



THE HISTORY OF **RED CROSS** IN WOOLGOOLGA

Celebrating 20 Years of the
Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch

1991 - 2011



Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY



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The Origins of Red Cross in Australia

Henri Dunant founded Red Cross in June 1859 after he had experienced the sight of thousands of wounded soldiers on the battlefield at Solferino without adequate medical treatment. The founder of Red Cross, like many others at that time, was part of a wave of humanitarianism, and the organisation was quick to take root.

In England Queen Mary appealed in 1905 to "*all the women of the Empire*" to become involved in what she saw as essentially women's work. Soon afterwards, in 1914, an Australian Branch of the British Red Cross Society was inaugurated, which was itself characterised by association with the theatre of war and the humanitarian role of women.

Historian Jillian Oppenheimer ascribes the responsibility for the establishment of Red Cross in Australia to Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, the wife of the Governor General, at the beginning of the First World War. Clearly the precise work to be undertaken by ladies in Australia had to vary from that on the battlefields of Europe. In 1915 the Australian Red Cross had already become involved in establishing and running convalescent homes. By 1918 there were 100 branches in NSW while it is estimated that some 82,000 women and 20,000 men and boys were successfully engaged in fundraising.

The Early History of Red Cross in Woolgoolga

Information on Red Cross branches is recorded in the so-called Doomsday Book in Red Cross House, Sydney. This does not always tally with detail provided in Annual Report statements which set out office-bearers, funds raised and other services given by a branch in any given year. Nor are

population figures for Woolgoolga readily available for the period of the First World War. However it is known that the total number of school children attending the single school in the village in 1914 was only 117. It is safe to assume that the population was only a few hundred.

The Doomsday Book does however record that the Woolgoolga Branch was operating from 1914 – 1919 but there is no detail of the work done by the branch.

Red Cross in Woolgoolga in the Second World War

The Doomsday Book records that the Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch was reformed in 1940-41 and operated until 1949. Annual Reports are recorded for the years 1939-46 inclusive; the first President was Mrs S A Spencer, the Secretary was Miss F A Hales and the Hon Treasurer was Mrs C Blackadder.

In 1939-40 the Branch raised 36 pounds and sent articles to the Red Cross Store for wounded soldiers and to Polish refugees. The initial membership of the branch was 17 and grew to 38 in the following years. At the height of the war the 1942-43 Annual Report indicates a membership in the mid thirties and fundraising of more than \$500. The need for the kind of service provided by branches for the war effort declined with the end of the Second World War and the Woolgoolga Branch, like many others, ceased to operate.

Current members recall that the late Mrs Pearl Richards and Mrs Jean Robinson described their attendance at meetings during those years with toddlers at their feet. Mrs Robinson said that after the war ended they concentrated their efforts on their childrens' schools, sporting groups and other local organisations.

Red Cross Branch Woolgoolga 1991-2011

On Friday 29 June 1991, 18 people attended a meeting at the Woolgoolga Community Centre called to assess interest in establishing a Red Cross Branch in the village. The meeting was initiated by Mrs Pamela Drabsch, Country 3 Zone Representative.

Interestingly a publicity handout at the meeting indicated that the organisation had begun to assume an Australian character. Post-war, Red Cross management had realised that there was no need to place emphasis on the training of volunteers to aid wounded soldiers on the battlefield, nor did they need to provide care for them as they recovered.

As a result Red Cross was now offering several community services and the handout listed a wide range of those which were available locally, nationally and internationally under the heading "*We Do More Than You Think*" and declaring that "*There's a lot more to Red Cross than Blood and War.*"

At that first meeting Mrs Lilian Essex-Clark was nominated to act as Interim Liaison Person, and at a follow-up meeting in August Lilian was elected President and Mrs Marion Hay became Treasurer.

At that time the population of Woolgoolga was barely 4,000 and it was felt that responding to the needs of the elderly was a service the new branch could address. Planning quickly began for Friendship Days to provide companionship and refreshment. Contact was made with the Woolgoolga Primary School and Meals-on-Wheels, and information was sought on Disaster Welfare Training and First Aid courses. After early Branch meetings were held in homes, arrangements were made to use the CWA Rooms free of charge.

