



Association of Engaged Buddhists

Association of Engaged Buddhists Annual Report 2022

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From the President

The past year has been one of great renewal and positive momentum for the Association in many ways and has established a solid foundation for the future. This has been primarily due to the inspiring efforts and hard work of Committee members and a small group of volunteers who have given so much of their time to the activities of the Association.

In particular I would like to make note of the contribution of three long-standing Committee members who are stepping down this year:

Molly Lim has been Immediate Past President over the past year, but as a founding member of the Association and many years as President, has devoted innumerable hours over more than 25 years to developing the Association and supporting Venerable Tejadhammo in so many ways. Her contribution, energy, honesty and devotion cannot be underestimated and we all owe her a debt of gratitude for her work.

Sue Toohey has also stepped down from the Committee after a similar period of contribution as Molly and many years on the Committee in various roles, including President for longer than anyone else! Sue's contributions are many, from her long-standing warmth and guidance both on the Committee and on a personal level to many members; her many years teaching for the Association, both Dhamma and Yoga; and her presence at every single event held by the Association over the years.

Alex Lee has been the rock on which much of the Association's activities in recent years have stood. He has been an able and effective Treasurer, masterful Food Fair coordinator, and expert volunteer and retreat coordinator at Vejjasala. Alex's quiet good humour and unfailing energy have been evident in every activity and the sheer hard work he has devoted over the past few years in particular should not be underestimated.

Of course, the past year also saw the completion of the redesign and renovation of the main building at Vejjasala and **David Wilson** spent countless hours in design, managing the build, and ensuring the best possible result for our members. The feedback has been universally positive from everyone visiting Vejjasala as to the dramatic improvement in usability, flow and let's not forget, council approval of the changes! The continuing volunteer contributions of **Pip and Dave Denton** at Vejjasala, while not widely known, are considerable and the fact the property continues to improve continuously is in no small part down to their hard work.

Vice-President **Meredith Tan** has worked tirelessly to develop and host our teaching program, mostly online but occasionally in person and the number of attendees for our sessions who have been able to benefit from her coordination and promotional work continues to grow. Meanwhile our Secretary **Kynan Tan** has brought much needed energy, enthusiasm and expertise to the Committee, taking responsibility for website maintenance, retreat bookings and coordination, leading retreats himself and generally proving willing to help with many and varied other tasks.

What stands out most for me over the past year is the consistent contribution of each of the Committee members, according to their talents and availability, but also the friendly, happy and good-humoured spirit in which the work has been done. The Association is lucky to have benefitted from these contributions over many years. It is highly unusual in my experience to have such a stable and consistent base of members in a voluntary organisation over such a long time and, in my humble opinion, this is what makes AEB special. Though relatively small in scope and ambition, it remains true to its roots and devoid of rifts, either personal or spiritual.

While I will also be stepping down from the role of President this year, I will continue to sit on the Committee as Immediate Past President for the next year and we have a great crop of new members interested in joining the Committee who share the values and commitment of the retiring members to bring new energy, enthusiasm and ideas to AEB.

Of course much of the ongoing momentum is also due to the continued guidance and involvement of **Venerable Tejadhammo** who, despite facing innumerable health challenges over the past year, never fails to lead by example, refusing to complain and often quoting his own teacher, "with a human body, what do you expect?" and yet still tending to the spiritual needs of members and a wide variety of others on a daily basis. Thank you Bhante.

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

Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu

Chris Burgess, President

Sangha Report

Dear Friends,

The past couple of years have been extraordinarily difficult and chaotic. The Association has seen dramatic changes thanks to Covid 19, the closure of Sangha Lodge at Lewisham, the attempt to establish a presence at the Buddhist Library largely thwarted by Covid restrictions and the terrible damage done by the bushfires of 2019/2020. Added to this has been ongoing health problems for myself which remain unresolved as I wrote this to you. I spent a little over two months in hospital following emergency spinal surgery earlier this year and am still experiencing problems related to this. The rheumatoid arthritis is still not under control and I am severely immunosuppressed. As my beloved teacher said, "What do you expect if you have a body?"

