

HEART OF COMMUNITY

History of the Achievers Club WA

Beginning

Our founder, Danny McEvoy, volunteered with St Vincent de Paul for many years. That experience made him aware of the challenges families face in low socio-economic areas. Danny set himself the goal of spending part of his retirement helping a family, particularly with a young boy who didn't have a father figure; for example: sitting on the sidelines while the boy played sport, helping with his schoolwork, or helping him solve problems he may have at school, or elsewhere—in summary, being his best male supporter.

Talking over lunch with his wife Sue and close friends Anne and Rees Barrett, Danny expressed surprise that finding an organisation that offered such a role was difficult. Anne asked him if he had heard of an organisation called Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS). Anne (a retired social worker) had been involved with ASeTTS and thought they might have the role that Danny was looking for.

ASeTTS Volunteers

When Danny visited ASeTTS he met their volunteer coordinator, Jim Sharp, who was very welcoming. Jim explained the variety of volunteering roles ASeTTS had, including helping children struggling with their schoolwork, settling into an unfamiliar environment, and needing a male role model because there were few men in their lives. Mostly, the males of families were either in prison overseas, fighting wars, or had been killed in a war. Jim arranged for Danny to undertake a training and induction day to enable him to be accepted as a volunteer. The organisation advertised all vacancies in an internal circular, and it wasn't long before he saw there was a ten-year-old boy who needed help with his schoolwork, so Jim arranged for a case worker to introduce Danny to the Sudanese boy (Nakuti) and his mother at their home in Balga. When asked about areas he needed help with Nakuti didn't know, so with the mother's approval, Danny approached Nakuti's teacher for guidance. The teacher was very supportive, which was a good start.

Lessons were held twice a week after school, under a patio/lean-to attached to the back of the house. The lean-to had no sides, so comfort-levels were dependent on the weather. Before long Nakuti asked if some of his friends could join them, it was explained that if more children joined Nakuti would not have Danny's sole attention which would affect him. Nakuti understood, however, he wanted his mates to get help too. Jim agreed to the request, however, it was quickly recognised that helping four children at diverse levels and ages was beyond Danny's capacity, so he asked Jim if he could find more volunteers. Jim successfully found three volunteers, so unbeknown to anyone, the forerunner of the Achievers Club was born.

The group was recognised as *ASeTTS Volunteers*. Word spread amongst the Sudanese community. As the student numbers increased they changed venues several times going from the open lean-to, into a large lounge-dining room, to a larger garage, and finally to the Mirrabooka office of ASeTTS. By the time the group arrived at Mirrabooka, it had grown significantly and, apart from the study component, the group offered three additional services:

1. those kids who didn't have transport would be picked up and delivered home;
2. arrangements were made with a fruit shop in Clarkson to save their 'seconds' which were picked up each Saturday morning and shared during lessons; and
3. fun days became a thing.



January 2013



Fun-Days

It was a fun time with no thought of any change of name or huge growth. The students had difficult private lives and didn't enjoy what other kids took for granted, so 'fun-days' were introduced to provide enjoyment and new experiences for these kids. 'Fun-days' occurred on holidays, or weekends. These included picnics, fishing, swimming, and cooking lessons with Danny's wife, Sue. The kids enjoyed the opportunities to relax and share new experiences. Whilst these 'kids' have now grown into adults some of them keep in touch with Danny and tell him they were the best times in their childhood. On one hand that is sad because most kids would take these experiences for granted, on the other hand it is wonderful to think that as adults they can look back on their childhood and think of those days as highlights in their lives.



Fun Days 2014

Overnight Challenge

Just as it seemed Mirrabooka would be home forever, it was announced that ASeTTS had lost a significant grant from the federal government (2015) and would have to make many tough decisions including relinquishing the Mirrabooka office when the lease ended and would need to reduce their volunteering program. This meant our group would have to find a new home, or wind-up. A discussion with volunteers (approximately 14 people by this stage) determined that they would continue because they didn't want to let the students down. The group had a few weeks to devise and implement a plan. There were two main questions:

- How could we find a new partner to take the place of ASeTTS? and
- What could we do in the short term?

