wines, President of the NSW Medical Benevolent Association said "The MBA is honoured to receive the remaining funds from the Charitable Foundation. The MBA has a proud supporting doctors at their most difficult times, we welcome the chance to both receive the funds and to also raise the profile of the MBA and the work we do."

AMA (NSW) would like to particularly acknowledge Ron Heinrich and Scott Chapman of HWLE Solicitors who served as both Foundation Advisory Board members and advisors. HWLE Solicitors supported the Foundation with pro-bono legal advice during the operation of the Foundation.

AMA (NSW) would like to acknowledge all of the members of the Charitable Foundation Board throughout the years:

- A/Prof John Gullotta
- Dr Brian Morton
- Dr Michael Steiner
- Dr Kathryn Austin
- Dr Danielle McMullen
- Dr Elizabeth Feeney
- Ms Sophie Scott
- Mr Scott Chapman
- Mr Ron Heinrich
- Mr Laurie Pincott
- Ms Fiona Davies

dr.