

## **Presidents Report to the BSWA**

**AGM 27<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

It is just five months since the last A.G.M. so I will try to keep this report as concise as possible because most of the information presented in the report last October is still relatively current.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the wisdom and the pleasure I have received from this society over the years both as an ordinary member, and by serving on its committee. My role as president over the past three years has been wonderful. It has given me the chance to work with exceptional people including Ajahn Brahm. I am incredibly grateful for his friendship and guidance and am in awe of his dedication to the Dhamma. Every moment of his life is Dhamma.

Being a longstanding member of this society gives me a beautiful view of its history. I first started attending in the mid to late 70s, and over those years I have fallen in love with BSWA. I look back to the founders of the BSWA, some now dead and gone, but there is someone special that is still around today. She is Lynne Jackson, a modern-day matriarch who, along with some other members of the time decided on how the structure of this society should be; and where its influences should come from. I remember the various inputs as we were trying to decide which way and how this society should grow. We had visiting teachers from all the traditions. Mahayana, Zen and Theravadin. Once the house in North Perth was purchased (a big step helped along by Warren Smailes and his wife Karen, who put their house on the line as collateral,) we started to deepen and solidify towards the Theravadin structure. I remember Phra Kantipalo, now Lawrence, coming over from Sydney to spend extended times with us for retreats, teachings and working bees. I still remember him up a ladder on the gable end at the front of the house, attaching a Dhamma Wheel.

The BSWA decided to send Lynne, with a delegation representing us, to travel to Thailand and ask Ajahn Chah, by now a quite famous monk in Theravadin Buddhist circles, if he would be so kind as to send Monks to help our society grow. He agreed, and from that moment on we had a clear vision and constitution setting out a pathway for which we wanted the society to grow. Building a monastery for Monks and Nuns was our number one priority. Today the BSWA is a wonderful reflection of how the Buddha saw the Dhamma operating inside a society. He had said to Mara the tempter that he would not die until the four pillars of Buddhism were in place. The order of ordained monks, the order of ordained Nuns the order of committed Laymen and the order of committed Laywomen. He made suggestions as to where the monasteries should be located and how the four pillars should interact. He made it very clear that the relationship should be symbiotic, that the monks were to be totally dependent on the laypeople, and that the lay people in return would receive the teachings and the wisdom that comes from the perspective found in the monastic settings. For Lay people to support the monks and nuns fully, he suggested monasteries not be too far away that lay people could not attend to them, and not so close to a city that they lose their silent Hermitage ambience. The Buddhist society has, I think, fulfilled these requirements perfectly and our system works very well indeed. This society is a model for the whole world to follow. Our constitution is balanced to allow an equalised authority through the four Pillars.

The growth of our Buddhist Society and its associated monasteries and venues had put a significant burden on the committee and executive, charged to look after its affairs. It became inevitable that we would need to professionalise our operation by bringing in 'paid expert help', to keep us in touch with the ever-growing regulation and to be lawful, in order to live up to the duties and responsibilities expected of us. To this end we have employed Stephen Connell as Operations Manager for our society. He has now been with us for a year, and he has transformed the way the society does its business and has brought relief to what had become a stressed committee. The future looks even more bright. We are now meeting our responsibilities fully under the Australian Charities & Not-For-Profits Commission (ACNC) by having in place rules surrounding what we have called Project Accord. Now that Stephen is more free we are looking to expand our out-reach further as we continue to grow the Dhamma.

As mentioned in my last report we have set up a Strategy Group to help provide an outline for the society to grow and flourish. To that end this group is made up with the presence of Peter Smith, Sol Hannah, Vicki

McClafferty and Nicolette Binz together with Venerable Mettaji. Together, they have provided a strategy plan for the next five years. The new committee will have the benefit of their excellent work to plan for what the society needs to do to support and encourage our membership, especially around the Dhammaloka precinct. These ideas are not new and have been around for some years, but I believe they are becoming more urgent if we are to address the socialization, cohesiveness, and development of our Dhammaloka community, especially in bringing western people into the fold. Traditional Buddhist communities generally know how our community works and how to celebrate its virtues.

