



co.as.it.  
community  
services

# *annual* Report 2020/2021

# mission statement

## Our Mission

*To offer choice, value and consistently high quality services to people with diverse needs.*

## Our Vision

To be a leader in the provision of quality, accessible and affordable community care services for the general and CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities.

To be the focal point in Queensland for the promotion and the study of the Italian language and culture.

## Our Values

### Dignity

Create a work environment in which there is equal opportunity, where staff and clients are understood and respected.

### Excellence

Strive for a high standard of client satisfaction and to excel in all that we do.

### Honesty

Act with Integrity, be transparent, and exercise stewardship and good governance, while being responsive and accountable.

### Sensitivity

Meet the clients' needs by being responsive, adaptive and innovative and supporting clients in their choice of care and lifestyle.

### Value

Aspire to provide value for money at all times and meet the clients' expectations and financial capacity to receive the best possible care.

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# board of directors & executives

## **Chairperson/President**

Cav. Nereo Brezzi

## **Vice President and Secretary**

Cav. Antonio Giovanni Palella

## **Treasurer**

Antony Brown

## **Directors**

Joe Bonica

Joe Chisari

Angela Bonica

Dina Ranieri

## **CEO**

Dina Ranieri

## **Assistant CEO**

Tanina Softa





# our centres

## Brisbane

### Head Office

Co.As.It. Community Services  
35 Dover Street, ALBION

### Italian Language Centre (ILC)

42 Newbery Street, NEWMARKET

### Social Activity Centres - Brisbane

#### Casa Serena

1 Lanchester Street, STAFFORD HEIGHTS

#### Casa Aurelia

79 Sussex Road, ACACIA RIDGE

### Cleveland Baptist Church Hall

240 Bloomfield Road, CLEVELAND

### Narangba Community Hall (Closed May 2021)

229 Mackie Road, NARANGBA

### Amici House (From May 2021)

294 Bracken Ridge Road, BRACKEN RIDGE

## South Coast

### Office

Co.As.It. Community Services  
34 Thomas Drive, CHEVRON ISLAND

### Social Activity Centres - South Coast

Italo-Australian Club

18 Fairway Drive, CLEAR ISLAND WATERS



# president's report



***"I acknowledge with gratitude the collaboration and support of partners. They are vital in accomplishing united positive outcomes for our clients and community members."***

## **Cav. Nereo Brezzi**

President

It gives me great pleasure on behalf of the board to present this report marking another successful year of accomplishments in Co.As.It.'s 43rd year of serving the community.

The board directors on entering this year's AGM were: Vice President and Company Secretary Cav. Antonio Palella; Mr A. Brown, Treasurer; Mr J. Bonica; Mr J. Chisari; Ms Angela Bonica; and Dina Ranieri, CEO. The Board again met for its annual planning meeting in January enabling us to review the commitment and ongoing viability of our programs and services while refreshing our vision of the Co.As.It. of the future.

Undoubtedly, the most significant factor in our operations has been the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its impact has led to the

implementation of strict compliance protocols in our office locations, our day activity centres and, most importantly, in the delivery of home based services to clients. I do wish to congratulate and thank all our staff for their resilience and adaptability in continuing our important work under such challenging circumstances.

As foreshadowed last year, increases in our services delivery led to the decision that our main office accommodation was inadequate. The board decided to purchase a building to house all of our current and future activities. The building is in Lutwyche Road, Lutwyche with renovations completed at the end of June, 2021.

We were privileged to have our newest Community Hub (Amici House) at Bracken Ridge formally

opened by Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing, Hon. Grace Grace at a successful ceremony on 8 May.

Our language programs through the Italian Language Centre continued successfully but within the serious constraints imposed by the effects of Covid-19. The CEO and I were privileged to attend in May, the farewell function at the Italian Embassy in Canberra for the outgoing Education Adviser, Dott.ssa Anna Rita Tamponi. Dr Tamponi had been of great assistance to ILC in promoting to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs the quality of our Italian language education services.

In its ongoing governance role, the Board was involved in two important audits: The Aged Care Quality audit; and the NDIS audit where directors were required to familiarise themselves with many aspects of NDIS requirements.

The organisation was confronted with numerous operational changes by funding bodies. That required prolonged and difficult management by the Treasurer and his IT team to enable operations to continue with minimal disruption and performance at the highest level.

Our sincere appreciation goes to Tony Brown also for the management of the two highly demanding projects at Amici House (Bracken Ridge) and the eventual transition to our new Head Office in Lutwyche.

As always, I acknowledge with gratitude the collaboration and support of partners. They are vital in accomplishing united positive outcomes for our clients and community members. I would like particularly to thank the following who have supported our vision: They include the Australian and State Governments; the Italian Consulate; Comites; the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; PHN Brisbane North; Dementia Australia; Catholic Education Offices in Brisbane, Cairns and Townsville and Education Qld.

I wish to record the board's gratitude for the outstanding performance of all our staff and of our executive team especially in the context of the very difficult year.

I am grateful for the on-going support of the whole Board. Together, we continue to be excited by the challenges and opportunities of the coming years and we are confident our vision will guide us in the advancement of our programs.

I wish to sincerely thank the Directors, the CEO and all staff for their tireless contribution during a very active and challenging year.

# CEO's report



**Dina Ranieri**

Chief Executive Officer

We began our new financial year knowing that we would be facing more Covid-19 challenges. It continued to impact our service delivery but with stringent processes we kept clients and staff safe and continued to provide essential services during lockdowns that for many, meant peace of mind.

Since Covid-19, technology, track and trace reporting has been an important part of our day. We relied on the data to protect our clients and staff whilst testing our outbreak management plan often to ensure we were in an optimal position to take action if required. We also raised awareness for clients and staff about vaccinations, PPEs and Covid-safe safe practices.

High periods of stress and uncertainty during the pandemic prompted many support staff to take early retirement citing work-life balance and reduced interest in full time work as compelling reasons to change their lifestyles. For those who remained working, the approval of 3 funding applications with the Department of Health to access retention bonuses was welcomed by staff

who had lost hours of work. The loss of support staff across the sector has created shortages in this industry and we can expect that these workforce shortages will be part of our future as Australia's population grows and ages. By 2040, Australia is predicted to have 5 million people aged 70 and older, with an average life expectancy greater than that of previous generations. In the years ahead, a new wave of aged care clients will have fundamentally different expectations for their care to what aged care organisations have been used to providing. The growth and demand for home care will evolve in the next few years and this landscape will continue to change.

We continuously sought opportunities to develop our services and promote them to a variety of community members. Our aged care and disability programs successfully provided support to well over 5000 clients per week. We evidenced an increase in the number of home care packages services with many clients responding favourably to the consumer feedback surveys. The flexibility and continuity of services offered in home has



enabled many to continue living independently. We faced increases in workload as a direct result of the Royal Commission in Aged Care with the final 148 recommendations being considered and implemented in the next few years. Ongoing surveys, feedback and consultations have been undertaken throughout the year with respect to the formation of a new Aged Care Program. The noticeable transition will be fee for services and moving away from Government block funding that will test the financial stability and resilience of many providers.

The opening of our new community hub Amici House was the highlight of this year and although attendee numbers were limited, Open Day at the centre was filled with visits from community members in the Bracken Ridge and surrounding areas who popped in and viewed the facility, enjoyed a coffee and Italian sweets. This new facility offers health and wellbeing classes, social connections and allied health services.

A variety of small grants were put to good use viz. Community Languages Multicultural Grant, the Mental Health training for support staff and the Dementia Australia partnership providing ongoing support to individuals and families struggling with the disease. This funding has been approved for another year. The ability to communicate in the client's own language offers confidence and trust to carers and other family members.

Co.As.It. prepared extensively for its Aged Care Standards Audit which took place over 3 days in October 2020. It involved support staff, clients, management and care services coordinators including clinical team, providing information, processes and policies, clinical governance framework and organisational governance that is the framework on how we provide care to our

elderly clients. Co.As.It. was successful in complying with all 8 standards and we are very proud of the high standard of services we provide. The final audit report is available to the public on the Department of Health website.

Our NDIS Audit went through a similar process taking place over 2 days in April 2021. It showcased our detailed policies and procedures and how these align with our service provision and support coordination.

With an increased interest in learning Italian we launched a new Italian Language Centre (ILC - a division of Co.As.It.) website with an interactive site, lots of activities and information regarding classes and online booking which enables easier enrolment.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced new funding guidelines and rigorous application process in late 2020. The approval received has allowed ILC to employ extra specialist teachers to guide and support Italian teachers in Queensland schools as well as provide financial support to schools where Italian is taught.

Over the past year, I am proud to say that our staff has shown amazing passion and empathy for providing better care, embracing so many changes and still continuing to care for those most vulnerable. I thank all staff for their resilience through these difficult times as well as the Board of Directors for supporting new initiatives, providing guidance and advice when required

Our focus will continue to provide services that are person-centred and that promote meaningful relationships with our clients and staff and we look forward to our new Co.As.It. premises in Lutwyche with many new projects yet to unfold.