Elaborate arrangements led to a successful afternoon tea on Monday 9 December after which it was agreed to hold a luncheon for elderly people on 17 January 1992. The handful of Red Cross members was quick to appreciate that there were many elderly and lonely people in Woolgoolga, especially during the holiday periods. Consequently it was agreed to hold Friendship days on the fourth Friday of each month.

Arrangements were then made for the first Red Cross Calling Doorknock in March. This first effort raised more than \$4500 and was followed by more refined and elaborate fundraising efforts, including luncheons and afternoon teas, discussions of a house numbering project, sale of Red Cross First Aid kits, volunteers assisting with residents at the Woolgoolga Retirement Village, negotiations with schools for Red and White Days, the presentation of Red Cross history books to the High School, and various barbecues. A Red Cross

Button Day was held in June with street stalls and a sum of over \$500 collected.

At the first Annual General Meeting the members confirmed Lilian Essex-Clark as President, Robyn Rooth as Secretary and Mr Allan Crute as Treasurer. In her first Annual Report the President acknowledged that she had had doubts about what might be achieved in a small community like Woolgoolga but paid tribute to the work done by her committee and members.

The Zone Representative reported to the AGM that the coming year might include work on Organ Transplants, Recruiting and Training of Volunteers, Aged and Disabled People, Youth Services, Hospital Services and the expansion of Regional Services.

At a meeting held in late July it was determined that craft teachers were needed at the Retirement Village and that Telecross and Home Visiting Services should be advertised in the local newspaper. It was clear that the new Branch was still coming to grips with the needs of its community.

The remainder of 1992 was spent in improving communications within the organisation and the establishment of close connections with local institutions and organisations, including the Retirement Village and CWA. Red Cross Woolgoolga was also represented at the Annual Zone Conference in Kempsey and held a special meeting on 9 December to form a Disaster Welfare Committee.

1993 began with widespread attempts to involve schools and community organisations in making arrangements for Red Cross Calling in March. This was coupled with continuing attempts to build participation in the afternoon teas and to spread the message of Red Cross through speakers at local organisations.

In March 1993 the Lions club volunteered to put on a sausage sizzle for those involved in Red Cross Calling. This was the beginning of a most fruitful relationship between the two groups. In addition to the annual Doorknock the Branch introduced raffle selling in the CBD of Woolgoolga as well as at the Friendship Days.

Twenty members attended the second AGM on 12 July 1993 when the Zone Representative, Pamela Drabsch, congratulated the Branch on its achievements. She was especially impressed with the Friendship Teas which had become a singular feature of the activities of the Woolgoolga Branch.

The Branch was now well established with a fairly stable program and was able to participate in the traditional functions and services of the organisation. In addition to fundraising these included Disaster Relief, Telecross, Trauma Teddies, Cosmetic Care / Hands On and Junior Red Cross.

Fundraising

In her first Annual Report the President noted that none of the members wanted to be just fundraisers. Nevertheless, the Branch accepted that a major role must be the traditional one of raising funds to support the work of the organisation nationally and internationally.

In subsequent years many individuals have influenced the nature of fundraising activity and the amounts raised. At the onset a representative of the Red Shield Appeal advised the Branch on how to organise its Doorknock. Other organisations, like Lions, Rotary, Apex, Freemasons, CWA, BCU, local banks and Police gave their support. Importantly students at the Woolgoolga High School have continuously given their time willingly as the annual collection has steadily increased.

1994 saw the Doorknock Appeal rise to \$6000 while the Branch experimented further with raffles which were clearly appropriate for responding to disasters or other specific purposes. This year also saw the High School presented with a Mac computer for collecting the most money in NSW, together with a shield for the country school taking the biggest collection of any school in 6 years.

The Doorknock amount increased from \$5800 to \$6670 over the next two years although the following two year period saw small reductions. On average the years 1999 – 2003 produced more than \$6500 pa and the collection grew to \$7426 in 2004. This was the year that the wife of the Governor General, Mrs Marlena Jeffrey, launched the Red Cross Calling Appeal in Coffs Harbour while she was on a visit to the city.

