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MEDIA RELEASE

With photo: CODA Chair Trish Stephens, Speaker Bernadette O'Connor, CODA CEO Jacqui Soares in front of the war history wall display by CODA clients.

Kokoda experience – lessons for resilience

The Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea is legendary for testing the physical and mental endurance of the toughest and the fittest. Once you start the 96 kilometre trail through mountainous jungle and steep ravines, there is only one way and that is forward, one step at a time.

Business leader and former Colac resident Bernadette O'Connor shared her experiences of completing the trail earlier this year when she presented as guest speaker at Colac Otway Disability Accommodation's (CODA) recent Annual General Meeting.

Her message was no matter what challenges you face whether it is managing a team in business, sport, your family, or facing personal issues, staying focused on your goal is paramount.

CODA CEO, Jacqui Soares, said the presentation was fitting as clients have been researching history and the involvement of family member and friends in past conflicts to broaden their understanding of challenges and resilience.

"At the same time, CODA has experienced one of the most challenging periods in its history completing its first full year of being funded under the new National Disability Insurance Scheme NDIS as part of the first Victorian launch site in Barwon.

"We are pleased to report one of our most successful year's, increasing our business by 30% and employing additional staff. While there are still areas of the NDIS that need further development, there have been noticeable improvements in service accessibility for younger clients and people who may not have had access to resources before."

Other highlights for CODA this year include the establishment of a new recycled clothing business in Colac which is building clients' confidence and customer service skills. A new holiday program for children also commenced.

Jacqui Soares who this year celebrated 25 years at CODA said the AGM evening was an opportunity to bring together staff, Board, clients and their families to celebrate challenge and achievement.

"Hearing Bernadette O'Connor's personal experience of Kokoda and relating that back to what those young soldiers endured during World War II on a perilous track, outnumbered by enemy makes our own problems look small."



Bernadette O'Connor told the audience, the trek highlighted the importance of having a good team, staying focused and maintaining a good sense of humour.

“Just because you're tired, stiff, sore and hungry doesn't mean you can't enjoy yourself and working as a leader, a parent, a coach can be like that. On Kokoda, there is no point complaining about the steepness of the slope because you can't turn back. There is only one way, and that way is forward, one step at a time. It can be much the same in business sport or in your personal life.”

Bernadette O'Connor is Executive Director of Management Governance Australia which assists business managers, leaders and Boards to advance their skills. Bernadette has a strong connection with Colac having spent 17 years as a manager and CEO of Colac ACE.

For more information on CODA visit: <http://coda.org.au/> or phone 03 5231 1573

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