This immunity problem has meant that I cannot continue for the present with the hospital and hospice work which is so dear to my heart.

However we have some wonderful teachers who have stepped in and given with great generosity of their time, wisdom and skill. The great work carried out at Vejjasala has resulted in a truly beautiful and functional retreat centre which we are now using regularly.

Retreatants and teachers all report most favourably on these changes. 2023 promises to be a better year. We hope for greater involvement and contribution on my own part in the life of our little group.

I want to thank everyone for their great kindness and generosity over the last year from the President Chris and the whole committee and all our members and friends.

To those stepping down from the committee this year I say a heartfelt thank you and offer every blessing for your wonderful contributions of so many years.

I hope to see you at Vejjasala very soon.

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu to all and with great gratitude and every blessing,

Yours

Bhante Tejadhammo

Financial Summary

Income

In the last financial year 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022, AEB received substantial donations and a GST refund. The GST refund is mainly due to the expenditure on renovation at Vejjasala. There were two substantial donations to the Building Fund by anonymous donors. During this period, AEB received a substantial bequest from Nicholas Diamonde estate in the amount of \$72,149.03.

Expenses

The total expenses for last financial year is \$528,746.53. The greatest portion of it is on the renovation cost at Vejjasala, standing at \$479,057.39. As the renovation started in July 2021 with an original contract sum of \$382,260. At that time, AEB had Building Funds in the amount of \$513,227 including insurance claim in the amount of \$265,013.

The work at Vejjasala was practically completed on 18 March 2022 and the final retention money was returned on 8 October 2022.

Due to unforeseen conditions of the existing building, variations to the original contract were made. The final adjusted contract price is \$515,000.

The other big expense is medical in the amount of \$9,132.00 and motor vehicle in the amount of \$3,659.45. The main reason for medical expenses is because Bhante Tejadhammo is undergoing spinal surgery.

Financial Position

Due mainly to renovation costs, AEB has generated an operating shortfall of \$352,373.71 which is covered by the existing building fund.

Currently, the Building Fund has \$105,000 in fixed deposits and \$24,209.21 in general saving accounts. The General fund has \$25,000 in fixed deposits and \$91,961.25 in various savings accounts.

Generally AEB is still relatively sound financially but it should delay any building work except general maintenance for next few years to build up its reserve.

It is unfortunate that the major fundraising event – Food Fair, is unlikely to happen next year. The committee may have to look for other fund raising revenue otherwise donation from members and supporters, is AEB only source of income, which does not cover the total general expense. This will gradually deplete the General Fund.

Alex Lee, Treasurer

Activities

AEB Meditation & Teachings

In 2022, we continued our Thursday night teachings mostly via Zoom until September, when the Covid restrictions eased a little and Bhante expressed his strong interest in going back to live teaching at the Buddhist Library. We started to have live teachings once or twice a month at the Library from September. Unfortunately Bhante's health deteriorated again, so we have put the live teaching on hold until Bhante gets better and is able to travel to the Library.

We have received much positive feedback from participants and members for having Zoom teachings especially those who could not travel far to the Buddhist Library. We have participants from everywhere (even overseas) tuning in on Thursday for the Zoom teachings. Additionally all teachings have been recorded and are available through AEB's YouTube channel, which will hopefully provide an ongoing resource for students of the Dhamma (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7kmuz3yV653uwL9NVORVw>).

We are very fortunate to receive enormous support from many Sangha teachers who very generously offered their teachings to the AEB community. I would like to express my utmost gratitude especially to Thay Thich Truc Thong Phap and Venerable Pandit Bhikkhu who very generously stepped in without hesitation to provide monthly teachings to AEB community throughout the year, especially when they heard Bhante Tejadhammo was unwell.

In October, we organised a full day meditation practice at the Buddhist Library, led by Kynan Tan and this was very well received. That inspired us to have more such live events in the coming year.

