

2016 Catherine McAuley Alumnae Award Winner

Acceptance Speech (14/3/2017)

Janice Madeline Kerrison nee Duck CV (RN; RCM; CH&F; H.N; Pall. Care)

Education: OLMC Parramatta Intermediate class of 1954

Nursing Training: St. Vincents Hospital Sydney, Graduated 1960

Midwifery Training: St. Annes Hospital Perth, Graduated 1962

Immunisation: CNS 1993 - 2009

Work History.

Generally worked as a Community Nurse and as an Immunisation Specialist.

Employed by Western Sydney Community Health and as Immunisation nurse to Holroyd Council.

Volunteering History.

1969: Secretary of Red Cross Blaxland Branch (20 years younger than most members).

Continued to 1974 with 3 years away,(1971 in Perth and 1972/3 in Melbourne).

1973: President Blaxland Pre- School and President of Ladies Auxilliary Blaxland Primary School.

1974:President Red Cross Blaxland.

1982 Secretary of Blaxland High School P&C.

1981: Inaugral member of Community Aid Committee sponsored by Penrith Community Health.

This continued as Lower Blue Mountains Neighborhood Centre to this day servicing residents from Lapstone to Warrimoo.

1981: Upon the Community Aid conceptual idea of building a *Riding School For The Disabled Centre* in Blaxland I got very involved with that. Most of this speech is about the building of that RDA Centre.

1991-1995: Drove Community Aid bus fortnightly for shopping excursions and outings.

It is an honour to be invited to be here today.

My definition of Community Service: "Community Service is a peculiar phenomenon. One really doesn't know what it means until one becomes involved."

I first became involved by winning a Red Cross raffle at a Blaxland street raffle in 1968. The prize was a knitted doll, my eldest daughter was only 2 years old and loved the doll.

I was invited to a Red Cross Meeting, which happened to be the AGM. I was nominated as Secretary ,(I was not even a member of Red Cross then). The members immediately made me a member and I was duly elected! Except for three years off living in Perth and Melbourne (because of my husband's work) I was in Red Cross until 1980.

On another committee, it was decided the Lower Blue Mountains area needed a riding school for disabled children. I was on the inaugural committee, looking for land on which to build the riding school.

There followed a research effort that entailed kilometres of driving looking at Council Land and Crown land that may suit the purpose. We needed about 5 acres for the horses, stables and riding arena. We finally found 25 acres of Crown Land at Blaxland that would be suitable. I lobbied our State member Bob Debus and with his help we finally ended up with a 99 year lease from the Crown Land Office over 6 acres for our **exclusive use**.

We eventually lobbied for and received a special CEP grant of \$89,000 but as part of the deal we also had to build a community centre on our site as well as the stables, riding arena and toilet facilities to form the Riding School for Disabled Children. The grant could also be spent on purchase of riding school equipment. The grant was a start but not nearly enough to finish.

Community involvement then commenced. I was coordinating our efforts and both companies and individuals came with offers of manual labour, expertise, earth moving equipment, and drivers for the equipment.

During construction we sometimes had help from unexpected sources; for example,

- In the laying of main concrete slab for Community Centre Complex, we ran out of daylight and manpower to finish the slab. The bridge building contractor building the new Macathur bridge over the Nepean River at Penrith sent their concrete crew up and finished the slab off by the lights of cars and light trucks that we could quickly pull together. The Contractor (Transfield) would accept no payment and even offered further assistance if we needed it. (The contractor's crew had finished their own work for the day and were getting ready to go home when we asked for help).

We had many volunteers at different times, in fact, about 75% of the labour was by skilled volunteers, a further example or two of community support is;

- A father and his two sons laid the bricks (free of cost) for the main Community Complex building,(double brick construction).
- The brick supply company charged us "common brick " price instead of face brick price for the whole building (a difference at the time of \$60 per thousand).
- The concrete company charged us \$100 per cubic metre instead of \$120.
- The electric cable supply company provided about 300 metres of heavy electrical cable to feed power to the stables. (this was a major contribution and was part of a large order of the cable that was condemned due to a manufacturing fault. Enough of it was perfect and they donated (and delivered) it to us
- The Electricity Commission donated old but good electricity poles which were used as part of the main supports for the stables building.
- Telecom as it was called then) dug about 300 metres of trench (it goes in a big half circle to try and avoid rock) for the heavy electrical feed cable, telephone cable and water line down the hil to the stables. They came with a brand new cable trencher (still wrapped in plastic). They said they wanted to test the new machine in rock conditions. It got well and truly tested and did the job.

There are many other instances of similar community support but the above gives you some idea of how we managed to proceed and progress.

This type of support all adds up, considering that we initially only had \$89,000 of government funding and I found out later that 3/4's of it had to be spent on wages. {not sure that was achieved}.

A part of the CEP grant the workers had have some or all of the following attributes;

- I. non English speaking migrants
- II. be aboriginal
- III. a proportion had to be women
- IV. some had to be disabled.
- V. be 5 years unemployed

We had 6 employees and complied with these requirements and paid award wages and provided workers compensation coverage. We were allowed an able bodied but previously unemployed supervisor.

After about 3 months, we reverted to volunteer labour plus specialist contractors for licensed work.

Interestingly nothing about the site was anywhere near flat when we started and once ground was broken you nearly always struck hard sandstone rock.

The main Community Centre Building is steeply uphill about 200 metres from the stables and riding arena. We had to build an all weather properly formed access road. O local company supplied a heavy bulldozer and operator for this and we obtained about 600 tonnes of old railway ballast from the railways department (delivered) which was used to form this road. Some years later the road was properly tarred and curbed and guttered with concrete.

The Community Centre opened in November 1990 and the RDA in April 1991. The first function in the stables was a bush dance to celebrate the finish of the project and to raise funds for the operational phase of the RDA.

The dance was well attended (a special liquor license issued for the night) and the venue was perfect for the occasion.

Update 28 Years Later

In regards to the RDA portion, since opening the riding arena (about 80 metres by 40 metres) has been covered (roofed), the access road has been hard surfaced, curbed and guttered and a new toilet block has been built. All of these and other more minor improvements have been organised and done by the present committee and I was not involved. The RDA gives Rides to about 60 children and adults per week and the Community Centre which I still manage is used by 4 separate community organisations and also has been upgraded with the addition of an outside sail covered safe play area for children. Another BMCC grant

I was not personally much involved with any of these latest additions.

The organisation's using the Community Centre pay a minimum rent to cover the insurance, maintenance and other costs to do with the building. The building is self funding in regard to it's running costs.

Throughout my life the values inculcated by my family and my time at OLMC has prompted me to act rather than just wring my hands, talk (a lot of this around) and procrastinate. Someone has actually to make things happen and act to make a difference.

This is how the spirit of Catherine McCauley has influenced my life. She made a difference; I have tried and in a small way succeeded, to do the same.

Thank you for listening and keep the old OLMC / Catherine McAuley flag flying in your studies and in your lives.