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acknowledge the various Chefs who have also provided a culinary reason for customers to return.

Challenges.

When assessing challenges for ACRO in the coming year there is sometimes a growing sense of how deep is the well and do you want to climb down or jump!. At this stage we perceive that governments are confused about where they are going. If that is not the case and they are informed they are certainly not telling us about what their expectations are likely to be in the coming years. At all levels there is uncertainty. All our pro-

grams are in jeopardy.

Notwithstanding, the organisation started from within the community and that is where it will remain. Our core Staff members Fiona, Neil, Jennifer, Nancy, Ben, Jared, Ed, Paul, Harry and Graham have continued to provide invaluable service to our client base and for that I am extremely grateful. This year we farewelled Paul Green who left ACRO. We wish him and his wife great travels and a happy retirement. We also acknowledge with gratitude those generous people who have donated

ed furniture, household items, clothing and baby items for our housing clients during the year.

This has been another successful year for ACRO in spite of great uncertainty for the Staff, new program guidelines and procedures, portals and government change. As always, ACRO will persist and continue to provide services needed within the community. I wish all our supporters an outstanding 2016.



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It is a sad indictment that the needs of citizens have become secondary to the wants of corporations

The non-governmental sector that I have now worked within for the past 33 years is one that has been historically governed by two elemental features. The first is the charter that directs its operations and which has, at its core, a series of objectives. The implementation of these objectives is, in turn, guided by a set of principles that encapsulate the best of community values centred upon equity and fairness. In essence, the charitable sector exists as an exemplar of that which is desirable within a community – compassion and humanity. The second feature is determined by government policy—particularly in relation to program funding across various portfolios (Health, Education and Community Services included) of which our sector has been a beneficiary. During my time with ACRO there have been moments when government policy direction has been inconsistent with the values for the organization and, arguably, the broader community. Whilst we (the non-governmental sector) believe that we should augment government policy there are times when the pragmatism of government decision-making is at odds with what our sector believe are community expectations. We currently live within such a moment. For several years I have spoken of the movement by government away from the “welfare state” towards the privatisation of essential services, including housing, welfare and education. Under processes germane to the “welfare state”, basic services such as education, health and welfare are funded from taxpayer contributions. Australia’s history has always recognised that some within its community are unable to reasonably care for themselves without this public support. The “safety net” that social services has provided for such people has aided in reducing homelessness and poverty as well as creating a well-educated and fundamentally “middle class” Australia with relatively low crime rates. It is the case in contemporary Australia that both major political parties believe that market forces should direct compassion within our community—the privatisation I referred to earlier. In this model welfare provisioning by government is reduced to a bare minimum signalling the demise of the welfare state. The argument by politicians is that they cannot raise sufficient funding via taxation to meet growing demands for support (particularly given our aging population). There is a fear that increasing taxation to meet these demands will not be popularly endorsed—and governments, as we know, hate losing power. It is, paradoxically, OK to spend billions of dollars on off-shore detention centres, engage in wars and expend large amounts on other unspecified purposes. Not raising taxation to meet social need is not a view shared by some of our Scandinavian communities for example but it does, nonetheless, prevail in Australia. The adoption of neoliberal laissez-faire economics in this country will have a cost with an inevitable erosion of the middle class and

the expansion of a poor underclass which, tragically, will include large numbers of older people.