We are very grateful for all the teachers' generosity and compassion. The list of teachers for 2021-2022 are:

- Bhante Tejadhammo
- Bhante Akaliko
- Bhante Pandit
- Thay Thich Truc Thong Phap
- Chan Sirimanne
- Dr. Jonathan Page

- Jim Teoh
- Victor von der Heyde
- David O’Rose
- Tina Ng
- Dr. Tucker Peck
- Sue Toohey
- Kynan Tan

Community Activity

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

Dana Day at the Park - 26 June, 2022

After a long lock down, we were finally able to organise a Dana Day at Burwood Park on 26 June 2022. We were blessed with beautiful weather and were very fortunate to have three ordained Sangha members attend the dana day in Bhante Tejadhammo, Bhante Akaliko & Sister Sudhira. The Community were overwhelmed to be able to meet each other and to offer food to the Sangha (in person) for the first time since the lock down. Everyone had a precious time together and enjoyed great food and marvellous company with each other.

Dana Day the the Buddhist Library - 23 October, 2022

We had the wonderful opportunity to welcome Thay Thich Truc Thong Phap from South Australia to have a Dana Day at the Buddhist Library on Sunday 23 October. Thay has been our regular Dhamma teacher for a long time.

A short meditation session followed by Thay's inspiring stories, and an engaging shared experiences session between Thay and the participants took place before the offering of food (Dana offering), after which we had a lovely shared lunch together.

Having slowed down so much on community activities particularly during the many lockdowns, it was truly heartwarming to be able to meet up once again with old friends, make new ones and engage in face to face contact with members of the Sangha.

We humbly thank Thay Thong Phap for accepting our invitation & making the effort of travelling all the way to the Buddhist Library for this Dana Day. Thay's loving & compassionate presence always warm the hearts of people around him. Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu!

Meredith Tan, Vice-President & Teaching Coordinator

Vejjasala

Retreats

Following the completion of the renovation at Vejjasala we were finally able to hold formal retreats this year with great success and feedback. Thank you to all the teachers and volunteers who made these possible.

April: Contemplation as Meditation: A Four Day Sutta Retreat on the Annusatis with Akāliko Bhikkhu

May: Weekend Silent Meditation Retreat with Kynan Tan

Sep: Mindfulness Meditation in Daily Life with Jim Teoh

Oct: Day of Practice with Kynan Tan (at Buddhist Library)

Nov: Tasting the Dharma: Weekend Retreat with Grahame White

2023: There are plans underway for a number of retreats, including a retreat with Bhante Tejadhammo, a longer retreat with Kynan Tan, and an Easter retreat with Bhante Akaliko.

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 Building P/L 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 Covid outbreak and great progress was made, with completion achieved early in 2022. 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 have resulted in the final total exceeding original expectations.

The Contract was finalised, and the Defects period completed in October 2022 with very minor corrections required.

The committee had full confidence that these amendments have been both necessary and as cost-effective as possible and the final result is a fully-compliant retreat centre ready for its new life as a centre for Dhamma in 2022 and beyond.

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 2021 and at the end of the construction period, making their usual great contribution to the maintenance of the property.

Publications

Website/IT

Kynan Tan took over maintenance of the website this year, including some simplification and restructuring of the pages for ease of use and updating it regularly with all the events and activities of the Association.

We were also able to make use of Google for Nonprofits to move all our files and storage to Google Workspace, providing more storage and ease of use. Thanks again to Russell Bastock for his assistance in the transition to the new platform.

Newsletter

The email newsletter moved to a new simpler format this year focusing on upcoming events and teachings and being sent on a semi-regular weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Administration

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.

Management Committee

At the November 2021 AGM, a new committee that comprised Molly Lim (Immediate Past President), Sue Toohey, Chris Burgess (President), Kynan Tan (Secretary), Alex Lee (Treasurer), Meredith Tan (Vice-President) and David Wilson were elected to serve.

Chris Burgess, Molly Lim, Sue Toohey and Alex Lee have signalled their intention to step back from the committee in 2022-3 so we will be seeking a new President, Treasurer and committee members at the AGM.