# 2020-2021

## statistics

### Total Staff/Volunteers 505

Management	3
Finance	7
General Administration	19
Regional Assessment Team (RAS)	6
Aged Care and other Community Services	65

#### Allied Health

* Team Leader	1
* Physiotherapists	6
* Podiatrists	3
* OT	2
* Allied Health Assistant	1

#### Nursing Staff

* Team Leader	1
* Registered Nurses	9
* Enrolled Nurses	4

#### Community Care Staff 280

#### Italian Language Centre

Student and Curriculum Administration	5
Language Teachers	8

#### Volunteers 85

## Total client numbers & service hours provided throughout the year

Total Co.As.It. Clients 6,035

Total Co.As.It. Services hours 365,848

### Home Care Packages (HCP)

Total clients 789

Total support hours 104,068

### Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)

Total clients 4,776

Total hours 235,970

### Queensland Community Support Scheme (QCSS)

Total clients 106

Total hours 6,207

### NDIS

Total clients 64

Total hours 15,013

### Community & Individual Support Services (CISS)

Total clients 152

### Private

Total clients 148

Total hours 1,453

### Clinical Services (Nursing and Allied Health)

Total clients 1,941

Total hours 42,005



# year *in review*

In the past 12 months we continued to navigate a path that faced a disquieting new world, one that heightened local and international awareness of our human frailty and vulnerability and illuminated how much we needed other people to assuage our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. This was particularly true for the frail, aged, disadvantaged and disabled members of our community, many of whom could not depend on extended family and/or other social support mechanisms during times of turmoil.

As everyone continued to remodel the way they lived, worked and socialized, as an organization, we reappraised and adapted the way that our services were offered and delivered – even during times of no lockdowns or restrictions. Social distancing, temperature checks, Covid-app registrations, tracking, remote working and other administrative processes were crystallized. The pandemic left a legacy of alertness that imbued our operations and propelled us into new realms of service delivery as an essential part of our community presence.

We worked seamlessly within Covid-19 constraints, committed all office and field staff to best practice protocols and standards in infection prevention, increased clinical care and trained and supported staff in continuing to provide essential services. As a service provider in the current environment, it was vital that our invaluable staff prevailed in supporting clients professionally and compassionately. We were grateful to have been granted funding through

a submission to the Dept. Health for three retention bonuses between September 2020 and January 2021 for aged care staff, including clinical and allied health, incentivising them to remain working during Covid lockdowns. Bonuses were calculated for staff delivering home care services according to the formula provided by the Department.

We were also fortunate in being assigned a grant from Dementia Australia for dementia training for staff for 5 quarters that was successfully renewed until June 2022.

We proceeded in upskilling staff knowledge, currency and efficiency as a priority so that our organisation remained a constant and inspiring presence for our clients and the general community. We received funding under the Queensland Thriving Communities Grant that enabled 100 Co.As.It. staff members to complete mental health training modules provided by the Workplace Mental Health Institute. The training raised awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing, identification strategies and appropriate responses to a recognition of mental health issues in clients and themselves as workers.

Above all else we prioritised communication with staff, clients and the wider community to connect the vulnerable, elderly and isolated in ways that were appropriate for each individual person. We recognized the potential of significantly improving our current technologies such as video-



conferencing, webinars and remote collaboration. Even our older generations who in the past could not be dragged into digital use have benefited from what they call 'new-fangled' ways to communicate, learning to use ipads, tablets, PCs and other digital technology. Through dedicated workshops, individual tuition and practical support from our staff, older clients have enjoyed learning about connecting on a broad scaler. It was gratifying to see them better understand and embrace technology as an essential commodity as opposed to what they first perceived to be frivolous activity.

Despite Covid-19's obduracy, in the past 12 months we celebrated exceptional milestones and projects within our community. We achieved 100% compliance in Aged Care Standards Audit in October 2020 and also congratulate our staff on achieving a 100% compliance on our first NDIS audit. The official opening of our new community hub and café 'Amici House' at Bracken Ridge was the culmination of two year's work and is now fully operational and bearing positive impacts in the local area.

This hub was made possible by the Board's fervent belief that creating a sustainable community centre in this area would bring extensive local and community cohesiveness, increase the range of local services and provide the community with an accessible, cost effective centre for social, educational, aged and community care services. The redevelopment of the premises was solely

funded by Co.As.It. which was in excess of \$1M, made possible by the Board's astute financial directorship. The organization will relocate to larger premises at Lutwyche in a multi-use facility that can accommodate all programs and the Italian language teaching divisions. A pilot project on increasing physical activity in older persons was initiated last year and became a self-funded program running four times a week in three localities.





# year *in review*

We continued our collaboration as part of a number of consortiums viz. PHN Brisbane Metro North and the CALD QCSS service providers as well as continuing to undertake RAS assessments on behalf of PHN Brisbane Metro North and Aspire 4 Life under contractual agreement.

As stewards of our community's well-being, we persisted in consolidating our financial status, planned for future contingencies to ensure continuity of service and fostered systematic growth that would sustain our programs long term. The underpinning of strong risk management, astute financial and administrative systems and robust capital resources allowed us to withstand and continue to grow in a year fraught with pitfalls.

The Italian Language Centre (ILC), a division of Co.As.It. excelled in the organisation of their activities, markedly those enacted via digital technology. A new user-friendly website was launched that makes it easier and more efficient for enrolments with online registration and fee payments minimising social contact between staff and students. Staff championed many events during the year including the StuditaliA scholarship, and a Community Language grant that enabled the writing of a new curriculum for after school classes.

In collaboration with the Education Advisor based at the Italian Embassy, held an Australia-wide conference and professional development for teachers. Importantly in December 2020,

we renewed the signing of our Statement of Understanding between the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Italian Consulate - a joint agreement to promote and support the learning of Italian in Queensland schools.

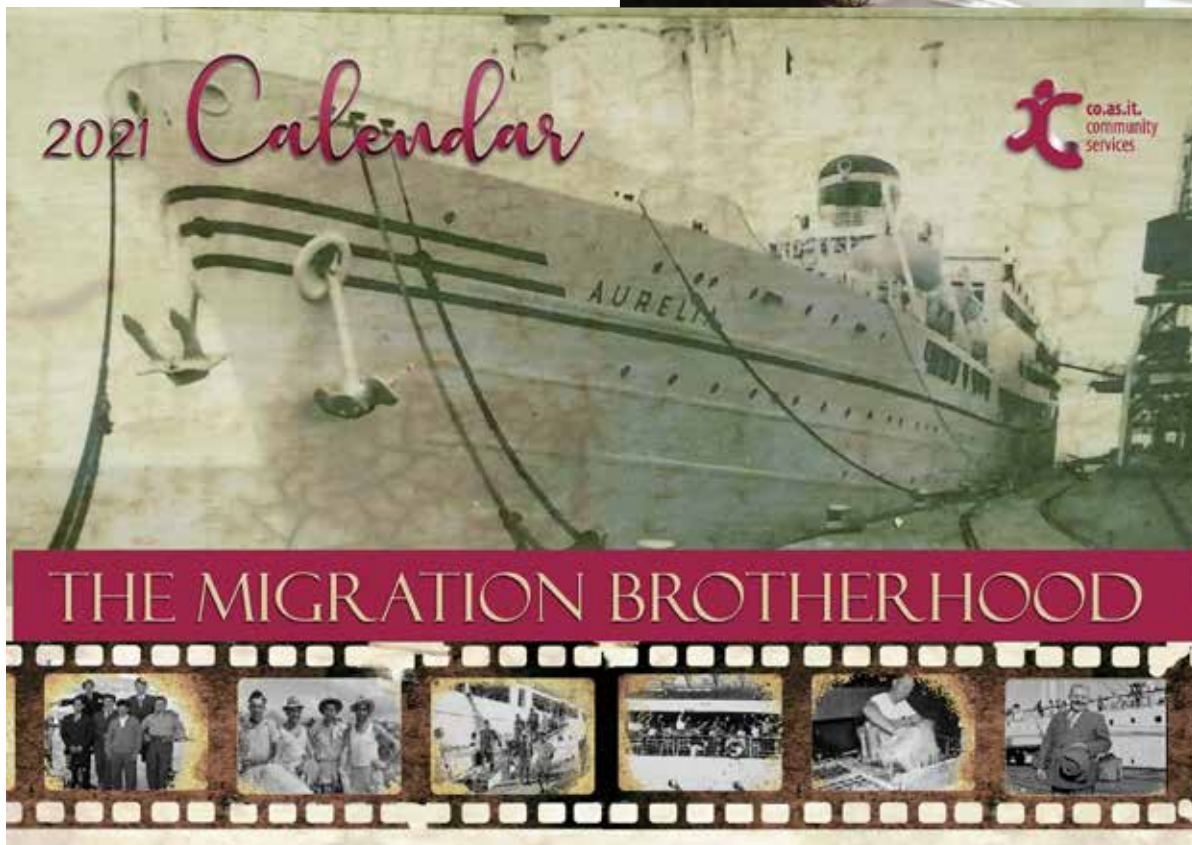
We congratulate our community care staff, our administrative teams, volunteers and teachers who contributed in ensuring the welfare of our clients and students remained our first priority. They all responded with flexibility, adaptation and lack of compromise and have maintained all services at an optimal level. We happily note that none of our clients succumbed to the virus and that despite the advanced age of many of the elderly we care for, they too remained well and appreciative of our support.

Certain of our capacity in responding to the external environment, with the resolute support of our Board and our caring, unshakeable staff, we look forward to the challenges that the next 12 months bring.

Having grown at an accelerated pace through the last few years, our location at Albion had become too small and we began to look at options in the local area that could accommodate all of our staff, including ILC. We had the opportunity to finally purchase a site at Lutwyche with a huge amount of floor space.

