



Association of Engaged Buddhists

# Association of Engaged Buddhists Annual Report 2021

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## From the President

It has been another challenging year for everyone but I'm hopeful that the Association has been able to provide at least some of the necessary spiritual care to our members over the past 12 months.

The difficult decision to give up a city property following the sale of Sangha Lodge led to a new partnership with the Buddhist Library where we were able, for a period of time, to again hold in-person Dhamma teaching and meditation on Thursday nights. It was wonderful to experience the Dhamma in the company of others again.

Thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of Meredith Tan with help from Kynan Tan, even when holding in-person sessions we were able to broadcast the teachings using Zoom to members who could not attend, as well as provide videos of past sessions on YouTube. This stood us in good stead when we had to go fully remote again and weekly teachings have continued unabated through the lockdown period and beyond. Thank you Meredith and Kynan, your efforts have helped many people continue their connections to the teachings at the time they have needed it the most.

Due to changing Council regulations around food safety, it appears unlikely we will ever be able to hold our Annual Food Fair as we have in the past. This change has serious implications for our ability to raise general running expenses, so we would strongly encourage members who wish the Association to continue, to set up recurring donations in order to continue to help fund the activities of the Association. We will look to develop a new annual fundraising activity, probably centred around Vejjasala in 2022.

Of course, the biggest activity the Association has undertaken over the past 12 months has been the building and renovation work at Vejjasala. Please find a detailed report below and thanks most of all to David Wilson for his extraordinary commitment to this project.

The Association of Engaged Buddhists is a volunteer-based organisation where all activities are performed and driven by people who give their time, effort and, in many instances, financial donations. It would not be possible for the AEB to function without the generous support of such individuals. They have carried the burden to meet the needs of this community again this year in the true spirit of the Dhamma.

I'm hopeful that 2022 will see us gradually emerge from the cocoon of COVID and start to spread our wings in new ways - in-person teachings again, informal and formal retreats at Vejjasala and hopefully some social activities to maintain our connections to each other.

There are too many individuals to be singled out for their contributions in this report, but please excuse me if I have inadvertently omitted those who deserve particular mention.

As always, your feedback and suggestions for the committee are welcome either via the AGM or contacting any of the committee members directly.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge the kindness, guidance and support offered to the Association by our Spiritual Director Bhante Tejadhammo, who despite his many and various health issues (and dislike of Zoom!) has continued to make himself available to the needs of the Association and its members.

Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu

*Chris Burgess, President*

# Sangha Report

Dear Friends,

Normally this report would contain a long list of Ordained Sangha activities undertaken for and on behalf of the Association. This year however is extraordinarily different.

Thanks to the Covid 19 pandemic and our move from the old Sangha Lodge at 20 Victoria Street Lewisham our regular programmes including our monthly Dana Days have been severely compromised if not all together extinguished. For a short time we managed face to face teaching at the Buddhist Library thanks to their kind help and co-operation but this too was brought to a halt by the pandemic. Teaching then resumed on ZOOM (something I really dislike.....is this aversion?). We have been blessed though by so many visiting teachers kindly offering to share their skill and wisdom with us over the computer screen. I have also taken part in this process though clumsily. A big thank you to Meredith and Kynan for organising this. Without them it would never have taken place.

We had one gathering in the park at Homebush to offer a puja for our dear Lily Koo and we have not been able to meet as a group since. I have continued to offer "counselling" via the telephone which is far from satisfactory but none the less helps. This has been quite busy at times.

I have also managed to perform just a few funeral and memorial services for people. I have recently been visiting nursing homes but this has become very difficult owing to my very compromised immune system. Hospitals have been a no go area for me. Rheumatoid arthritis continues to plague me. Naturally I have been undertaking my own practice and study. I have such a long way to go even after 40 years!

Thank you to our President and our whole wonderful committee who have been so wonderful over this most difficult year. The great bright light in the darkness has been the renovation of Vejjasala making it into a truly wonderful retreat centre. Thank you to David Wilson and Ian Jones for their skill and care.

A big thank you and blessing to all our members and friends for their continued support and kindness. I hope that 2022 will bring a great new flourishing of Dhamma work for myself and everyone in the Association.

