

Lizzie's Lunch

Lizzie Pinkerton was determined and vibrant with a cheeky sense of humour. She lived with severe symptoms of Tuberosus Sclerosis Complex (TSC) and associated polycystic kidney disease that sadly ended her life in 2010 aged 25 years. Sue Pinkerton, Lizzie's Mum, is the former long-time President of TSA. Sue and her immediate family – husband Ross, daughter Clare and sons Tom and Sam (her eldest son Nick lives overseas) – organise Lizzie's Lunch each year to remember Lizzie and the impact of her life on all those who knew and loved her.

All proceeds from Lizzie's Lunch are donated to TSA and the event has raised over \$109,000 since its inception in 2014. The lunch now takes place every year in June and is attended by over 120 of the Pinkerton's family and friends. In this interview we talked to Sue and asked her to tell us more about this amazing fundraising and awareness event.

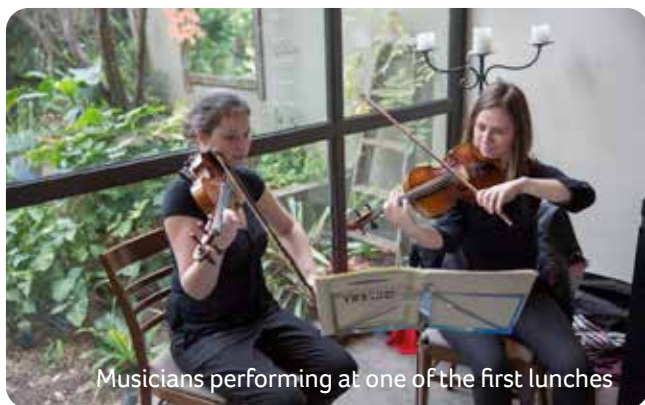
Q How did Lizzie's Lunch come about?

My daughter Clare Stuart, TSA's former General Manager, had the idea originally and she largely organised the first lunch in 2014. Her inspiration was that the event should be a fitting legacy for her younger sister Lizzie and it could help raise awareness of TSC and, most importantly, funds for TSA. Clare was only too aware of TSA's lack of ongoing funding and its reliance on families and individuals living with TSC to raise funds. She wanted to create an event that would be fun to attend and would be supported by friends and friends of friends.



Sue and Ross Pinkerton

The first Lizzie's Lunch event was held at the Three Weeds in Rozelle in Sydney's Inner West. It was supported by about 60 people – mostly friends of ours or members of our family – and it was a stand-up social with canapés, drinks and live music. We raised about \$10,000 from the first lunch and knew we were onto a winner.



Musicians performing at one of the first lunches

Q Why did you move the lunch from the Inner West to the Hills District?

As word spread, we had more and more people who wanted to come to Lizzie's Lunch. One year I even borrowed a bus to bring friends from my area in the Hills District to the Inner West. However, the Three Weeds only had capacity for 75 people and so we became victims of our own success. In order to meet demand, another venue had to be found. I approached The Hills Lodge in Castle Hill. The lovely people there listened to my story and offered support and so we held the first Hill's based Lizzie's Lunch in 2017. Despite recent changes in management, the Hills Lodge has remained a steadfast supporter of the event. They now provide the venue, a discounted lunch rate and a complimentary drink for guests on the day. They also donate a night's accommodation with dinner and a spa treatment for the silent auction and a helicopter flight for the raffle.

When I first approached the Hills Lodge, I knew no one there. Now I know many of their loyal and lovely staff members. We know that we can rely on them to host a fantastic lunch and afternoon event. It is a well-run venue with gorgeous grounds and lots of parking. It suits our event perfectly.



Hills Lodge, Castle Hill

Q How has the event evolved over the years?

Raising awareness of TSC and helping raise funds for TSA have always been central to Lizzie's Lunch. So, from the start, the event included a silent auction and a raffle. I also try to do things a little differently each year and have introduced several innovations over the years.



The Wine Wall

This year, the auction and raffle went digital for the first time. I was not sure how that would go – particularly as we have quite a few older, dare I say, less tech savvy guests – but it was hugely popular. We had quite a few people who were bidding against each other on their phones whilst sitting next to each other at the same table. I think the ease of bidding and buying was one of the factors that helped us achieve our best fundraising result to date.

Growing in popularity are the other fundraising initiatives which now include a Mystery Wine Wall with about 100 bottles of quality wine donated by a few big-hearted donors. For a \$25 ticket, guests ‘blind’ pick a bottle and most are worth well more than the ticket price. And, for the first time this year, we had Lucky Envelopes. For \$50, guests received a mystery prize which was either a voucher guaranteed to be valued at over \$50 or a chance to select something from the ‘Pick a Prize’ table which also had prizes valued over \$50 or more. Not surprisingly, these Lucky Envelopes sold out within the first hour!

You have to approach lots of people and be prepared to ask – donors, potential guests, anyone you can really! And you have to be prepared to tell your story and explain what TSC is over and over again... The great thing is that it gets easier over time as people get to know you and the event and are happy to come along or donate prizes year after year.

people’s awareness of TSC and educate them about the impact it can have on the individual and the family. Our guest speakers’ stories have been very moving. I appreciate their generosity in sharing the story of their TSC journey.

Q What are the challenges in setting up an event like this?