The next three years the amount collected grew from \$5837 to \$6700 then \$7798. Changes in co-ordinators, including Bill Chorley and Denise Lockett, produced minor changes in approach but basically the Doorknock continued to be an amazing community event with generous response from locals.

The Branch introduced another and somewhat unusual fundraiser with Ossie Hall sponsoring Motorcycle Poker Runs, coordinated by member David Dodsworth. The Poker Runs owed their origin to earlier events when several Branch members, including Allan and Beulah Crute, manned the entrance gates at freestyle motocross events in Woolgoolga during summer holidays. Their discomfort in hot, noisy and dusty conditions was rewarded by Ossie donating the takings to the Branch. The Poker Run is now a regular event in the local Red Cross calendar and produces some \$1000 per event.

With the arrival in Woolgoolga of Judy Jackson and Ray Willing the Doorknock received a boost with the introduction of up-dated management and technological techniques including the use of on-line fundraising. Their influence and skills helped increase the annual receipts to \$10,248 in 2008 and again to over \$10,000 in 2010. Judy was later praised by Australian Red Cross for her innovative approach.

2009 saw the cancellation of the Doorknock in the aftermath of the Victorian Bushfires. The Bushfire Appeal had seen a massive response from the community and over \$40,000 had been collected, and it was deemed unwise to expect any more. One notable feature of this bushfire fundraising was the work of local Graeme Lynch who sat daily in his wheelchair in the shopping precinct in Woolgoolga for the best part of a fortnight taking donations.

In 2011 a modified Appeal was held because of the community response to the number of disasters experienced in the first months of that year. Separate collections had been marked by extreme generosity from Woolgoolga locals as they responded to the tragedies in Queensland, Victoria, NSW, Christchurch NZ and in Japan. However, dedicated members led by Betty Watkins, sat for days in the Woolgoolga CBD successfully collecting donations for the Red Cross Calling Appeal.

A one-off fundraiser was a Will Day, when basic wills were written by Solicitor Gordon Abbott for a \$25 donation. Gordon's generosity produced a major benefit to the Branch account.

Beside the major Doorknock fundraising, the Branch has conducted Button Days and Art Unions, while regular street raffles have been held over the last five years. Even the monthly Friendship Afternoon Teas have generated an average of \$300 a gathering.

When the Woolgoolga Branch opened twenty years ago the population of the 2456 postcode area was 4000 and the Doorknock raised over \$4000. It is now a feature of the Annual Red Cross calling that collections equal or exceed the size of population and in 2010 with a total population of around 10,000 a collection of \$12,000 was raised. Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch challenges any other branch to achieve the goal of over \$1 per head of its local population.

The Branch has now collected in the vicinity of \$120,000 in 20 years in formal doorknocks alone, not counting other fundraising efforts. In total the Branch has raised conservatively in excess of \$250,000 including disaster appeals. Perhaps more importantly the Branch now has the experience to launch an appeal at a moment's notice in the event of a disaster. Further, it is difficult to envisage any sector of the community that has remained uninvolved in these fundraising efforts and is not willing to support the organisation in any of its community activities.

Community Services

Community Services involving the branch and its members can be perceived as traditional activities of the organisation which might be found in any part of our country. These include Disaster Relief, Telecross and Trauma Teddies. Other activities are designed as a response to local needs which in Woolgoolga include Friendship Afternoon Teas and the Hands On program.

Disaster Relief

Woolgoolga Branch has from the outset been involved in the Disaster Relief program when a founding member, Peter Cam, joined a Coffs Harbour

Committee whose objective was to determine the procedures to be adopted in the event of a disaster. Several members completed training courses held in centres throughout the region, and experienced their first evacuation to the flood hit area in Coffs Harbour in the mid nineties. Their outreach role was to visit damaged homes to determine what aid was needed and to generally provide support. Soon they were activated to other centres in the region including Grafton, Kempsey and Bellingen.

In successive years support was largely limited to fundraising to support those who had experienced major disasters. The Asian Tsunami in 2005 was followed in September of that year by the earthquakes in Pakistan. A feature of these events was the involvement of the Sikh community in Woolgoolga which donated substantial amounts to provide aid for the victims.