Renovations for this site commenced in early 2021 and it is anticipated that our staff could move to the new offices in July 2021. The new facility will allow greater interaction space for staff, new classrooms for ILC, meeting rooms and events venues as well as interview pods, conference rooms, a function hall, two kitchens and breakout nodes where staff can meet for collaborative exchange. The usefulness of the premises was evidenced before renovations began.

We are looking forward to the move as it will make the organisation's work environment better suited to the needs of the large administrative workforce.



# agedCare in home support

In the past 12 months, staff delivered a wide range of in-home support and assistance through government funded programs viz. Home Care Packages (HCP); Queensland Community Support Scheme (QCSS); Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and private services. We were proud to have prioritised the wellbeing of our clients through person-centred care that was respectful of, and responsive to, the preferences, needs and values of the individual person. We provided emotional support, physical comfort, information dissemination and communication in their own language and most relevantly, continuity of care as their health conditions changed. Throughout all of our service delivery we nurtured a sense of achievement and empowerment in our clients, whilst respecting and complying with appropriate Covid-safe practices.

The Home Care Package Program (HCP) funded by the Dept. of Health was crucial for older, frail people who required access to weekly services that catered to more complex care needs.

The Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) funded by the Dept. of Health supported eligible persons aged 65 years and over with less complex needs. This program expanded in the past 12 months by 30% now constituting well over 4700 clients. As we continued to provide person-centric care through these programs, we proudly maintained a strong commitment in meeting our clients' goals with dignity, flexibility and adaptation

in service delivery. Above all support was responsive and appropriate to changing needs whilst empowering autonomy through recognition in clients' capacities.

During a challenging year where we juggled many balls, clients were a priority, especially those at risk. Our familiarity with the person's needs and a willingness to really know the person, their history, work experiences, cultural and family background, likes and dislikes guaranteed that every client's needs were individually addressed and that no client fell through the gaps.

We were very proud to see our staff in action, hear from our clients about their dedication and know that our ethos was reflected in every task they performed.





# clinical. services

Clinical services continued to dominate our clients' wellbeing, it was evident that the nursing and medication care provided drastically reduced the need for overnight or longer hospital admissions. Reducing clients' needs of having to move to doctors and outpatient clinics for medical care also reduced risk of transmissions during Covid restrictions that maximised client comfort.

By coordinating services to integrate with individual needs rather than organisational barriers, our nursing team was able to maintain essential services and routine interventions for our clients with complex medical and health needs. The team was highly efficient in early identification of medical and mental health risks which allowed for improved management of chronic conditions and greater liaison with doctors and other allied health personnel.

Our clinical care team went out of their way to ensure that their client was not disadvantaged by isolation and alienation in remaining at home during lockdowns or because of their reduced physical capacity to undertake tasks of daily living independently.

The clinical governance framework together with the Outbreak Management Plan that was introduced in line with the recommended government directives continued to be vital in establishing consistent and safe methodology to treat clients during lockdown procedures. This was supplemented by Co.As.It's Covid Tracker Data Base that allowed for the monitoring and follow-up of all clients, staff and volunteers by a Team Leader who responded immediately to identified or suspected Covid contact cases.

Our client story following highlights the remarkable differences made to a client's life when clinical care also encompasses an assessment of the person's emotional, spiritual and physical well-being.



# clinical. services

## meet graham

When we first met Graham in 2017, he was 79 years old, living by himself and feeling desperately lonely. Graham was very melancholy and found little reason to continue living, he felt isolated and that no-one care about him and he had some medical issues that required monitoring. His Coordinator was adamant that a re-ablement approach be adopted as well as medical supervision and she worked closely with the clinical team to breach any obstructions he was facing.

Graham's Coordinator identified that he was sorely missing the company of other men so our Clinical Team Leader Shaun took on Graham's medical care, visiting weekly. As his health began to stabilize he required less frequent monitoring. Since coming under the watchful eyes of his Coordinator and our clinical team, Graham has been given a new lease of life. Our clinical staff is not just nursing personnel, they are healthcare professionals who see the client's medical issues as only a small part of the whole person.

During his visits Shaun discovered that Graham used to enjoy gardening. With a little encouragement and assistance from Shaun, Graham recommenced gardening and it wasn't long before his front garden became a talking point in the local community where he lives. A bench is now installed in his front garden and Graham sits there daily. This bench has generated countless

opportunities for chatter, social chit chat and new community connections because people walk by and cannot refrain from complimenting him on how beautiful his garden is looking. Apart from deriving wonderful satisfaction for his hard work and renewing his gardening interest, he has become a botanical guru for his neighbours who bring their ailing and dying plants to him to revive. There is always someone dropping past to chat over the fence about his green thumb and this has been a therapy that created purpose and meaning to

Graham's life. Graham's daughter says "

I don't know what I would do without Co.As.It."





# clinical. services

## meet john

John commenced services with us in 2019. Suffering from pronounced neglect he was not expected to live more than a few months. John's poor condition and ongoing medical issues were long-term results of his inability to manage his own medication. When our nursing team assumed the responsibility for ensuring that John received all of his medication correctly and regularly, there was a rapid stabilization of John's medical issues.

Continued care involved regular well-being visits, and our nurses were always quick in identifying any changes that could affect his health. This early detection strategy adopted by the whole nursing team ensured they collaborated early to address clinical intervention with his GP, thus staving off further deterioration.

From presenting to us as a gentleman who required end of life care, our nurses intercepted this predicted outcome and thanks to their care, John has now seized a second chance at life.

As he now enters his 3rd year of continued care from us, our nurses are always delighted to be met every morning with a broad smile by John. Looking stronger and happier than ever, we hope to be able to support his good health for years to come.



# allied health

Our allied health and clinical services work in synergy to treat client needs holistically. There is strong collaboration and referral between the many disciplines in these services viz. physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry, social work, dietetics.

Our allied health staff do not only treat the client in their particular field they also take the time to make observations about the clients' homes, potential risks, the need for specialised equipment that may provide safer access and they take photographs of potential needs areas for future reference. If someone says a step in the bathroom is becoming an issue, staff can refer to photos rather than having to make another visit to the client's residence. Staff provide cross-referrals within the allied health team and across clinical services e.g. a new injury, or a physiotherapist recognising the need for an occupational therapist to assess the home for assistive devices.

In Brisbane the allied health team steadily increased over the past 12 months, with five physiotherapists, an occupational therapist, a podiatrist and a part-time physiotherapist supporting NDIS clients and the team's administrative assistant has increased from part-time to full-time employment. The Gold Coast office brokered the services of a physiotherapist who specialised in treating people with Parkinson's disease, this was in direct response to the increased incidence of this disease and identified as a growing area of need within our client cohort.

Waiting lists for both occupational therapy and physiotherapy amongst HCP and CHSP clients were resolved by the design and development of an internal assessment tool that prioritised clients according to their conditions. The assessment completed by care Coordinators, categorises clients from low to high according to the score on the assessment and this tool has both streamlined and greatly facilitated early action to avoid further deterioration whilst on the waiting list.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not cause significant disruption to in-home services for clients, in fact the need to devise new methods of working was been the impetus to organise staff most of whom are now permanently on flexible work arrangements enabling them to complete non-contact client work at home or in the office. The team found that the flexibility increased efficiency and had a positive effect on workload management, reduced travel time and shortened waiting periods between clients.




## Meet an OT

One of our OTs attended a client with lymphoedema after an urgent OT referral was received. Three days earlier, the client had moved into an independent living unit within a seniors' complex.

On our OT's visit, it became apparent that the unit had very few modifications for older people and her assessment reported that the client was potentially unsafe in the unit and that to ensure her safety, necessary modifications were urgently required to her new environment.

Our OT's visit also revealed that the client had experienced a fall shortly before her arrival. This only cemented our OT's need for immediate action to provide a safe and secure home setting for the client. She organized a speedy procurement of specialized assistive equipment and the same-day installation of this equipment to mitigate further risk of falls.

Caring for aged and frail people requires identifying ways to ensure they can live happily and independently in their own abode. Seen through an experienced and highly qualified lens our staff continue to excel in client care.



*“Caring for aged and frail people requires identifying ways to ensure they can live happily and independently in their own abode. “*

# social groups

## Brisbane and the South Coast

Located at Stafford Heights, Acacia Ridge, Cleveland, Narangba, Bracken Ridge and on the South Coast, the social group activity centres played a significant role in the lives of clients and their carers by providing social and recreational activities, socialisation, outings and essential respite services, especially for carers.

In Brisbane and on the South Coast, groups operated when lockdown restrictions were lifted, however these were implemented with reduced attendance because of social distancing. This meant that transportation was also limited to smaller numbers of passengers and the frequency of attendance ensured that every client was able to attend at least once weekly where possible. New processes for Covid-safe measures were introduced, sanitising stations installed and spaces between tables and activity hubs widened to allow sufficient social distancing. During lockdown, clients had very limited contact with friends and families so the telephone saw a renaissance in voice calls unmatched since its introduction in the 1870s!

Coordinators and staff continued to make frequent welfare checks via telephone, effectively maintaining social connections but more importantly, checking our clients' emotional, spiritual and mental well-being. These calls helped to identify clients' practical needs, smoothed the introduction of

additional or new services, and evaluated clients at risk of depression/anxiety etc. Telephone calls also kept us engaged within the community and people knew that we were available if they needed support, information and referral to other services or practitioners.