A plan was devised where Danny would seek temporary accommodation until he could arrange for more permanent accommodation. He approached two libraries for their support, one in Dianella and the other in Mirrabooka, explaining the situation. Would it be acceptable to them if no more than seven students with seven mentors attended their library between 10 am and 12 pm on Saturdays? Danny indicated that it would not be a permanent situation, and he was looking for new accommodation which he thought would take no longer than eight weeks. That figure was just plucked out of the air! At that time Danny had no idea how long it would take! Both libraries were very supportive. The next step was to ask the parents to meet outside the former ASeTTS' Mirrabooka office 15 minutes earlier and mentors would then take the students to one of the two libraries and return them to Mirrabooka after each session. The reason for splitting the group was to ensure that the libraries were not unduly affected. The second part of the plan was to find a more permanent affiliation. Before speaking with organisations the group decided to call itself the *Homework Club*, so it had a name and identity.

Partnership with City Of Wanneroo

After contacting several organisations without success, Danny was advised to speak to the City of Wanneroo which had a reputation for supporting not-for-profit volunteer groups. Given many of its students lived in their area, it was felt that the City of Wanneroo (CoW) might be open to helping the *Homework Club*. Danny approached the CoW and found them receptive, particularly Ms. Glenda Bignell (Volunteering Development Officer), who used her influence to

arrange meetings with key senior people in the City. After several meetings, the City invited Danny to a meeting to which they had also invited representatives of other groups working in the same field within the City boundaries, as they were keen to avoid duplication.

They discovered how the *Homework Club* was unique in that it only operated on Saturday mornings and offered a one-to-one relationship for mentors and mentees. Interestingly, all the established groups at the meeting expressed their support for what the *Homework Club* was doing and agreed that it was unique. Danny left the meeting happy that he had been given the chance to put the Club's case to the group; however, he recognised the people who had to make the decision may not be convinced.

After a few weeks Danny was invited back to the City, he went into that meeting hoping for the best, but expecting the worst. He was pleasantly surprised when informed the City would support the *Homework Club*, it would be attached to the Library Division, and they foresaw a homework group in every Library in their local government area. Danny left the meeting delighted but recognised that the reality of the Club being in every library was not a realistic goal unless it received support from the City. Nevertheless, he thought one step at a time would be the way to go. The *Homework Club* would now belong to the City of Wanneroo with all volunteers having to enrol in the CoW volunteering system. This meant volunteers would work under CoW policies and practices, including not being able to transport students to and from sessions.

Locations

The Club had several homes in its early days as part of the City of Wanneroo.

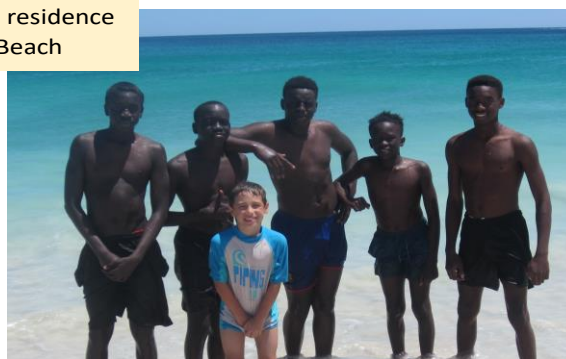
- Girrawheen (Hainsworth Leisure Centre) where we stayed for over 12 months,
- then Girrawheen Library,
- before moving to Girrawheen and Wanneroo Libraries,
- then into The Hub in Girrawheen,
- and finally, both The Hub and the nearby Girrawheen-Koondoola Senior Citizens Centre.

New Name

It was suggested by a senior staff member of CoW that a name change should be considered - from the *Homework Club* to a name that would identify the Club and give the students pride. After long consideration, the name *Achievers Club* was agreed. The word *Achievers* indicates people working to achieve, which is what the students and their mentors were doing. It was also thought being a student of the *Achievers Club* would provide our students with pride and help build their sense of belonging and self-confidence.