Two of our members played special roles in dealing with disaster events. The appointment of David Dodsworth to the position of Group Leader in 2004 led to a more sophisticated form of training and to members volunteering to serve across the State and more recently at disasters interstate. In more recent years David has been promoted to Emergency Services Liaison Officer.

David and his wife Annette travelled to Toowoomba to help with the Equine Flu Outbreak in 2007, with other volunteers to Brisbane floods in 2008, to Coffs Harbour and Grafton in 2009.

In 2008 much of NSW was badly affected by drought and a Drought Committee was established by the NSW Divisional Board. Robyn Rooth, a Woolgoolga member, was asked to be Chairperson of the Committee which devised a number of strategies to help people in drought stricken areas. These included special project fundraising, the distribution of emergency parcels and an "Adopt-a-Branch" program. Woolgoolga adopted Gooloogong in a scheme which brought a close relationship for several years.

Robyn had taken over as Zone Coordinator from Pamela Drabsch in 1999 and was elected soon afterwards to the State Divisional Advisory Board. In 2007 she received the Red Cross Distinguished Service Award.

Christmas 2010 saw the beginning of a series of natural disasters including floods, bushfires, earthquakes and hurricanes which hit parts of Australia over several months. A contingent of trained volunteers travelled to various parts of Brisbane, Far North Queensland and Grafton and provided much-needed support at evacuation centres set up to deal with displaced people.

Telecross

Telecross commenced in Coffs Harbour in 1990, before the Woolgoolga Branch was launched. Thereafter Woolgoolga clients increased in number while several Branch members joined the program as volunteer callers although it remains administered from the Coffs Harbour office.

Trauma Teddies for Children

From the time of the establishment of the Branch members have been knitting Trauma Teddies to distribute to children in distress. One keen knitter even made an outfit of "teddy bear" patterned fabric to publicise the service. The human size "Big Ted" is still used periodically for fundraising and publicity. Recipients include the Ambulance Service, Police Station, Surf-Life-Saving Clubs, dentists, doctors and primary schools. One local Ambulance driver has acquired a reputation for bandaging Trauma Teds to look like his young patients.

Cosmetic Care/ Hands On

The Cosmetic Care service began at Woolgoolga Retirement Village in 2001 with 10 local Red Cross volunteers including some Branch members. The program lapsed but was reintroduced in 2003 and became firmly established in 2005 when the Village completed its High Care Unit. Since then the service has flourished and is much appreciated by the residents in the Village. Not only do they receive hand massages and nail care but they develop strong relationships with the volunteers. Informal chats and conversations are very much part of these relationships for men and women alike as many receive few, if any, regular outside visitors. There are instances too, of men or women whose

spouses can no longer communicate who especially relish the Hands On visitors.

Junior Red Cross

Some of our members, women especially, remember wearing the Red Cross nurses type veil in their primary school days and have a strong association with Junior Red Cross. In the early years of the Branch Mrs Jan Hall started a JRC group at Korora Public School and supported the group for some years. More recently Mrs Carol Rowe was approached by two of the Grade 5 teachers at Sandy Beach School to initiate a JRC Group. Motivated by their own memories, they were keen to use the JRC as a means to teach the pupils new skills such as meeting procedure, leadership roles, fundraising and supporting the disadvantaged in their own environment. This Sandy Beach group has continued successfully for some years now.

Friendship Teas

The Red Cross Branch was one of the first regular users of the Woolgoolga Community Village facilities and continues to be most appreciative of the cooperation of the Village management. Initially the Friendship sessions were built around lunches provided by volunteers. This became too big a task for the small number of members and the change was made to afternoon teas.

The afternoon comprises a singalong with a member or volunteer pianist with entertainment initially provided by school children and guests sharing in joke-telling and making music. As the reputation of the afternoons grew entertainment came from Coffs Harbour and even interstate. Local dance schools, bagpipe players, ballroom dancers, magicians and a number of school groups are now regular entertainers. A Victorian couple who come north each winter plan their holidays around the Friendship afternoons. The wife plays her trumpet and the husband the harmonica and spoons. The regular musicians and MCs have included Peter Cam, Yvonne and Kevin Knott, Nell Sisson, Val Moase, John Rooth and others.