With gratitude, metta and every blessing,

*Bhante Tejadhammo*

## Financial Summary

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### Expenses

In 2021, the association is experiencing an operating shortfall of \$23,153 compared to Year 2020 which has a surplus of \$44,932. This is due to huge drop in total income and increase in property expense. In both 2020 and 2021, AEB is not able to hold any food fairs to raise fund due to Covid restriction and there was no retreats at Vejjasala in the past two years. Total expenses for 2021 is \$58,599, comprises \$34,574 in property expense and \$24,025 in operating expense. The main contributor in property expense is consulting fees.

### Financial Position

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AEB signed a contract with Unistruct Building Pty Ltd on 20 July 2021 to commence renovation work in accordance with the approved DA. The contract sum is \$382,260 inclusive GST. Currently, AEB has building fund in the amount of \$513,227, including \$265,013 which is insurance claim from the bush fire damage. Providing no major variation in the building work, there will be approximately \$120,000 in the fund after completion.

There is \$125,105 in the general fund for AEB daily operation expense. Since early 2020, AEB has vacated the premise at Lewisham, and return the lease to Buddhist Library. This reduced the property rental expense by \$1000 monthly but AEB pays Buddhist Library \$65 per week for hall hire for Thursday night teaching.

As seen in the financial summary, there is a shortfall of \$23,153 this financial year. Due to the uncertainty of the Covid crisis, AEB may not be able to organise any fund raising in this financial year 2021-2022 , relying solely on general donation, which raised \$16,018 last financial year.

*Alex Lee, Treasurer*

## **Activities**

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### **AEB Meditation & Teachings**

In 2021, we moved our regular Wednesday evening meditation & dharma talks to Thursday evening and all talks were held at the Buddhist Library. Due to the Covid19 restrictions of group gatherings, we made our teachings available online via Zoom. All teachings have also been recorded and are available through AEB's YouTube channel.

We are very grateful that, despite the challenges that we encounter especially during this pandemic, we received enormous support from many Sangha teachers who very generously offered their teachings to our AEB community. We are very grateful for their generosity and compassion. The list of teachers for 2020-2021 are:

- Bhante Tejadhammo
- Bhante Akaliko
- Bhante Pandit
- Thay Thich Truc Thong Phap
- Michael Dash
- Chan Sirimanne
- Dr. Jonathan Page
- Dr. Eng Kong Tan
- Winton Higgins
- Dr. Chien Hoong Gooi
- Grahame White
- Lachlan Warner
- David O'Rose
- Tina Ng
- John Barclay
- Sue Toohey

*Meredith Tan, Vice-President & Teaching Coordinator*

## Community Activity

Due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 our general community activities were again limited in 2021.

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### Association Picnic - 23 May 2021

We were fortunate just before the Delta outbreak to be able to come together as a community to celebrate the life of our long-term and founding committee member, friend and inspiration Lily Koo. Lily gave so much time, energy and effort to the Association since its inception and it was very special to be able to see each other as a group and honour her memory together on this day.

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### Asylum Center Food Voucher Drive

In the past our Association had worked closely with the Asylum Seekers' Centre in Newtown. Some of you might have been aware and also involved in our past initiatives – collecting food items for their Food Bank (which we did twice a year in the past) and making hot meals for them at the centre.

Covid changed all that. Instead of collecting food items and basic necessities for their Food Bank (as the Food Bank is now closed) we collected donations which will be used to buy food vouchers for the asylum seekers.

We had a fantastic response to this initiative with over \$3,000 raised for people in need.

## Vejjasala

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### Informal Retreats

While COVID has limited our ability to utilise Vejjasala this year, in the pre-Delta period we were active in coordinating 2 'informal' retreat weekends for members of the Association, an activity we will look to continue in the future.

Starting on a Friday night and going through to Sunday afternoon, members came to Vejjasala and followed their own relaxed schedule of meditation, walks and other activities outside of a formal retreat routine. Catering was also organised on a communal basis. Unfortunately a couple of planned weekends had to be cancelled for various reasons but those who attended found this a very worthwhile and enjoyable way to spend a weekend and get to know other members, as well as a great use of Vejjasala for the benefit of members.