The most enjoyable activities were multicultural events that reflected the background of our participants and group coordinators and volunteers created wonderful theme days that celebrated the occasion with costumes, props and decorations. In the past few years, tots from the local child care centres have often visited the centres and this regular intergenerational exchange was vital in creating vitality and interaction between the 'nonni' and the children.





# residential care support

## Community Visitor's Scheme - CVS

Implemented for almost three decades, the CVS Program funded by the Department of Health continued to be one of the most satisfying programs implemented. During the challenges of the past 18 months with Covid-19, it diverged from face-to-face visiting to old-fashioned letter and card writing, digital contact via mobiles, tablets and ipads and window visits.

Encouraged by an additional amount of funding to increase innovative connectivity, additional tablets were purchased for our volunteers to continue operating the visiting program through ways that were Covid-safe and responsive to the changing social climate. Where feasible during lifted restrictions times, many volunteers tried to visit with a group of residents to increase social contact as much as possible for as many people as possible.

There were numerous practical challenges however, some residents' rooms did not have a telephone and there was difficulty in communicating on the phone for residents living with dementia. Additionally, staff at the facilities were strapped for both time and resources in connecting an electronic device for the resident.

Our home care package clients fared somewhat better as their visitors could easily call them and spend quality time on the phone, where

competency was present, they also benefitted from using a tablet, or mobile for virtual visiting as well as enjoying personalised letters and cards. A number of home care package clients who lived alone and were further isolated and alienated due to restrictions during the pandemic were taught how to use digital technology by our Coordinators.





## CVS - Meet Lee

*Volunteer visitor Lee speaks English, Mandarin and Cantonese and is now visiting a small group of four Chinese residents living at Taigum. On her first visit there was a lot to celebrate!*

*All of the residents were delighted to be able to talk to Lee and as one of the residents was celebrating her 101st birthday, Lee and residential CVS Coordinator Luisa were warmly welcomed into the birthday celebrations. This soon turned into a very animated birthday event when Lee enthusiastically spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin, bringing real excitement for the residents.*

*There was much to talk about and share, one lady had been a university lecturer in English and their life stories and memories were expressed in their own language. Lee and Luisa were told a lovely story about white finches and the role they used to play in Chinese fortune telling. Each person at the table would release the finch which would then settle on a cookie. The message contained therein, was that person's fortune.*



## CVS - Thanks from a client's daughter

*Just a quick note to thank you again and say, how the tablet/Skype connection has made such a difference to Enza's life.*

*During these very isolating times, at least she is now able to see me daily and not just talk on the phone. It is also helping enormously that Enza has been able to return to Casa Aurelia, so thank you also for all your hard work there.*



## CIAO Program

The expectations of older Italian CALD persons to be cared for at home is no longer viable as families struggle to maintain a healthy life, work and family balance amidst many competing priorities. In the past year, we evidenced more and more Italian CALD elderly admitted into aged care facilities where the language, culture and environment are alien to them.

The CIAO program originated from a recognition that CALD residents were not participating fully in the daily life of the facility and were especially isolated and excluded from diversional therapy activities that were often deemed to be tasks they performed during their working life e.g. crotchet, sewing, gardening. The inability to understand the purpose of activities perceived as work meant that many were reluctant to be involved and were missing out on social interaction. There was an urgent need to create culturally appropriate diversional therapy activities that would cater to these residents.

The CIAO program creates diversional and recreational therapy activities that incorporate language and culture ideally addressing the Italian residents' cultural norms. The bi-lingual activity officers work closely with the residential aged care facilities, helping them to understand CALD needs in aged care and to plan activities that reflect their cultural celebrations and significant community events. In coordination with existing lifestyle and



leisure schedules, important Italian themes and celebrations were planned included all of the other residents as well. Many enjoyed Italian National Day, Easter and Christmas festivities since the program began operating in 2015. The aged care facilities absorb a partial cost of the program which is now operating for over 120 residents across the Brisbane metropolitan area.

Volunteers are an integral part of this program and their valuable support allows for the implementation of numerous activities on an individual level, especially for residents with hearing impairment or those living with dementia.

Informally, family members also 'volunteer' as they engage with their loved ones in the games, conversations, music and the making of 'espresso' coffee, a ritual that is enjoyed by everyone because the aroma wafts throughout the facility.

# RAS assessments

We have a team of six diversely skilled assessors who undertake Regional Assessment Service (RAS) assessments on behalf of the Primary Health Network (PHN Brisbane North) and Aspire 4 Life.

Our assessors are contracted to carry out assessments in the Caboolture; Brisbane North; Brisbane South and the Logan regions. This contract arrangement has been in place since 2015 and since then each assessor has been carefully selected based on a number of critical criteria.

This role requires special skills in assessing clients within their appropriate cultural framework and all our assessors hold strong cultural and linguistic competency and familiarity with the community in which they operate.

Our assessors currently service clients from Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds making communication accurate and relevant.



***“Our assessors currently service clients from Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds making communication accurate and relevant.”***



# Our clients love us

*“Thank you for your care, support and love through the years. I really appreciated your help to stay home for as long as I have and it’s all thanks to you all. Best wishes always.” Jean*



*“In my opinion it takes a special human to look, understand a space, understand the needs of the people in that space, and genuinely make the biggest difference to the people they care for on their visits, not just be on auto pilot.”*

*“I am writing to say a HUGE THANKS to you and all your staff who have looked after both Ron and me so well during all the years we have been with Co.As.It. So many have contributed to our well-being, ..... I can honestly say that all the people I have dealt with (including Management, Physios, Podiatrists, Nurses, regular carers and administration staff), have been professional, courteous, and helpful, where possible. It is with sadness that I say goodbye to the exceptional package care Ron has received from Co.As.It. but am planning to keep the connection going through making use of the Commonwealth Home Support Program to meet my increasing needs.”*

*“My support worker is awesome, I am more than satisfied, she positively shines and I relish her visits.” Ellie*

*“Our wonderful care worker has dramatically made a big difference in our lives by being consistent and attentive especially caring for my wife Del.” Darryl*

# amici house *opening*

## Amici House Community Hub – Opening

More than 100 people including community leaders, representatives of other community organisations, staff and volunteers gathered on May 8th, 2021 at the Open Day of our newest community hub, Amici House at Bracken Ridge.

The multi-use facility incorporates a community café that offers inexpensive meals and snacks, indoor and outdoor facilities, ample parking and will be servicing clients from as far as Redcliffe, Pine Rivers and Caboolture. The commercial kitchen fitout and the purchase of allied health equipment were gratefully made possible through a grant from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund.

The official opening of the facility at a VIP event prior to the Open Day was presided over by the Hon. Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education, Industrial Relations and Racing, who praised the “wonderful” centre, highlighting the quality of services that Co.As.It. has been providing to the community for more than 40 years, including to her own parents who were also clients.

The former gospel chapel on Bracken Ridge Road began its extensive refurbishment in 2020 and the complex was completed in April 2021. Funded solely with Co.As.It.’s own funds of \$1M, this lovely facility is a testament to the Co.As.It. Board’s commitment and vision of actualizing a legacy that will continue to foster community harmony.

The facility will also provide greater access to social group activities, allow carer respite through centre-based respite, provide affordable allied health services, physical well-ness programs in addition to recreational activities in that area.









# dementia support

## Sunshine Groups

The Sunshine groups were an essential element in maintaining the welfare of carers, this was particularly difficult during lockdown as carers were unable to be assisted with respite from neither friends, family nor support staff. These groups have a special mission, to create engagement and opportunities that validate people living with dementia by supporting them with activities and goals that are both creative and achievable. Coordinators and their trained staff concentrated on understanding clients' feelings and emotions which may not always be expressed verbally. Staff was taught to stimulate other senses e.g. olfactory, sensory, aural and visual.

## Young at Heart Concert

Some time ago, one of our Gold Coast Coordinators became aware of a project that was done in the UK where people with cognitive impairment became vocalists in a choir. Inspired by the success of

this initiative, it was felt that the project could be replicated to provide a wonderful experience for our clients living with dementia. Best of all, the choir would perform for family, friends and staff. Fourteen members between the ages of 69 and 97 years were voted in by the social activity group members and practice sessions for the new vocalists were trialled in January. There was a lot of trepidation in the new choir, some were timid and others intimidated by the learning process involved. True rehearsals for the concert began in March after the whole group had decided which songs they wished to perform - a large repertoire of songs ranging from Louis Armstrong 'A Beautiful World' to Vera Lynne 'We'll Meet Again'. Over the rehearsal sessions we received constant feedback from the choir. From this feedback, changes were made to the format making it easier to learn the lyrics.

At the first sessions, everyone was singing – just not in unison! We marshalled experienced Choir Master David Brigden (Young Sydney Singers; Carols



in the Domain) to help with the vocalists and with his input, the singers soon progressed from being able to retain the lyrics to singing together as a group and even gaining enough confidence to do solos - with dancing! It was an arresting transition because initially, many were reluctant to participate but over the 10 rehearsals, with each singer encouraging and supporting the other, everyone became invested and excited about the concert. The 'Young at Heart Concert' was held in May 2021 and the highlight of the evening was the Choir's performance of 'YMCA' (Village People) which had many taking on the characters of the Policeman/ Indian/Construction worker. The evening ended with both the audience and the choir taking to the dance floor.

CEO Dina Ranieri attended the concert and congratulated staff and clients for a genuinely moving experience. She stated that "It's days like today that I get to witness why we do what we do." It was obvious that she was intensely proud of the

staff and the dedication put into making this project such a rewarding experience for everyone.

