

## A CARERS COTTAGE

### A CENTENARY PROJECT BY KIAMA LIONS CLUB

The Carers Cottage project was conceived about five years ago when a member of the club realised that there was a cottage near the centre of the town that had been unoccupied for many years. It was Council owned and had originally been the Manager's residence when the adjoining plot was the town's gasworks. Those works had long since been discontinued and the area was now the Council depot.



The Lion, Ray Redgrave, considered that this cottage would make a suitable Respite House. After many months of enquiries Ray was able to persuade a few friends in Lions in early 2017 to form a committee which could take the potential project forward.

Firstly, support from Kiama Lions Club Board and members was vital and expressions of support were obtained from neighbouring Lions Clubs in Gerringong and Minnamurra. In addition approval to undertake in principle had to be obtained from higher authorities in Lions. Once these had been granted we were then able to approach Council.

A presentation was given to a full Council Meeting and the response was unanimous support and they would lease it to us for a peppercorn rent, however it was noted that at the time that cottage was still zoned as industrial and would need permission for a change of use. This would take time to achieve.

In the meantime we were given permission to undertake safety and cosmetic work, so we paid for tree surgeons to remove trees and bushes that would inhibit vehicular entry and a local specialist company disposed of asbestos that we found.

During this period we realised that there were a couple of Respite Centres opening in the Illawarra, but none catering specifically for Carers, so we decided to concentrate on making a Carers Cottage where Primary Carers of the chronically sick could come for a break by the seaside.

All too often we discovered that Carers are the forgotten ones, they have often sacrificed comfortable lifestyles or lucrative salaries to put their lives on hold and look after a loved one.

These Carers are available 24/7 for their loved ones and research has found that the work is often stressful and challenging, so they need rest and breaks on a regular basis in order to sustain their capability to be as efficient and caring as possible.

Consultations were started with various Carers organisations locally, such as Interchange Illawarra and the Disability Trust, to ensure that there was enough demand and that it could be financially viable and useful talks were held with the then State Minister for Disability.

We then embarked on an information dissemination project throughout the town and municipality. This engendered much interest and offers of support from businesses and tradespeople.

Towards the end of 2017 we were able to strip all interior walls and dispose of years of debris and detritus. The shell of the house was structurally very sound but there were no services connected and all were non-compliant with modern standards. A local architect donated her services, providing a plan which would provide 3 bedrooms each with ensuite, a common area, kitchen and laundry. In addition one bedroom would be wheelchair compliant and there would be decks to the front and rear, the latter having a ramp to the car parking area. This is so Carers can bring their charges if they are happy to do so, as many expressed the desire just to have a change of scenery.

It became apparent that because there would be a totally different interior layout, there would be gaps where walls had been removed, thus it became necessary to renew all the flooring throughout. This has been done using Cypress pine. Furthermore, the roof would eventually need replacing so we organised for local company to remove the tiles and replaced them with a new Colourbond roof. Additionally all the external walls have been reclad and all windows replaced.



These have been major undertakings



Currently the exterior has been totally repainted by volunteers, all interior framing completed, all walls and ceilings insulated, all first fix electrics and plumbing as well as NBN wiring completed.

Gyprock will be delivered shortly and we have a team of volunteer Plasterers who will install it for us. We can then turn our attention to interior painting and finishing.

We have to procure a kitchen, laundry washer and dryer, furniture, lighting and fittings at the highest standard we can afford. We hope to be able to provide Solar hot water and power in order to keep utility costs down.

We will shortly have to start excavating the rear and levelling it to provide car parking and to make foundations for the decks.

All the basic building work has been done by ourselves but we have needed tradesmen to carry out specialist tasks, many volunteering their services but we have bought the equipment.

We continue to fundraise in order to pay for the project. There have been some innovative methods used, such as selling a fine grand piano by displaying it in a disused shop in the High street, putting on a comedy written by a retired Lion, running BBQs at Hot Rod Shows and any other avenues we can think of at the time.

It is our hope to be complete by August , (possibly July). Whilst this will be the winter months, we are assured that Carers will still need breaks at that time.

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Research tells us that 4.3 million Australians live with a disability, of these 1.4 million have a severe or profound core activity limitation (*Australia Welfare 2017*). 2.7 million are Carers, 1/3 of these are Primary Carers , a high proportion spend over 40 hours a week caring and some have been doing it for ten years. There is a significant number of teenage Carers looking after sick parents.

Our aim is to make a difference to some Carer's lives

Our Lions motto is "We Serve" ----Our project motto is "we serve so that you can care even better"

April 2018