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### Renovation/Restoration

Many years in the planning, Committee Member David Wilson, ably assisted by Ian Jones, prepared detailed plans and a scope of work for long-overdue renovation, restoration and other building work at Vejjasala. As the proposed work required to bring the main building up to standard and resolve the many issues represented a major investment from the building fund which has built up over the years from member donations and our insurance claim from the recent bushfires, much debate was held at the Committee level to assess the necessity and value of this project.

It was felt that before such a large investment be made, the members as a whole should have the opportunity to speak their minds on the proposal and wide feedback was sought and received from the membership as a whole. Feedback was universally positive in regard to moving forward with the plans and as a result Unistruct were contracted to complete the works.

We were fortunate that due to the specific circumstances and location of Vejjasala, construction was able to continue through the recent Delta outbreak and great progress has been made with completion likely before the end of the year. While every effort has been made to keep costs down, due to the somewhat 'home-made' nature of previous additions/modifications to the

building there have been some unexpected additions to the scope of work (like grounding electricity in the kitchen!) which may result in the final total exceeding original expectations.

The committee has full confidence that these amendments have been both necessary and as cost-effective as possible and the final result will be a fully-compliant retreat centre ready for it's new life as a centre for Dhamma in 2022.

The amount of effort, work, care and oversight that David Wilson has put into this project has been exceptional and extraordinary. We simply could not have attempted this without his generous volunteering of his skills as a professional architect and project manager. The Association as a whole owes him a huge debt of gratitude.

Of course, thanks are also due to Alex Lee and other volunteers for organising clean-ups and clear-outs at Vejjasala and of course Michael Chuah for his commitment to regular maintenance of the grounds. David and Pip Denton also stayed for a period over Christmas and made their usual great contribution to the maintenance of the property.

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## Property Maintenance

A number of different grants relating to bushfires and environmental work were received and consequent work carried out over 2021 including:

- Funding from the NSW Gov. Biodiversity Conservation Trust for pine tree removal. Thanks to Louise Egerton for her patience and persistence in overseeing this work
- Supporting Our Neighbours – Public Land Boundary Fencing Program - Local Land Services which has enabled us to replace the fencing along Forest Road as well as install a gate at the front of the property. David Wilson again oversaw this work as well as having our land properly surveyed and pegged accordingly
- We are still expecting more pine trees to be removed as part of EPA funding for the council but unsure of timeframe

## Publications

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### Website

A complete re-platforming and re-design of the Association [website](#) was undertaken this year, moving to an easier method of maintenance using WordPress. This has allowed us to present a more dynamic page with frequent updates to the teaching schedule, teaching video archives and other information for our members. Direct donation using PayPal is also available now via the website along with the automation of membership renewal forms and newsletter sign-ups.

Thanks again to Russell Bastock for his work over many years on the website and for his assistance in the transition to the new platform.

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### Newsletter

Molly Lim continued to send out regular email newsletter to the members informing them of our various activities, teaching schedule and interesting teachings and reflections. As Molly is looking to step back from formal duties for the Association in 2022, we will be looking for someone to take her place in this important function. Thank you for all the time you have devoted to it over the years Molly.

# Administration

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## Spiritual Director

Bhante Tejadhammo has been Spiritual Director of the Association since its inception and continues to provide needed guidance for the community. Bhante is a member of the Teaching Faculty of AABCAP (Australian Association of Buddhist Counsellors and Psychotherapists) and a founding member of the Australian Monastic Encounter that seeks to promote inter-religious and inter monastic dialogue.

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## Management Committee

At the November 2020 AGM, a new committee that comprised Molly Lim, Sue Toohey, Chris Burgess, David O’Rose, Alex Lee, Meredith Tan and David Wilson were elected to serve.

Chris Burgess was selected as President, Alex Lee as Treasurer and David O’Rose as Secretary. Molly Lim was the ex-officio member.

Molly Lim and David O’Rose has signalled their intention to step back from the committee in 2022 so we will be seeking a new Secretary and committee members at the AGM.