This proposed Dhammaloka project needs to have a dedicated working group to assess what we actually need and want. The strategy paper sets out a procedure for this. The rough idea and plan propose an idea to open up the library to the courtyard and add a new toilet block at the back of the undercover courtyard. This allows us to remove the existing toilets behind the Community Hall kitchen to allow a new expanded Commercial Kitchen. A guide plan that I have drawn sets this out, and also shows the Community Hall extended into the stage area, with stage relocated into the 4m setback area at the side of the hall. This allows better flow and opportunity to open up the southern wall to the courtyard to make the stage visible from there. This opens the Community Hall to the courtyard and allows an idea to build a coffee pavilion at the front beside the Bo tree. The cost would probably be around 600K.

There is also plans to open up Dhammaloka more during the week, both to offer service and teach the Dhamma. We currently have a midweek meditation happening on Wednesday evenings. As mentioned last time We have opened a Care Group Listening line at the back of our house at No. 37. Milford Way, adjacent to our centre. Members who have been trained in listening skills are making themselves available to listen to anyone who may wish to call and discuss any trauma's or troubles that they may have. The lines are open Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday nights from 6:00 pm until 9:00 pm. There is also plans to expand the service to our community in other areas as the need arises. Chaplaincy work is also being looked at with possible plans to provide Buddhist Chaplains to the various governmental institutions.

This year is Ajahn Brahms 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with a big celebration planned along with fundraising for several of the projects he is involved with as spiritual director of many organisations. The extent of this work is prodigious, and the Organisational Chart shows most of these organisations that benefit from Ajahn Brahms ministry. Often this work goes unseen by our membership and it is literally quite profound. The BSWA provides a very powerful base for all of these activities to succeed. There is a team headed by Anusha that will be planning the event and we look forward to a highly successful day.

I would also like to mention the large workload taken on by our monastics. The very beautiful Dhammasara monastery has expanded its accommodation and Bodhinyana Monastery has the Hermit Hill project ongoing with more accommodation etc, they also have a new office and internet building. The Kusala monks in Kelmscott have moved into their new premises, a very beautiful conversion of what was once a stable. Venerable Mudu at Bodhinyana Great Southern is gradually building a community with lots of work improving access to our Monastery / Hermitage there

This past year or so had presented many challenges for our society as Covid has caused many things to change. As mentioned in my report 5 months ago the BSWA has managed the problem well with the use of 'live streaming' and Zoom meetings. The committee and our Sangha have managed amazingly well with the upshot being that we have probably delivered Dhamma in a way more full than before, and this process is still ongoing.

New members of the committee for the past short term are Kseniya Abusaif as vice president, Natalie Marr as treasurer and Linda McGuire as Secretary, all who have joined with myself and Ajahn Brahm to make up the executive. Doria Giuffre, Gah Siong Lam and Paul Firth joined the committee then, and as was mentioned last time all these members did a wonderful job in helping Stephen prepare documentation and policies required by the ACNC over the entire term. Special mention is made here of the work on Project Accord done in the treasury by our current treasurer Natalie, with Boon, who was still treasurer then along with the still current treasury team. They had swapped the operating software and completed the enormous

task of documenting it all. Members that stayed on the committee from the year before were Jee Too Foo, as assistant treasurer, Tonny Wijaya as webmaster, Lucky Kodituwakku looking after memberships and Bill Prins, ever faithful all-round member who heads the Dhammaloka subcommittee and looks after events and security. The committee is also populated by monastic representation in the form of spiritual director and assistant spiritual director, and we have been blessed in having Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn Hasapanna filling those roles. We have also had the bonus of Ajahn Brahmali's attendance to assist Ajahn Brahm.

The committee have been considering some recommendations from the Strategy Group that go to good management and decision making, and we have decided to institute a 'Line Management' strategy from the now fully implemented sub committees through to the five executive members including Ajahn Brahm. Each sub committee will have a budget and spending limits overseen by line management through to the executive, all overseen by the committee. We are hopeful that this procedure will make our operation more efficient and less stressful.

There are sub committees for Bodhinyana, Dhammasara, Dhammaloka, Jhana Grove, Broadcasting Web and AV, and the Spiritual Education Group which includes the Care group and Lay Teachers. Our Operations Manager has guidance and duty of care involvement with all of them. (See the chart for details)

The Operations Manager also advises on the 77-policy document that have been written and are now in place under the ACNCs Project Accord. 42 of those policy documents relate to our Financial Management Guide. Stephen also oversees the operations of Administration Library and Treasury. Thanks also to our staff, Ronnie Chin and Madu Wijebandara in Treasury, Amanda Hunter our administrator along with Cherry Jackson and Nick Allott. Then there is Manel Fernando and the whole Library team, who do a huge job in our Library.