28 January 2016
Fun Day at McEvoy residence
and Mindarie Beach



As a result of a change of management at CoW a decision was made that the *Achievers Club* no longer fitted the library setting, or its budget. In 2016, Danny was informed that while CoW would continue to support the club by providing accommodation, they could no longer justify supporting it financially, and they gave the Club 12 months to make other arrangements. After discussion, our group decided to incorporate which would mean becoming a legal entity, running independently with its own Constitution, Board, rules, policies, bank account and registering with government agencies. This provided new challenges. The first was to write a constitution that would suit the Club's needs and meet all the federal and state registration requirements. At the same time, sustainable financial income had to be secured to support the new entity's expenses - including accommodation, insurance and running costs such as stationery, and the IXL program that was being used to help children develop their literacy and numeracy skills.



Dikun with mentor, Rebecca, May 2016

Like many situations in the journey of the *Achievers Club*, just when it was felt that the challenges ahead were too hard, someone 'knocked on the door'! Miracles do come in pairs! At approximately the same time and completely independently, the principals of *Alkira Care Services* (Rosemary and Gary Hill), and a lawyer (Ray Christensen) offered their support to meet the Club's challenges. It was an unbelievable coincidence.



Mentors and students, August 2017



Bara with mentor, Jordan, at The Hub Girrawheen, August 2017

Securing Financial Support

Alkira Care Services provides a range of disability care services across the metropolitan area and is highly respected in the disability sector. Their principals, Rosemary and Gary Hill, heard about us and the need we had for financial support through their friend, Paul Prior, who was also a friend of Danny's. Paul arranged a meeting and after asking several questions, *Alkira Care Services* became our first and most significant donor. *Alkira Care Services* continues to show great belief and trust in our Club, without their support we would not have been able to help the number of students we have. We are incredibly grateful for their continued support.

In recognition of their remarkable contribution to enabling the Club to become an independent entity, Rosemary and Gary Hill became the first Life Members. In Gary's words "It was clear that Alkira and the Achievers Club were in it for

the long haul.” Further recognition for their continued financial support will be given through the *Hill Family Scholarship* (details under development at the time of writing). Scholarships will be awarded to successful Achievers Club students pursuing tertiary education through TAFE or university.

Writing a Constitution

When lawyer Ray Christensen heard of our need to write a constitution he offered his professional services pro bono. Ray not only wrote the draft Achievers Club Constitution, but he also managed the registration of our Club through the *Government of Western Australia Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety*. In this process, we were required to add the letters ‘WA’ and ‘Incorporated (Inc.)’ to our name. On 26 March 2018, *Achievers Club WA Inc.* became a legal entity.

Since that time, Ray has continued as a long-serving Board member, filling key positions such as Secretary and Treasurer. In 2024, Ray was made a Life Member of the Club and continues to be a mentor, board member, and offer his professional services pro bono.

Armadale Chapter

Jim Sharp, the same Jim Sharp who supported Danny when he started at ASeTTS, joined the *Achievers Club* in 2017 as a mentor at Girrawheen, which was a big effort given he lives in Roleystone. Jim looked after a student who lived in Byford and due to CoW rules Jim couldn’t pick him up, or take him home so the student’s father had to bring him every week and wait 2 hours because it was too far to go back to Byford and return.

After some discussion, it was decided that a branch (or chapter) in Armadale could be worth considering. Jim discussed this idea with his friend and local state member of parliament, Tony Buti MLA and they subsequently met with Danny. After this meeting, it was decided to proceed, and Tony offered to introduce the Club to several schools, as he was on the Board of many schools in the area. *Westfield Park Primary* was finally selected as the most appropriate school. The Armadale Chapter was opened in 2018, and has had remarkable success, receiving accolades from both teachers and parents. It is well recognised that Jim Sharp, as the Chapter Coordinator, has done an outstanding job. At the time of writing, the Club is considering hiring administrative support for the Chapter. In 2024, Jim was made a Life Member of the Club and continues to be a chapter coordinator, mentor, and board member.