The rapidly changing landscape in welfare and social justice administration in Australia is already having impacts. Many smaller non-governmental organisations have disappeared and others that are not amalgamating are unlikely to survive. Services that were once regionalized are being centralized. Governments are shedding their historical engagement in housing, education, health, welfare and aged care to the auspice of for-profit corporations – whose agendas, it could be argued, are less than honourable. The movement towards corporatization has created mega-non-governmental conglomerates whose charters move them, it could argued, from the charitable to the profitable in a way that, I believe, challenges their originating charters. Were it not for the slim margins between political parties that have created minority governments in this country, the movement towards unfettered privatization would be complete. The fact that government is poised on a knife-edge has given a reprieve to many program closures that otherwise would have been implemented. Governments in this context have not been prepared to do other than maintain the status quo, particularly with respect to services for older citizens. These governments face, however, the spectre of noncompliance to free trade agreements to which they have become signatories. They will become hostage to the requirement for global capital to extract profit from all aspects of human activity and without compassion. It is a sad indictment that the needs of citizens have become secondary to the wants of corporations but this is the reality that confronts all Australians as they age less gracefully than otherwise they would have expected. The guarantees of affordable housing for the poor; basic education for all; no-cost tertiary education; financial assistance for those disadvantaged in our society; the aged pension as a stipend for older people and so forth are now lost promises that are as moribund as the retired politicians who concocted the changes. Is this the Australia that our parents and grandparents fought for? Are these the values that blood was shed for? It is somewhat ironic to speak of “values” when we choose to incarcerate children refugees— or any refugees for that matter. At the least, the current debates on dealing with refugees lacks moral fibre on the part of those who endorse such barbaric practices. If we truly desire a valueless and hedonistic society, then so be it – if not, speak out and respond. Become the “community” that you aspire to be.

Executive Director's Annual Report 2015

"Become the 'community' that you aspire to be"

For our part there is no guarantee that government still see a future for independent charitable organisations—if we disagree with their policies no matter how inhumane that are, we may be defunded. If we agree through silence, then we lose the compassion that directed our creation. Regardless, ACRO will continue to provide a voice for those incapable of speaking for themselves.

In review of the previous Financial period I can report the following.

Housing

The threat to our funded supported accommodation program which was alluded to in my last report was averted with continuity of funding being offered to 2018. These properties have had continual use since being provided in acknowledgement of the short-term housing crisis over a three decades ago. It remains the case that an accommodation crisis for those unable to afford private rental persists. It is of some concern that this crisis will be exacerbated with the advent of what is deemed "affordable housing" in place of government owned and operated housing. In reality this is still unaffordable by a large number of our citizens. The disposal of property by government as it moves responsibility for housing to private / community sector and away from itself could, we predict, see an unprecedented rise in homelessness over the next decade. This phenomenon will not be confined, I believe, to younger people but will also capture older citizens unable to transition to affordable aged care. The development of a tiered accreditation process for housing providers will ultimately see the demise of emergency short-term accommodation provided by organisations such as ACRO and the emergence of a profit-driven ethos by those within our sector partnered with private enterprise. I am perplexed by the lack of insight by our political masters in creating a significant problem for future administrators.

In addition to the more general change in direction by government with respect to the nature of services to be delivered into the future (the capital housing program administered by the private / community sector) is the matter of access to this housing by disadvantaged or homeless people. Access, it would appear, is vested with those with employment—it is, in my view, a form of middle class welfare. Whilst a percentage of this housing is to be dedicated to those others

on unstable (or no) income, the reality is that few will ever enter the "marketplace" by virtue of poverty and will live in cars and on the street as they do in the United States or parks as they do in Europe. How much more prudent would it be for the public purse to invest in capital infrastructure (buildings), provide housing for the poor and elderly rather than face the dilemma of rising dysfunction in the community—those who have versus those who do not?

Over the last financial year we have provided 7234 bed-nights for clients in our crisis housing and 44051 bed nights in our short-term housing accommodation. This latter statistic is an almost 200% increase in service delivery over the previous year (23575). In spite of this we were still unable to assist 479 directly with their accommodation need although significant lengths were taken to seek assistance for them from other agencies. Do not believe that there is no accommodation crisis in this country. With rising unemployment and the probability of greater economic constriction leading to further unemployment, homelessness presents as a great challenge for our immediate future.

Welfare

ACRO has received funding from both the state and federal governments for emergency relief. This is the last year when funds from the federal government after several decades. ACRO has now lost access to this funding as a consequence of the implementation of a tendering process. The outcome of this process has seen the number of providers constricted to a handful in Brisbane providing limited emergency relief. We have dealt with over 1695 calls requesting emergency relief and other assistance. This figure is up almost 100% from last year. Of these we have provided cash or in-kind assistance to 338 with a further 394 unable to be assisted and an additional 600 calls engaging community development options. The move to outsource emergency relief to a small number of agencies will discriminate against poor people—particularly as

some of these agencies are not even located in Queensland. The trend to disenfranchise the poor is clear across all government departments. .