## Dementia Workshop

Co.As.It. received funding from Dementia Australia to deliver group, individual and family-based information, education and support with key performance indicators to be met over a 6-month period between January and June 2021. The target outcomes expected were that clients had a better understanding of dementia, coping strategies, and supports; and that communities had increased understanding of dementia and inclusive strategies.

The grant also provided support to individuals and family groups impacted by dementia through culturally appropriate information, education and practical support on how to access, understand and use dementia related services. It is expected that this partnership will continue in future and Co.As.It. will continue supporting the CALD community with education and resources.



# our people what makes us different

In any service industry, client satisfaction is intrinsically linked to staff who provide optimum service. This is correlated to their possessing high levels of skills and knowledge, the ability to communicate this knowledge and the empathy to use their skills appropriately. Above all staff need to possess the willingness to step outside of the box to ensure that what they do will enrich and make a difference to the wellbeing of their client. Many service providers say their clients are at the centre of everything they do, that their services are responsive, that they can support people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and that their staff is dedicated. No doubt this is genuine but what makes us different is how we provide these same services.

Our ethos of care was derived from our original cultural links – the importance of family, extended families and wider community members, all important elements of our cultural membrane. Thus our clients are also embraced within this membrane and we know that our staff respond to their needs as they would to members of their own families. Every so often we get feedback like the one below that truly shows us that this ethos is deeply ingrained in our people. We are privileged to see our exceptional staff doing exceptional things - all the time.

We praise and acknowledge every person we employ as being the embodiment of our ethos of

care, we are so proud to be different! Our staff are the pillars of our organization. We see the triumphs our people make at work every day – they are truly achieving not only their best life's work but also for clients who benefit from truly Promethean traits.

They utilise common sense, life experiences, diversity and inclusivity that contributes to innovation, wisdom, and ability to help clients in practical ways. We keep lauding the virtues of our people and the following stories show why we believe we have the best people working with us.

Our claims of excellent service provision were independently validated this year with the organisation achieving a 100% compliance rate in the new Aged Care Quality Standards, a result that has been maintained since the triennial audits commenced in 2000. Conducted over three days, auditors personally interviewed clients, community care workers Coordinators, clinical and allied health team leaders and management to measure the organisation's competency. We were elated to once again achieving an outstanding outcome, where no specific areas were identified for improvement.

Co.As.It. abides by its continuous improvement policy and will always endeavour to review and improve systems and processes, thus allowing us to exceed in meeting the needs and expectations of our clients, staff and funding bodies.



# hcp program *meet nathan*

Nathan loves to share his life story, particularly about starting his own trucking company up north and his many years of truck driving. These days he lives with chronic lumbar pain and sciatica which greatly affects his mobility, particularly in getting in and out of bed independently. He also needs assistance aids like grab rails and a ramp to access his outdoor area.

Working in conjunction with our allied health team (Occupational Therapist) his Coordinator was able to give Nathan greater independence by using the unspent funds in his package to install some minor home modifications.

An electronic bed demonstration was arranged in Nathan's home thanks to Sleep Electric. The beds arrived in a trailer with friendly supportive staff and Nathan was able to trial them before he found not only his preferred option but one that our OT felt met all of his medical and mobility needs. Remote buttons for raising and lowering the bed have really made a difference to Nathan. Nearby grab bars from Sleep Electric were also installed that further facilitated movement.

An outdoor ramp was installed so that he didn't have to lift his legs over the 12cm threshold and now Nathan can tend to his garden, hang out his washing and reduce his risk of falls. All of these small yet vital additions to his home have ensured that Nathan can carry on living independently in his

own house. Need we say he is delighted?

*"I am writing to let you know how much I appreciate the services allocated to me, in my HCP package. I am able to go down to the beach for coffee each fortnight as well as my housework being done for me. The Taxi vouchers for my many and varied visits to Doctors and hospitals make it so much easier to access these. My new door and ramps have been greatly appreciated and admired and make bringing my groceries in and accessing my home so much easier! Thank you!"*



## Meet a Coordinator

Earlier this year, Warren was urgently taken to hospital after suffering severe cardiac pain. His wife Shirley\* who has Alzheimer's Disease could not care for herself.

In the midst of his own severe pain and concerned for his wife, Warren tried in vain to find respite for his beloved partner and in the end Shirley had no choice but to accompany him to hospital. Having no one to care for her, in desperation Warren called his Coordinator to ask if she could arrange something.

The Coordinator had been out enjoying her weekend but the desperate call soon changed her plans. Despite calling every contact available, she was also unable to find any emergency respite places for Shirley. Knowing that Warren would not be able to recuperate if he was constantly worried

about his wife, our Coordinator did what any member of a family would do.

She stepped in, cancelled her weekend plans and went to the hospital to pick Shirley up and take her home – where she stayed and cared for her the whole weekend. Her compassion, and willingness to forgo her own time to help another person echoed strongly within our organisation as with Warren.

*“I wish to place on record and extol the virtues of my Coordinator who in a recent medical emergency situation, went well above the call of duty to assist my wife Shirley and myself. I had a cardiac episode of considerable urgency which required hospitalization over the weekend. My wife suffers from Alzheimer's and had to accompany me to hospital as she is incapable of caring for herself. I was unable to get her into respite care and called my Coordinator to see if we could arrange an emergency carer. My Coordinator gave up her own time over the weekend, came to the hospital and stayed with her for the weekend. She was outstanding in her devotion to my wife's care and arranged for our normal carer to be with my wife in my absence. I cannot speak highly enough of the goodwill and charity of spirit she displayed and I am eternally grateful for her solicitude towards both of us. She is a testament to Co.As.It. and the values it espouses. Thankyou.” Warren.*







# chsp program meet audry

Audry is no stranger to financial hardship, grief and family turmoil. An asthmatic with chronic back pain, she has lived through a turbulent life and at 66 says it is only now that she can relax and enjoy a better quality of life.

A country girl, Audry lived in many parts of Queensland, travelling around as her father followed his work, first as a drover and later, building dams with the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission. Born in Nambour she left home at 16 and became a nurse at the Ipswich General Hospital. "I loved it. I would go back tomorrow if I could," Audry says, "but I left after three years when I married a man who turned out to be full of alcohol and abuse." She had three children and a fourth child to her second partner, who was also abusive. Escaping her partner she uprooted her children and moved to Melbourne where she raised them on her own but fate had more harrowing challenges for her to overcome.

Audry found herself starting again when in a quirk of fate, she lost everything, including the photos of her children and she had to live through the traumatic deaths of two of her sons within an 8 year period. Her youngest son took his own life six and a half years ago and it was a shocking blow when her second youngest son was killed in a motorcycle

accident in January this year. He was 42.

Audry received CHSP support from us which has made an indelible improvement to her life. "My quality of life has been much improved by the services I am now able to access and I don't have to wonder where I am going to get the money," she says.

Her care worker takes her out for 4 hours every fortnight to shop, have social contact and help her with meal preparation which she then freezes and uses during the week. "I can't stand at a bench for that long because of my back. It's agony to even stand up," she said. Co.As.It. has also organised help for her with household chores that she is unable to do herself. She sees the same care staff every week and has formed strong relationships with them.

"My quality of life has become good, other than the back pain," she says. "Co.As.It. has made a real difference to me. Life is looking up." And, she adds, "It's about time."



# supporting under 65's

## Queensland Community Support Scheme - QCSS

Administered by the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, QCSS supported people with functional impairment resulting from a disability, chronic illness or mental health condition who were under 65 years of age, not eligible for the NDIS and required slight assistance in independent living. This program was underpinned by a person-centred, capacity-building approach that focused on improving a person's quality of life and general wellbeing by increasing the person's ability to be as independent as possible in their own home and community. We delivered this program as the lead partner in a consortium with GOC (Greek Orthodox Care) and the Islamic Women's Association of Australia Inc. (IWAA) where as CALD service providers, we were able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services for clients.

*"I just wanted to write to let you know Dad is thrilled with his care worker who helps him with his showers and general tasks 3 times a week. We have had nothing but bad experiences so far with other providers, but his worker is a breath of fresh air. Dad said she is thorough, is proactive and seems to genuinely care. I can't tell you the difference this makes to Dad (and us of all). Can you please pass on our thanks"*

Together with the client, services were designed to identify the client's optimal support mechanisms and we focussed on re-ablement strategies that were of short term duration. With our diverse range of care staff, we provided in-home support and community connections that met the cultural and linguistic needs of each individual registered under this scheme.

Successfully, we used a multi-disciplinary team approach that provided referrals, counselling and practical support to establish wider community linkages for other support services as needed.



# qcss program *meet clarinda\**

Clarinda has been a QCSS client for the past year. Clarinda came to Australia almost 5 years ago from a detention centre in the US - a refugee from Cuba. Whilst the whole family fled to the US (husband and adult children) in a twist of fate, she was given asylum in Australia – alone. The rest of her family was sent to Canada. Separated from each other, despite the risk to their safety her family decided to return to Cuba and Clarinda has been applying to have them join her in Australia ever since.

On arrival, in addition to the grief of fleeing her home, she found herself grieving for her family, frightened of being alone in a new country with no friends, no support and unable to communicate with anyone because she spoke no English.

