Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE4852

Dragons Abreast Canberra

(1999 -)

Born	19990101
Occupation	Community organisation, Sporting club

Summary

Dragons Abreast Canberra started in 1999, one year after Dragons Abreast Australia, the umbrella organisation was founded. Members, both breast cancer survivors and supporters, race dragon boats on Lake Burley Griffin in an annual Breast Cancer Challenge Regatta, to raise awareness of breast cancer and funds for cancer services and research.

Details

Dragons Abreast Canberra started in 1999, one year after the founding of Dragons Abreast Australia, the national umbrella organisation for dragon boat clubs for breast cancer survivors. The group was formed under the leadership of Anna Wellings Booth who was awarded a Medal in the Order of Australia for her service to women's health through a range of breast cancer organisations in 2012.

Dragon boat racing began over 2000 years ago in China, where races were held as part of the agricultural cycle to avert misfortune and to encourage the rains needed for prosperity. Paddling dragon boats as a sport took hold in 1976 when the Hong Kong Tourist Association launched this traditional festival as a modern competitive sports event. Dragon boats are usually 12 metres long, with the head and tail of a dragon, and wide enough to sit 20 people (two abreast), along with a sweep to steer the boat and a drummer. The races are usually paddled over a course of 500 metres.

Dragons Abreast Australia was founded on principles of participation and inclusiveness. Participants consider themselves to be winners by simply being in the group and being able to paddle. Competitiveness is a secondary outcome. Research by Professor Don McKenzie, a Canadian exercise physiologist, has shown that dragon boating has positive benefits, both physical and psychological, for women recovering from breast cancer.

When it began, Dragons Abreast Canberra had the generous support of the Canberra Dragon Boat Association, which provided coaching and sweeping in the early days while encouraging the club towards independence. Several sweeps were trained, enabling the group to operate independently while maintaining its links with Canberra Dragon Boat Association. When Dragons Abreast Canberra began, there was only one other Dragons Abreast team in Australia, and now there are 45.

The first interstate foray was in 2000 to the Australian National Dragon Boat Championships held at Penrith, and individual members of Dragons Abreast Canberra have participated at every Australian National Championship since that time. The Dragons Abreast regatta for Chinese New Year at Darling Harbour in Sydney is an annual event for club members. International success came with a fifth place in an international breast cancer survivors' regatta held in Peterborough, Canada, in 2010.

Like all Dragons Abreast groups, the Canberra club has a mixture of breast cancer survivors and very active and valuable supporters. There are currently about 60 members. The club's most visible event is the annual Breast Cancer Challenge Regatta, an awareness-raising exercise on Lake Burley Griffin. Most of the money raised from registration fees is donated to cancer-related organisations, both locally and nationally, and some of it is retained to partly cover the club's ongoing expenses.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Dragons Abreast Australia,
http://www.dragonsabreast.com.au

Book
A Dragon's Tale, Hanton, M. and Wellings-Booth, A, 2007

Resource Section
Parliamentary Debates, 2008,
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansards%2F2008-11-10%2F0214

Site Exhibition
From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

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Digital resources



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