ACHIEVERS CLUB WA INVITES YOU TO OUR
2019 FUN DAY
AT
scitech

DATE: Saturday, 14 December 2019

DROP OFF: **Girrawheen Chapter** - 09:00am at the Girrawheen Hub
Armadale Chapter - 09:00am at Westfield Primary School
Scitech - 09:45am at Scitech, Sutherland Street, West Perth WA 6005

COST: **Free for students, their parents and siblings**
Free for mentors, their partners and children

FOOD: **Will be provided (please let us know of any requirements)**

PICK UP: **Scitech** - 01:30pm at Scitech, Sutherland Street, West Perth WA 6005
Armadale Chapter - 02:00pm at Westfield Primary School
Girrawheen Chapter - 02:15pm at the Girrawheen Hub

✂️

THIS IS A PERMISSION SLIP FOR STUDENT: _____]

I give permission for the above-named student to attend the excursion to Scitech.

I [will / will not] also be attending. I [will/will not] be bringing additional children: [If so, their names: _____].

DROP OFF: [Girrawheen Chapter / Armadale Chapter / Scitech]

PICK UP: [Girrawheen Chapter / Armadale Chapter / Scitech]

Any dietary requirements (for anyone)? [No/Yes: _____]

In an emergency, contact [_____] on [_____]

Parent signature: _____ Date: _____



March 2019, Girrawheen Chapter students and mentors at The Hub. Our patron at the time was Hon. Tony Buti (back row fifth from left), MLA for Armadale. A great supporter of the Achievers Club, Tony left this role when he later became the WA Minister for Education.

COVID

Just as COVID interrupted businesses all around the world we also were challenged, however, we retained our ‘never-say-die attitude’. When schools and local Government facilities were closed in 2020 the Club was forced to suspend its service. The Achievers Club Board investigated remote learning and how that might work. It put certain protocols in place to meet *Working With Children* legal requirements. This included requiring a person over the age of 18 to sit in on the lesson at the students’ end. In most cases it would be a parent, but if that were not possible an older sibling or someone the parents trusted would suffice. This was to protect the rights of both mentees and the mentors.

Once all protocols were endorsed, the Board looked at the feasibility of the Club’s capacity to conduct remote learning. One of the key requirements was for students to have an internet connection as well as a computer and the ability for a parent or some other acceptable person to be available for each session. The Board accepted that the sessions would not necessarily be on Saturday mornings. So long as the protocols were in place, the Club allowed the mentors and mentees to decide when lessons would be conducted.

It was decided that Armadale Chapter couldn’t take part because many, if not all, of their students didn’t have internet at home, or they could not meet the other protocols. This left only the Girrawheen Chapter, whose students all had an internet connection at home and could meet the other requirements. The Club did loan some mentees a laptop for this exercise. Whilst the learning wasn’t as effective as the face-to-face interaction, it was much better than not offering our students anything at all. We were all happy to return to The Hub at Girrawheen when the Government approved schools to return.



Mentor Richard Azzopardi with student at The Hub, Girrawheen, 2021

Leadership Diversity

Once the Club began to grow, it soon became clear that more than one leader would be required. Identifying and developing leadership capacity in diverse fields would be critical for growth and long-term sustainability.

In the early days when the Club had two locations in the City of Wanneroo, Dave Newman led the Wanneroo group which operated independently. As the Club grew, Dave provided support and versatility in taking on diverse leadership roles as the need arose. Once the Club moved out of the City of Wanneroo it had to assume responsibility for volunteer recruitment and induction. This included referee checks, police clearance, Working With Children Checks. Dave led the development of these responsibilities and continues in these roles. In 2024, Dave was made a Life Member of the Club and continues to provide leadership at the Girrawheen Chapter and through the role of Vice President and board member.

Incorporation and growth also required the Club to make the transition to become a professional operation. Since 2022, this has included hiring a professional administrator. Clare Badenoch was our first Executive Officer. We are forever grateful for the administrative skill, persistence and creativity that Clare brought to the Club. When Clare moved from Perth we wondered whether we could find anyone to adequately replace her. We needn't have worried as Mariana Silva found the role was a perfect fit for her own values, skills and career goals. A seamless change was achieved because of Clare's attention to detail in leading the handover and Mariana's creative energy and passion for the Club's work. We deeply respect the contribution of Clare and Mariana taking the Club to a new level of efficiency and effectiveness.