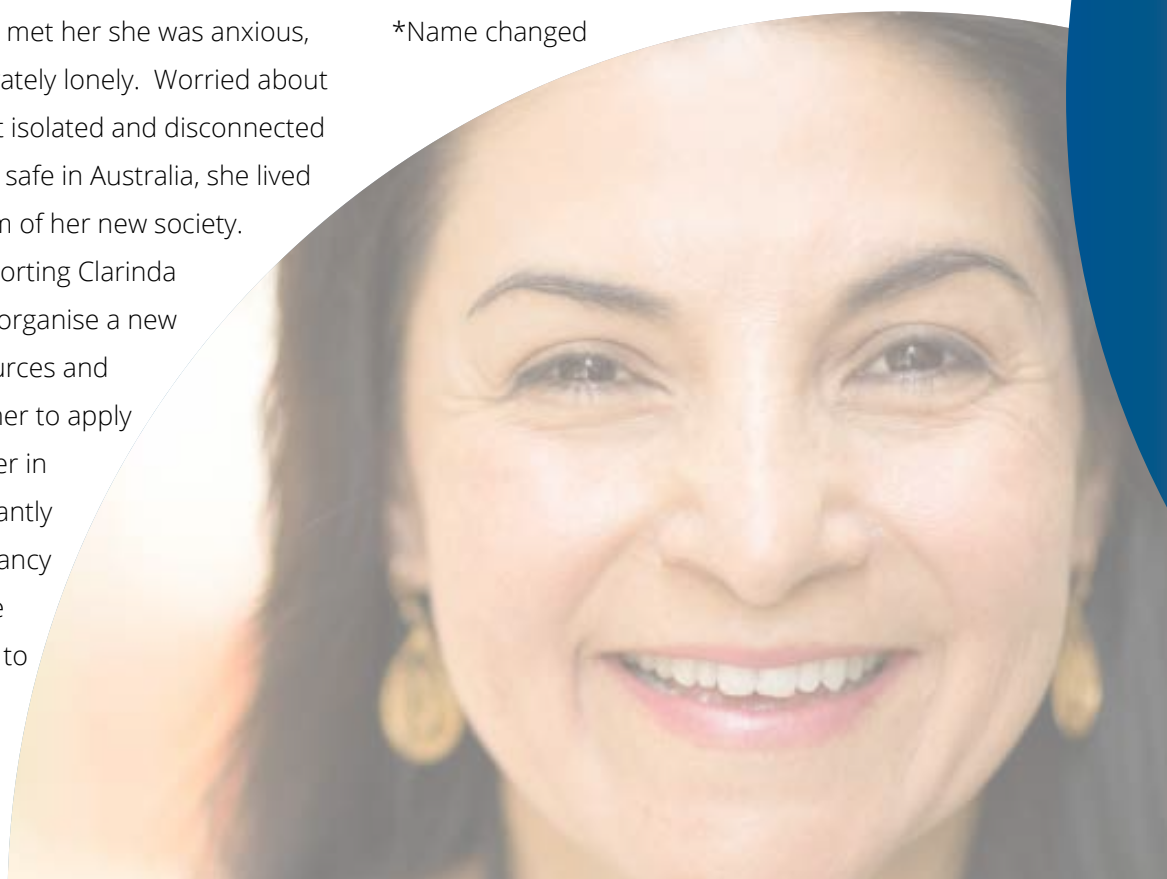
When her Coordinator met her she was anxious, depressed and desperately lonely. Worried about her family, Clarinda felt isolated and disconnected from people. Although safe in Australia, she lived within a tiny microcosm of her new society.

When we started supporting Clarinda she felt futile trying to organise a new life. We provided resources and language support for her to apply for her family to join her in Australia. Most significantly we brought a new vibrancy and purpose to her life when we matched her to her Spanish-speaking

community care worker by the name of Josefa who would prove to make a huge difference to Clarinda's life. Over the last year, we have seen this lovely lady blossom. Clarinda told us that since meeting Josefa she has felt more cheerful, she now has a connection to another person, can communicate in her own language and she has support with in-home services that are culturally appropriate. Not only does she receive in-home services Josefa provides her with valuable companionship, resources and a link to the wider Spanish-speaking community.

"My life has improved so much since your company came into my life, I feel accompanied and comfortable speaking in Spanish and feel encouraged to keep going."

\*Name changed



# national insurance disability scheme *ndis*

We began operating NDIS in 2019 and on-going changes to regulatory requirements necessitating realigning our operational parameters to implement this program. We have worked hard to address the challenges faced by our clients especially those unable to understand, plan nor budget on how their services would be implemented.

We undertook our very first audit in this program in April 2021 which was passed with 100% compliance. The audit was to determine compliance of Co.As.It. management systems with the audit criteria and our effectiveness in achieving continual improvement and quality objectives. The audit team conducted a process-based audit focusing on interviews, observation of activities and review of documentation and records.

At the end of the reporting period, 64 NDIS participants located between Brisbane and the Gold Coast received our best care, not only recognised by the Auditor but also by our participants.

We were delighted to hear that participants scored 9 out of 10 in service satisfaction with the lowest score being 8 out of 10.

We were humbled to see some of the comments made to the Auditor during their interviews but we were chuffed by one participant who said: "They are like my family."



# ndis program *meet michael*

Michael has been a Co.As.It. client since 2019. Despite a double leg amputation and other medical complications Michael has striven to remain as independent as possible.

In October last year as a result of an infection, Michael had recurrent hospital admissions with increased levels of pain and degeneration in his spine. Regrettably, unsupported hospital discharges left Michael without proper care. Our Community Care Worker Edin visited Michael right after one of his discharges and found him in bed unable to move or transfer independently.

Michael's debilitation was quite significant, physically he had deteriorated and it was affecting the way he wanted to live his life. He had lost the ability of transferring independently without the supervision of one worker, was unable to cook for himself nor go out into the community. His needs were now much more complex and Michael required two care staff to use a hoist at all times for transfers, was only able to sit upright in his chair for short lengths of time due to his poor core strength. Edin contacted the NDIS Coordinator Paola who immediately went to visit Michael.

At Michael's request, NDIS took over his management and created a care plan with a multi-disciplinary team approach. Liaising with other staff viz. a Support Coordinator, a Physiotherapist and a skilled team of 8 care staff they worked

together on improving his wellbeing and restoring Michael's independence. This had to be achieved within Michael's funding and service requirements as well as ensuring Michael had all the necessary equipment to meet his needs when he returned home from 3 months rehabilitation.

Our Physiotherapist trained his care staff to use the new equipment and he currently has care staff that rotate through 3 shifts a day, 7 days a week in addition to our physiotherapist who continues working closely with Michael in building his upper core strength.

Without this multi-disciplinary team Michael would not be able to attend to even his most basic needs. Since Michael moved to NDIS he is now able to stay out of bed all day twice a week and is working on slowly increasing his ability to do more.

One of the things he is really looking forward to is being able to participate in community activities again and cooking some meals for himself. Michael recently told us his goal is to be able to cook again so that he can put butter in his toast as "You can never have too much butter".



*"You can never  
have too much  
butter".*



# ndis program *meet brett*

Brett has been a client since 2015. He started receiving support services under the Community Care Program and later transitioned to the NDIS program. Brett has Acquired Brain Injury as well as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, he has difficulty managing money, regulating his emotions and also has social skills deficits.

Over the past year we have seen Brett make genuinely rewarding progress in his life. With specifically trained and selected community care workers, Brett has been able to tick boxes and achieve goals through support strategies that constantly adapt to his changing needs, his identified goals and everyday activities. Brett used to volunteer at a local Thrift shop and we started supporting him in his role of managing a specific area in the shop. With his care worker's assistance he ensured all his allotted tasks were completed.

In September 2020, Brett started volunteering at an E-Waste facility where his duties were to separate electrical goods (metal from plastic). He attended to this new activity with the support of his support worker Sam who consistently encouraged him and guided him to complete his assigned jobs. Brett discovered his passion for recycling and his dedication was noted by the facility coordinator who offered him a paid job. In December 2020, with two support workers, Brett began working at the E-Waste facility 2 days a week. His job was to

manually sort collected e-waste items, dismantle and then categorize materials which go through specific recycling and recovery processes. He has found a real passion and takes pride in his work ensuring that all components are recycled correctly so that they can be reused.

Aside from learning the necessities of his new job, he was also presented with new challenges; getting ready on time in the morning, packing a lunch box, taking his medications for the day, etc. During their weekly budgeting and shopping outings his care worker Sam assisted him in buying lunch items and healthy snacks to take to work and Brett has seen the monetary advantage of packing a lunch box. With consistent support from support workers Sue and Lachlan, Brett has adjusted to his new routine, has learned to work in a team environment.

His social skills have developed too, e.g. being more patient with colleagues who do not work at the same pace. He has come a long way in a short time. We couldn't be prouder of Brett's journey. We have seen how empowered he has become, how he has striven to reach his goals and become a young man full of potential. With continued input from his support workers, Brett has a fulfilling and satisfying job to look forward to and we will continue to be there for him for as long as he needs us.





# mind wellness *Team*

Our counsellors are remarkable people and our clients derive a richness of benefits that cannot be quantified, but we do know that they helped many, many people pick up their lives and live with confidence and purpose. There are many and varied strategies and therapies in the bag of a counsellor but nothing can work unless the unique nature of the therapeutic relationship between client and counsellor is based on impartiality, objectivity and fairness - unlike relationships with family, friends etc. As a Mental Health team they succeeded and promoted positive outcomes from the unique nature of the therapeutic relationship between client and counsellor.

Our counsellors have personally witnessed the growth of many of our clients. Through their interventions they have inspired tenacity and resilience to survive life with Covid 19.