It takes a lot of Es. You have to put in Effort. You have to be Encouraging and Enthusiastic and you have to let the Event Evolve. Initially, you have to really put yourself out there. You have to approach lots of people and be prepared to ask – donors, potential guests, anyone you can really! And you have to be prepared to tell your story and explain what TSC is over and over again.

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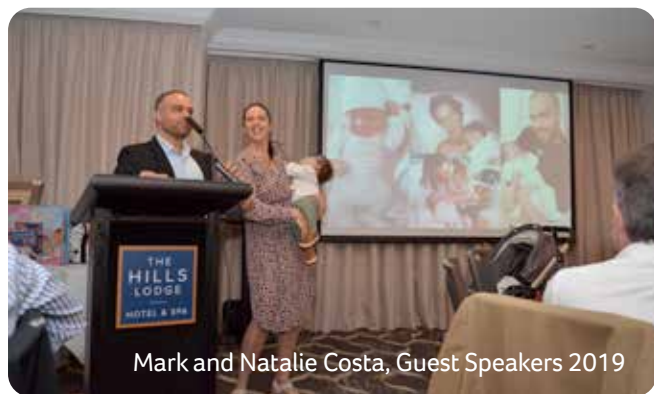
It’s still time-consuming following up everyone who has said they’ll donate and actually getting their donations, but I do it over the whole year and pace myself to try to avoid having a ‘mad dash to the finishing line’.

And, of course, one of the other challenges of running an annual lunch is mixing things up and coming up with changes for the next year to keep the event fresh and fun.

Q So, what advice do you have for anyone interested in starting a fundraising and awareness event?

Think about and use all your resources. Use every network available to you – friends, relatives, colleagues, casual acquaintances. Build relationships with the restaurants you eat at, the tradesmen you use, the friends with holiday houses. Talk to them about what you are trying to do and why – from the guy at the gym, to your hairdresser and the friend of a friend who you bump into while shopping. You will need them all as donors and/or attendees. And do not worry about starting small. It gives you a good chance to work it out along the way.

I recommend reaching out to TSA’s fundraiser, Kate. She’s a great support and can work with you to create your own unique event. I’d also be happy to chat to anyone who would like to organise something similar. It is a lot of work, especially the first year, but it’s also incredibly fun and rewarding.



Mark and Natalie Costa, Guest Speakers 2019

At every event we have a guest speaker – someone who lives with the daily challenges of TSC and can talk about life with TSC from the heart. It really helps people who do not know about TSC to connect with it and appreciate the impact it can have on the daily life of a family. Some of our friends knew that Lizzie had TSC but understandably did not really know what it was or fully appreciate what impact it had on us as a family. Lizzie’s Lunch is a great way to raise



Sue addresses the guests at Lizzie’s Lunch

Q What do you believe is the single biggest success factor of Lizzie's Lunch?

Building relationships is key. It is our relationships with the venue, with the guests and with the donors of prizes that keeps this event alive. We now have repeat guests and donors, who know the lunch takes place in June and support the event year after year, which is just magnificent. Having said that, we are always keen to welcome new people. We also have a venue we are happy with and want to maintain this relationship. We have avoided lots of 'chopping and changing' so that we can keep our focus on the main game of raising awareness and funds for TSA while having a very enjoyable time.



Lunch guests

Q How does TSA support the event?

TSA provides the 'engine room' for Lizzie's Lunch. Kate, TSA's Fundraising Lead, handles a lot of the admin, from the ticket sales to the online auction and raffle, the creation of programs and the publicity and promotion of the event. Sending thank you emails and letters to the donors of prizes is important, and Kate helps with this as well. Some members of the TSA committee donate prizes, like a weekend at their beach house or store gift cards such as Bunnings vouchers, and a couple come along to the lunch with their family and friends. My role is to solicit and manage the prizes and secure the guests to attend, then TSA help with the logistics and event management side of things. We work together in a fruitful partnership and TSA is always happy to support us.

Q Who attends and what feedback do you get?

People love coming to the lunch. It is a like a celebratory party with a chance to spend a little and get a lot. Most guests I speak to are delighted with how well they do prize-wise on the day and of course hearing from our speakers also helps many of our attendees reflect on how fortunate they are. People often say they feel good being able to do something for others who are facing bigger hurdles in life.

I am delighted to say that we now easily fill the 120 seats at Hills Lodge. It is a great opportunity for us to catch up with friends we do not see often enough, work colleagues and, of course, family – Lizzie's aunts, uncles, brothers and sister. We are always delighted to see other families affected by TSC and their friends and families. But, the great thing is that, just as Clare intended, the success of the event is not reliant on families living with TSC. It is lovely to see everyone – family, friends and soon-to-be friends – enjoying a happy occasion. The atmosphere in the room is always positive, fun and vibrant. Just like Lizzie herself.

The 8th Lizzie's Lunch was held at The Hills Lodge in June 2021. It raised an incredible \$24,000, which is over 10% of TSA's annual income. Over the years Lizzie's Lunch has made a huge difference to the information and support services that TSA is able to provide to everyone living with TSC. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Sue and the rest of the Pinkerton family for their steadfast support for TSA.



Kate and Jackie from TSA at Lizzie's Lunch

Create your own event

TSA would love to support you if you'd like to explore setting up your own awareness and fundraising event.

Why not create a Samuel's Supper, David's Drinks or Tamsin's Tea Party?

If you are interested in working with us to create an event, please call Kate on 0434 391 430 or email kate.garrard@tsa.org.au