Other acknowledgements

We are extremely indebted to many supporters including Lawrence at Department of Housing – Capital and Assets Branch; Department of Housing Area office staff – particularly Chermiside, Inala and Fortitude Valley; Staff from MDA; St Vincent De Paul Settlement Services; Claire from ACTS. For donations to assist families in our housing programs : Anthony Lupi, Sandra Lupi, Louise Redman ,Tina Bonalini, New Farm State school P&C, Ngon and Zoe, Jasper, Sarah Claughton and Katherine Quigley.

We also acknowledge Peter Crompton from the daytripper program who organises raffles for us.

Day Tripper Program

This program continues to grow in popularity with 280 people participating in bus trips throughout South-East Queensland this past year. Thanks to Nancy for her continuing coordination of the program



Dr Clive Begg, Executive Director



ACRO Staff members [above] (L to R) David Licht, Harry McKinnon, Ed Wilson, Ben Green, Jared Taylor, Paul Green, Fiona Begg (L to R [below]) Nancy Pitinga, Julie-Anne Wood, Neil Joseph Jennifer Abdur-Rahman, Graham Kersnovske.

Olga at Shorncliffe

involvement of Melly as our longest serving camp facilitator. Whilst it was not a highly funded project (some \$30,000 per year) and was already heavily subsidised by the organisation, the impact of the loss of this program to the young people it served is not lost on the organisation.

No Interest Loan Scheme (Nils) Program

ACRO issued 15 loans during 2014/15 with 7 repaid in full. There were no defaults and clients from our housing program and home assist programs were beneficiaries for a variety of household items including white goods, TVs and computers.

Student Accommodation

The Executive is considering options for the use of this facility into the future. Use as short-term accommodation for our refugee clients and redevelopment of the site have been canvassed with a decision still pending.

Olga's continues to raise the profile of ACRO within the community and engage more people in our work. It has considerably raised the consciousness of the community to the wide range of social justice issues that confront it. There is merit in having a meeting place that encourages debate and questions traditionally held (or media generated) notions about the way that we live and the way that we treat our neighbours. The provision of fine food is a bonus that draws patrons into the work of ACRO who otherwise would not participate in debate. Whilst being a small change agent, it exists as an avenue for vigorous discussion and modification of views. In this respect Olga's is a social enterprise of merit. I congratulate all those who have contributed to this success including our magnificent staff led by Dominik and including Jeremy, Ashley, Jodie, Tom and Jacquie. I

amongst her range of other duties. We also thank our great volunteers including Sarah, Del, Christina and Faye.

HAS/HACC

During the year the HAS Program has provided 4589 services; 3329 of which were provided by ACRO Service personnel.

In addition we have provided 4219 HACC maintenance services; 2060 of which were delivered by ACRO Service personnel.

As well as providing these services we have undertaken 5676 modifications on behalf of clients. We received 876 referrals from Occupational Therapists for assistance. The significant outcomes that this program provides to older people and people of any age with a disability wanting to remain living independently in their own homes should not be underestimated. By ensuring qualified, reliable tradespeople, assisting with the cost of labour for essential home maintenance and modifications and providing invaluable information to clients about a range of health, safety and security issues, this program value adds significantly to the lives of older people and people with a

disability. Changes to the program that compartmentalise those under and over 65 across both State and Federal governments and the implementation of centralised portal administration has led to increased levels of confusion for our elderly clients and increasing challenges for our staff. In the past geographic boundaries existed for each service. Confusion over service boundaries and differences in service operations between service providers is causing increased delays and, in some cases, duplication of services. The scramble for clients by new private services in competition with existing services (including our own) will only confuse our clients more. At the time of this Report future funding for this program is undecided.

Youth Camps

After almost 20 years funds to continue this project were withdrawn this year. The Executive has agreed to self-fund a limited number of camps in the coming year. ACRO is grateful for the efforts of a number of outstanding young people who have acted as camp facilitators over the years. They have proven to be outstanding role models for their young charges. We particularly note the

Below: Olga's at Shorncliffe Staff (L to R) Jodie, Ashley, Jeremy, Dominik, Jacqui. Insert: Tom; Absent: Emmett



Left: DayTripper participants enjoying a cup of tea and lunch at a Strawberry Farm excursion during the year.