Some of the wonderful outcomes they recorded in the past year were clients who had not left their homes for a period of time due to death of spouses, reconnected with family and friends; clients who were unable to 'release and let go' of old family disputes and disagreements reconnected with loved ones.

Clients experiencing existential pain and/or personal psychosocial conflict often driven by unmet emotional needs, loss of identity, fear of retribution reconnected with themselves and significant others; clients who received regular

counselling for a period of time no longer required support from us and ended the sessions.

## Mind the Men

A men's support group was established by our male counsellor called 'Mind the Men' where men of all ages were able to meet, discuss and share and encourage each other through the many trials and tribulations experienced by males, especially CALD men who traditionally do not seek outside organisational membership e.g. Mens' Sheds. Regular lunches and outings were organised that provided strong male-to-male support between group members, especially between younger and older men.





# mind wellness *meet paula*

A year and a half ago I decided to return to Colombia after my plans in Australia did not turn out as planned. I felt like everything in my life was collapsing, and for the first time I felt total despair and felt I had no hope for any future on this continent.

The leader of our Latino group at the Holy Spirit Parish suggested that before I buy my airline ticket, I speak to the Community Support Officer (CSO) of Co.As.It. I followed through with his suggestion I met with him soon after. I had my reservations for I have never spoken to a mental health professional and assumed he was going to be a condescending figure who was going to dictate the path I should take. The reality was the opposite.

On our first meeting, the CSO spoke in very unpretentious terms, and assured me that his role was to support me on my navigation of the complex mental health landscape. The outcome was of great benefit for me for I discovered a holistic approach to address my situation.

For example, the CSO made a referral for me to see a Spanish-speaking counsellor, and slowly my despair turned into hope, and I started to find a courage, creativity and willpower I was not even aware I possessed.

Some of the positive impacts I have enjoyed in this exciting journey are that I improved my English by enrolling in different English courses that led to my promotion as manager at my current job. Also, I started a Certificate III in Individual Support and with the Community Support Officer's suggestion, contacted the Community Visitor Coordinator and joined as a volunteer to provide social support to Spanish-speaking clients in the community.

I have learned, in working with the CSO, about the endless opportunities this generous country has to offer if I focus on the solution and not the problem. I am absolutely confident that I was not depressed as my friends were telling me at the time, but distracted from the untapped potential and hidden resources that were dormant inside of me.



# community connections

## **Community and Individual Support Services - CISS**

The CISS Program continued its involvement in supporting vulnerable families, individuals and children within the community and was instrumental in introducing new activities that directly responded to identified needs within the target groups.

Working in collaboration with other Community Support Officers, the CISS program has been involved with Hispanic, Syrian, Italian, Australian clients aged 19- 84 years including refugees, unemployed migrants, vulnerable single people living with poor mental health, students and younger families.

## **Latin Dance Classes**

These free classes were run weekly with professional Latin dance instructors to promote both physical and social well-being in addition to improving mental health and having a new recreational pursuit.

The classes proved to be so popular that Coordinators at the social activity centres requested some sessions at the centres, enjoyed enormously by all participants and staff.

## **Technology Classes**

The CISS technology classes saw tangible results in older users being able to keep connected with peers, family and friends, particularly during Covid-19 lockdowns. The program followed simple step-by-step instructions from a gradual introduction to computers, tablets and smartphones to achieve competency in accessing social contact via Facebook, Skype and Whatsapp.

## **Migration Brotherhood Calendar 2021**

The 2021 calendar celebrated the beloved sons, brothers, husbands and fathers whose dreams of a better life brought them to Australia as migrants. Co.As.It. had over 290 men clients born between 1920 and 1940 and their migration stories were being lost. As descendants of these dreamers we celebrated their imperishability through this calendar. With no English skills, little money and often few qualifications, they flourished in their new country and the calendar was a tribute to their audacity and enterprise.

## **Hispanic International Student Webinars**

As Covid-19 erupted last year, many international students found themselves in dire circumstances. Having been employed in the hospitality industry which was the first to close its businesses, many



found themselves with no income, unable to pay for rent or food and there was no possibility of government subsidies. These students were supported by CISS on a weekly basis through information webinars, linkages with free community food banks and the activation of social media connections with other Spanish-speaking students Australia wide.



## Zoom-bah Kids

Weekly zoom-bah classes were held in 2021 for children aged 6 to 12 years in response to an identified need that financially disadvantaged families were unable to afford extra-curricular activities for their children. Additionally, these children were missing out on participating in fun activities that assisted physical and emotional fitness.

## Portuguese Community Forum

Held in August 2020, a personalised community forum was held for Spanish speaking migrants some of whom were refugees to inform and provide resources on how to access aged care and community services within their local area.





# community connections

## Insieme

Co.As.It.'s organisational magazine was released quarterly as a digital copy available on the website and also as a hard copy edition in English and Italian for clients who did not have access to computers. The editions reflected current news and Covid-safe practices, client stories, information about the organisation's programs and planned events. This magazine maintained vital linkages with clients, ILC students and the wider community.

## Stay Active Program

Last year we saw a wonderful exercise activity blossom into a fully-fledged community program for older CALD members. We identified that older CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) people did not access existing physical activity programs due to financial, cultural, linguistic and logistical reasons. More significantly, we knew this group lacked awareness that early and on-going physical activity reaped long term benefits for their well-being. This lack of education in building and promoting physical wellness early, impacted on their long-term health. We started the Stay Active Program to educate and actively involve CALD elderly in physical activity programs that enriched their mental, physical and social well-being.

The program, now funded by Co.As.It. ran four times a week at Carina, Bracken Ridge and Kalinga and regular participants reported significant

improvements that continue to make positive inroads into older persons' health in their local community.

Regular participant, Cosetta noticed the difference Stay Active has made to her life. "I've been doing the sit-to-stands (from the home exercise booklet produced by Co.As.It.) and I can really notice an improvement. I can now step over a hedge in the garden that I couldn't step over before I started going to the classes," says Cosetta. Her husband







supports her , “I can see an improvement in my wife since she’s been attending the group. Now she can get out of a chair without needing to push herself up with her hands,” he remarked. Cosetta’s assessment scores measured by our physiotherapist improved from 6/12 to 9/12 between August and November last year. One point is a significant improvement, but a three point improvement is fantastic! “ stated our physiotherapist.

## Community Support Officers

Our Community Support Officers provided on-going attention especially to our CALD community throughout the past year. In particular, two target groups in need of information, counselling and support were identified as falling through the gap of service provision. These groups were the Latino community that was being supported solely by the local parish priest at New Farm and the need for supportive networks for men (of all ages).

After having been contacted by the priest Fr Ignacio who requested a number of educational and informational workshops for the Latino language group, four workshops were held that covered key areas as requested by Fr Ignacio. He had been supporting his community and had identified increased use of alcohol, illegal narcotics and prescribed drugs use during the pandemic and he sought assistance with educating users on the danger of substance abuse.

Workshops were also urgently needed on raising awareness of domestic violence, processes in acquiring employment, and navigating and seeking support services for people living with mental health issues. The ‘Mind the Men’ groups were one of the strategies aimed at meeting the need of young and older men by creating supportive networks where men of all ages could meet. The groups not only enjoyed getting together with men of all ages they also were provided with tools in managing anger, anxiety and depression. Of particular interest was maintaining resiliency during periods of Covid lockdowns.



## Gift of Giving

We are often asked to provide practical support for vulnerable members of the community, in so doing, we meet inspiring people who humble us with their extraordinary resilience in adversity. During Christmas 2020, we knew that some of our most vulnerable clients were doing it tough. Our staff sourced, requested and received donations of dozens of products and food items for over 40 clients that they personally packed into luxury festive hampers that were delivered by our Community Support Officer.

These are some of the stories that make us want to move mountains for our clients.

Gwen \* was recently widowed and forced to move to less expensive rental accommodation. A pensioner, with no family in Queensland and whose only child lived overseas, she was facing a lonely Christmas with no-one in her circle of life. We knew the hamper wouldn't change her isolation on Christmas Day, but for Gwen it was a tangible manifestation of our caring and on-going presence over the festive season.

Vincenza \* had a daughter who lived in Austria and a son who lived in Hervey Bay. She had daily telephone contact with a brother, but no face-to-face contact with anyone. She was overwhelmed and delighted to receive the hamper because she was also going to be spending Christmas day alone.



Despite living through hardship, many people showed nobleness of heart to think about others who may be worse off. Ronald \* had recently been discharged from hospital and had not had contact with any family members for more than 40 years. Renting with two other men, he suggested that perhaps we should give the hamper to a “more deserving” client. After being reassured that he was one of the ‘more deserving’ clients, he graciously accepted the gift.

Pauline\* was recovering from two surgeries to improve her mobility, despite these difficulties she was still visiting her son every day who was very ill in hospital. In his 20s, he had recently been diagnosed with two aggressive cancers. Despite having to grapple with ill health, sadness and anxiety about her situation, Pauline still thought about other people. Whenever our staff went to see her she was always ready with a cold drink and a biscuit for her care workers, conscious that they often spent all day out and about.

Every hamper went to a courageous individual who inspired us by their resolution in getting on with their lives despite being confronted by hardship and challenges. What a privilege to be involved with these clients.