Some children who originally performed 20 years ago are now returning to the Community Centre to watch their own children perform at the Teas. Many entertainers test their acts on the elderly but non-threatening audience before going on to more formal competitions. It is now commonplace for singing and recorder groups to move from the Friendship Afternoon Teas to the stage of the Opera House, and one dancer who first performed for us at age eight has been on National TV dance competitions. Both Helen Greenhalgh and Dennese Peach have been instrumental in ensuring variety and the high standard of catering .

The Red Cross Christmas function is eagerly anticipated in Woolgoolga and it is especially well-received. It is not uncommon for up to 100 people to enjoy a fun-filled afternoon with special food, decorations and hand-made presents supplied by the members. It is a far cry from the situation 20 years ago when there was little entertainment to attract the seniors from their homes.

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After 20 years Red Cross is a well established presence in Woolgoolga. People in the village and surrounds are extremely supportive of the organisation as shown by their generosity in fundraising and the support they give to disaster appeals. This engagement began with the small group who met in 1991 and continues with the current Branch membership of over 50; it extends throughout the village and to the increasing support and recognition given by the Local Government, State and Federal Members and their partners.

New members are attracted by the activities as well as the opportunity to help the disadvantaged both locally and overseas. The changing demographics in Woolgoolga have led to a younger group of members who bring new energies and skills. At the same time the senior members of the Branch maintain continuity and knowledge of the Red Cross organisation. The Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch looks forward with interest to the challenges and highlights of the next twenty years.

The Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch has prospered throughout the past twenty years, held together and nurtured by a changing group of members and volunteers.

Sincere thanks go to each and every person who has contributed to the longevity and success of the Branch. It is not possible to record the names of all those involved, nor to specify the details of their contributions. Names have been incorporated as part of the narrative as necessary.

May all those members and their families accept the recognition that, but for their support, initiatives and commitment, the Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch would not enjoy the reputation and the prospects it celebrates today.

Appendix 1

AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SERVICE AWARDS

Woolgoolga Red Cross Branch

1999	Mrs Lilian Essex-Clark
2001	Mrs Beulah Crute
2001	Mrs Robyn Rooth
2006	Mr David Dodsworth
2008	Mr John Rooth
2008	Mrs Annette Dodsworth
2010	Mrs Helen Greenhalgh
2010	Mrs Dennese Peach
2011	Ms Judy Jackson

Appendix 2

Woolgoolga Office Bearers 1991-2011

	President	Treasurer	Secretary
1991-92	L Essex-Clark	M Hay	R Rooth
1992-93	L Essex-Clark	A Crute	R Rooth
1993-94	L Essex-Clark	A Crute	Dawn Long
1994-95	B Crute	A Crute	R Rooth
1995-96	B Crute	A Crute	R Rooth
1996-97	B Crute	A Crute	R Rooth
1997-98	R Rooth	A Crute	J Matthews
1998-99	R Rooth	A Crute	J Matthews
1999-2000	N Sisson	K Sisson	T Simpson
2000-01	P Hughan	B Crute	K Reid
2001-02	P Hughan	L Essex-Clark	L Essex-Clark
2002-03	P Hughan	L Essex-Clark	L Essex-Clark
2003-04	I Scott	I Scott	A Dodsworth
2004-05	I Scott	I Scott	A Dodsworth
2005-06	D Dodsworth	D Peach	A Dodsworth
2006-07	D Dodsworth	D Peach	A Dodsworth
2007-08	D Dodsworth	H Michener	A Dodsworth
2008-09	D Dodsworth	H Michener	A Dodsworth
2009-10	C Rowe	H Michener	J Jackson
2010-11	C Rowe	H Michener	J Jackson



Woolgoolga Branch Honour Stamps



Olive Flack and Helen Greenhalgh after receiving their awards.



Button Day : Lesley Norman, Beulah Crute, Allan Crute and Bub Watts



Molly Hayes and Annette Dodsworth