The Club was also fortunate to gain the financial leadership of Rudi Gracias who was elected to the position of Treasurer in 2022. Bringing his finance management expertise and extensive experience in strategic planning on bodies such as the Telethon Board, Rudi has led the Achievers Club to a new era of financial support and accountability.

IT Development

Soon after incorporation, there was an urgent need for the Club to develop its identity and online presence. Maddie Brown (now Maddie Ninkov)s, a lawyer who worked with Ray Christensen, had been mentoring since the early days with ASeTTS. She volunteered to create the Achievers Club logo, website, and social media presence.

In more recent years, other talented software developers, led by Luca Marangon, have volunteered their time to build an application that manages recruitment, rostering, reporting and record-keeping.

Along the Club's journey, we have met a lot of very special people. This includes the people at *Sam's Spares* whom we met in 2022. The entity is a not-for-profit organisation that saves E-waste from landfill, rebuilds computers and other IT equipment and provides these items to a range of organisations across the state. In the critical process of establishing the Club, *Sam's Spares* enabled us to provide equipment to children who otherwise wouldn't have access to a laptop.s

Butler Chapter

The Club introduced the Butler Chapter at the start of the second term of 2023. Whilst we are still working on increasing our mentoring numbers, this Chapter has been a remarkable success due to the efforts of Andrea Dearden and her colleagues. The *East Butler Primary School* is very supportive of the program, in particular the Deputy Principal, Michelle Head.

Volunteer Mentors and Students

Finally, our volunteer mentors are the lifeblood of our social enterprise, and their students are the reason we exist. At the time of writing, the Achievers Club has about 100 mentors working with 50 students across the three locations – growing from one mentor working with one student in 2012. The spirit that drives the Club is manifested each time a mentor comments on the “reward of helping young people achieve their academic and personal goals and realise the power of education”, and when a student expresses appreciation for their ‘guide on the side’ helping in “learning how to learn and believing in me”.



Hassan Hussein with his mentors Aaron and Emily



Club President and founder, Danny McEvoy, with Hassan at his graduation, 2023

Conclusion

The *Achievers Club* has grown from humble beginnings and has attracted more supporters along the journey. It has also improved our services and delivery and will aim to continue to improve to help our students be the best they can be. Already we have seen one of our students obtain a double degree at UWA (Hassan Hussein) and he has gone on to work in the IT Department of a large government agency. Other past students are either part-way through their university degrees or TAFE studies, and at the time of writing the most recent cohort of year 12 students are preparing for their final WACE exams.

"The Achievers Club has made the impossible possible for me and many other students from immigrant backgrounds. With the help of the Achievers Club community and the amazing volunteers and mentors, my journey throughout high school was supported, particularly in my final year at school during ATAR. The Achievers Club was more than a community to me – they were a family, and with their tremendous efforts I was able to go from a barely passing student to an excelling student across all of my subjects.

I have now graduated from UWA and I'm grateful the Achievers Club supported me to get here."

**Hassan
Former Mentee**



"The Achievers Club has always been close to my heart. For over six years, it has been more than just a place of learning – it has shaped who I am today. A mentor is not just a guide, but a pillar of strength, wisdom, and inspiration. In my last two years of senior school, my mentors have been all that and more. Your unwavering support, honest advice, and encouragement have made a lasting impact. Your belief in me often surpassed my own, and for that, I am deeply grateful. As I move forward, I hope to honour your lessons by striving for excellence and offering the same support you have given me. As I continue my journey, I carry the lessons and values of the Achievers Club with me, hoping to pass them on and reflect its spirit in all I do."

**Muna
Year 12 Mentee, 2024**

**Danny McEvoy and Rees Barrett
23 October 2024**

EVOLUTION OF ACHIEVERS CLUB 2012 - 2024