\*Names changed



# social connections

## Social Outings

When permissible the monthly social group outings held within Brisbane North, South, Bayside and South Coast, were heavily patronised activities for people aged 65 years and over with no mobility issues nor cognitive impairment. The outings continued to be a significant component of the social support services implemented under the Commonwealth Home Support Program, energising people to greater community engagement and fostering a sense of belonging to a wider citizenry. Regular attendance established sound on-going friendships that were encouraged during periods of lockdown so that people were happily able to keep in contact through telephone calls when physical visiting was not possible.

Outings always sought to meet a broad range of interests; from exhibitions to sight-seeing to wine tasting, luncheons and animal farm visits. Recently a local camel farm had some very entranced sight seers who were enchanted by the camels' long lashes - the envy of many women present.





# events 2020-2021

## 75th Anniversary of the Italian Republic

Held at the Shrine of Remembrance Anzac Square Brisbane on the morning of June 2, a commemorative service was organised by Com.it.es President Mariangela Stagnitti to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Italian Republic.

All of the Italian Associations as well as community members were in attendance including Cr Vicky Howard (Councillor for Central Ward). Speeches by Cr Howard and the Italian Consul brought into highlight the significant influence Italy has made throughout the world and the contributions left by Italian immigrants worldwide.

The celebrations continued into the evening by invitation of the Consul and his wife for invited guests to attend a special event at Customs House, to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Italian Republic but also the 60th anniversary of the Consulate of Italy in Brisbane.

Attended The Premier of Qld. Annastacia Palaszczuk, during the evening, Grace MP was awarded the Cavaliere dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana.



## Stanthorpe Community Visit

In February 2021, representatives from a number of Italian organisations, including Co.As.It., travelled to Stanthorpe to meet with the Italian community there. Initiated by the Italian Consul Dott. Salvatore Napolitano, the visit was an opportunity to make connections with the local community.

Welcomed by Southern Downs Regional Council Mayor, Vic Pennisi and members of Council, a number of visits were organized to meet with first, second and third generation Italian business owners carrying on the legacy of their fathers and grandfathers. Visits included community and civic centres as well as Stanthorpe State High School.

A meeting with the local community organization, The Italian Australian Welfare Association (Granite Belt) Inc. about the future of aged care and how best to meet the needs of the growing Granite Belt elderly community was an important topic of discussion that will be expanded in the near future.



# language teaching & *promotion*



## Statistics

Students receiving language tuition  
Primary, Secondary, State & non-State schools  
Students 2020 21,253  
Students 2021 22,445  
Schools 68

Adult Students (All levels) 253

Professional Development  
Workshops for Teachers 36

Girotondo Playgroup 56

After School Italian Program 52

5th Brisbane Italian Speaking Competition 129

ILC Calligram Competition 2020 136





The Italian Language Centre (ILC) is a division of Co.As.It. Community Services Ltd. ILC's mission is to be the focal point in Queensland for the teaching and learning of Italian language and culture.

### **New ILC website**

The new ILC website was launched in July 2020 allowing online enrolment and payment of tuition fees and a new staff member was employed to overtake marketing and publicity.

## **Italian Language Programs in Schools**

Support for Italian programs in Queensland schools is made possible through funding provided by MAECI (Ministero Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale) through the Italian Consulate in Brisbane.

Curriculum support is applied for under Capitolo 3153 whilst support for Teacher Professional Development is applied for under Capitolo 2619. In 2020 and 2021 budget requests were put forward for approval under Capitolo 3153 and

Capitolo 2619. Both were approved for the 2020 and 2021 school years. The amount of funding provided is based on the number of school students studying Italian across Queensland. The data is collected annually and reflects the following:

During the first Semester 2021, the use of funding approved under Capitolo 3153 was broadened to include:

- Department of Education (DoE) and Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) approved the provision of funded upskilling Language Proficiency Workshops for teachers as well as a consultation service to assist teachers in the planning/execution of their Italian lessons.
- Language Program Liaison Officers were employed on fixed-term contracts to deliver language upskilling workshops as well as be available to provide assistance to teachers of Italian with curriculum and linguistic/cultural/ didactic needs.



During the first Semester 2021, funding applied under the new funding directive Il Progetto 2021 was utilised differently to support Italian programs in schools. A proposal was put forward to the Department of Education (DoE) and Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) to arrange for upskilling Language Proficiency Workshops for teachers as well as provide consultative services to assist teachers in the planning/execution of their Italian lessons. The proposal was approved by DoE as well as BCE.

A new staff member was employed part-time on a 12 month contract to deliver language upskilling workshops as well as provide assistance to teachers of Italian with linguistic/cultural/didactic needs.

## Professional Development

In the second semester 2020, due to Covid restrictions, ILC was unable to offer face-to-face PD sessions. However, ILC was invited by Dott.ssa Anna Rita Tamponi (Director of Education at the Italian Embassy Canberra) to host via Zoom, the 5th National Conference for Australian Teachers of Italian to celebrate the 'XX settimana della lingua italiana nel mondo'. International keynote speakers delivered their presentations in accordance with the theme 'Italiano tra parola e immagine: graffiti, illustrazioni, fumetti'. The conference took place with an audience of 280 who tuned in from all States and Territories of Australia. In line with the 'Progetto 2021' two Italian language proficiency days for Teachers were held.

## Italian Classes

### Adult Italian Language Classes

Nine levels of Italian language courses were offered; from beginners through to advanced students.

### Girotondo Playgroup

Twice-weekly Playgroup sessions for children aged 3-5 years are based on themed activity booklets supported by relevant Italian songs, vocabulary, props and toys. All Playgroup sessions had to be capped at 10 enrolments to allow for social distancing measures during the Covid pandemic.

### After School Italian Program

Qualified native-speaking teachers ensured students were positively engaged in learning language through after school classes.

### Italian Summer Camp

In January 2021 intensive Italian Summer Courses were offered for both adults and children at various times.

## Promoting Italy, its language and culture

Various activities and projects that cover both linguistic and cultural appreciation have always been created to appeal to as wide a range of ages as possible. This year was no different. Many projects are repeated annually and they now form part of the Italian language curriculum and our staff continued to provide resources and practical support in all of the following events.





### Italian Speaking Competitions

The 5th Brisbane Region Italian Speaking Competition couldn't be held face-to-face due to Covid social distancing measures. Rules were adjusted to allow entries to be sent in via video and native-speaking teachers from ILC judged the entries.

### Italian Calligram Competiton

This annual event open to all school students of Italian across 5 categories (Prep-Yr8) was launched with the theme "Oggetti e personaggi dal mondo delle fiabe" in line with the 2020 theme for the 'XX Settimana della lingua italiana nel mondo'.

### Book Club Italiano

Throughout 2020 and 2021 Book Club Italiano was conducted by an ILC literature expert. Fortnightly sessions were held on Saturday mornings at ILC where registered school teachers could attribute attendance towards obligatory professional development.



### Canzoni a Tema

This event was introduced in late 2020 to provide an opportunity for students to perfect their intonation, rhythm and flow and learn new vocabulary through Italian songs. Held over 3-fortnightly Saturdays, sessions introduced songs about Italian cities in line with the theme: 'Si Parte!' The success of the initial 'Canzoni a Tema' ensured its repetition in 2021 with the new theme of 'Le Quattro Stagioni'.



### **Movie Nights**

Held regularly before Covid, these events offered adult students the opportunity to watch a film in Italian (with English subtitles) which allowed exposure to contemporary and colloquial language. The film 'In Guerra Per Amore' was shown at New Farm Cinemas in April 2021.

### **Studitalia Prize 2020**

Co.As.It. Community Services Ltd. And Italian Language Centre provided sponsorship for this annual event organized by the Queensland Department of Education (DoE) under the patronage of the Italian Consulate in Brisbane. The prize rewarded excellence in Italian achieved by year 12 students and ILC was once again invited to serve on the selection panel which followed a

rigorous selection process to choose the 2020 Winners.

The Award Ceremony held in October at Education House was opened by Jacinta Webb, Director -Global Engagement at the Department of Education who called on HE the Ambassador of Italy in Australia, Francesca Tardioli. Each winner received a \$3K travel bursary for independent travel to Italy at a later stage. [Due to Covid conditions, students could not travel as a group to be hosted together in Udine (Civiale del Friuli) as in previous years].

### **End-of-semester celebrations**

Two end of semester celebrations at popular pizzerias were held in December 2020 and





June 2021 celebrating student dedication and achievements throughout the 2 semesters with awards and prizes. Most enjoyed were prizes for students with unblemished attendance records.

### **ILC continues subscription to Education Perfect (Language Perfect)**

This popular online learning resource is used by thousands of mainstream schools around the world. The incorporation of EP online activities as part of the adult classes enrolment package lifted the profile of ILC, placing it at the forefront of language learning innovation.

### **Farewell to Dott.ssa Annarita Tamponi Italian Embassy Canberra**

In May 2021, it was with regret that Australia

farewelled Dott.ssa Annarita Tamponi - Education Adviser based at the Italian Embassy in Canberra. Passionate about her role in the diffusion of the Italian language and culture in Australia, Annarita held the position for seven years and was a valuable support to many organisations involved in the teaching of Italian throughout Australia in both primary and secondary schools.

A special farewell ceremony was organised at the Italian Embassy by Her Excellency Francesca Tardioli- Italian Ambassador to Australia. Friends, work colleagues and other Australia wide representatives from the other Co.As.It. entities in Sydney and Melbourne attended the event which was also attended by Co.As.It. President Cav. Nereo Brezzi and CEO Dina Ranieri.





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# *annual* Report 2020/2021