Lynne Jackson is our female caretaker who has given years of great service to our BSWA. As mentioned, she has been here from the beginning. Nicholas Allott is our Male caretaker. He is also now a bit of a fixture, with many years of service. He is a gentleman, and we are so lucky to have him at our centre. Christina Yew and Scotty Ermer are the caretakers at Jhana Grove and do a fantastic job for us. The chart will show the Jhana Grove structure.

Vicki McClafferty has once again produced a brilliant monthly edition of the BSWA E-News Bulletin, on time every month, giving us all details of up-coming events and news from all of our Monasteries and Centres. This goes to our membership into upwards of 1700 computers. Nicholas Allott has continued to produce the Society's 'Enlightened Times' each quarter with deeper articles and news.

Once again, this year I have posted the organisational chart of the BSWA. It sets out the vast structure of BSWA and how it works to balance the Monastic and Lay side of our organisation. The volunteers listed are by no means a complete audit. We have tried to capture the main body of volunteers, but it may need some update. Please let either Lucky or me know if you see any glaring omissions. Lucky continues to look after an ever-increasing membership list and continues to be a point of communication for our members near and far. Lucky organises teams of volunteers to look after Reception and all sorts of membership issues.

The committee is also served by Anusha, a never-ending source of energy for the Kalyana Mitta group and beyond to the social activities she organises. She works --- 'sort of', unofficially as Community Co-ordinator and, as mentioned has a big job in train for Ajahn Brahm's birthday. Andrew McDougall looks after the team arranging prison and pastoral visits along with meditation classes inside jails. He and his team are noted on the chart. Then there is Cecilia who last year stepped down as President of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils after doing an enormous job. She acts as an external affair operative and a legal sounding board for our committee. She, with Boon is helping to set up our Chaplaincy program. I would also like to mention Veronica who is now a volunteer Chaplain for us at Curtain University. Then there is Sol Hanna and his teams of people that look after the huge I.T. and streaming side of our organisation. This includes all our Audio-Visual requirements that are now headed up by Jake Mitra who has streamlined our AV and Live streaming capacity.

Our Sunday School has been closed for a period over the worst of the Covid Crisis, however Lee Chan, along with her dedicated group of teachers now has it back on track. At its peak there are a couple of hundred students that do attend. A big thanks to all involved.

Thanks too to all the folk looking after our Armadale group (shown on the chart) and once again to Sol who is looking after an affiliate group in Busselton, Margaret River called (BAMBI). Long standing member Bianca De Bua, is still active doing many things for our society from looking after our Lay teaching program for beginners to cooking and stitching cushions for sale. I do also want to mention the mainly Thai ladies who look after the community hall and Sompok Kamarikerd who looks after our centre, the Monks and the Nuns so well.

In conclusion I would like to encourage lay members of our society to join in giving service and to know that the possibility of realising the teachings of the Buddha in a deep way is real. Some may think the real work of Dhamma is only to be realised if you are a Monk or Nun. This could not be further from the truth. Each one of us, Monk, Nun, Layman, or Laywomen, we all need to realise the Buddha's teachings for our self. A Monk or Nun cannot do it for you. They can only point the way and our monastics are very skilled at doing this. The Buddha set the 'Four Pillars of Buddhism' in place for us all. His teachings are not exclusive. Doing service for the community is a great way to deepen and understand our practice. As the clarity we derive from the stillness in our mind is absorbed, we start to see what is apparent; together with the transcendent. The Buddha's truth is there for us all to see. Right there in the heart of the present moment. Do the work and develop confidence in your practice. See the world with its Dukkha for what it is. When you are close to the BSWA it will be beneficial. This is the power of the Buddha's insight in building the Four Pillars. You will see that service to its cause will gradually loosen the grasp we have on the world and the right view will manifest. This Dhamma is for us all; Monks, Nuns, Laymen, and Laywomen.

I commend my report to the meeting.