

Executive Director's Annual Report 2014

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Dr Clive Begg, Executive Director

chosen to pursue the disenfranchisement of the disadvantaged in our society. Public servants have been willing to cut and paste from failed British programs and implement them here in Australia and others have been only too willing to import the draconian American ethos of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps by stripping social services. Government Ministers, it seems, are only too

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willing to enable their public service to continue this practice without intervention. To borrow and reapply former Prime Minister Paul Keating's image, the most vulnerable Australians are being left to swing in the breeze like a rotting carcass. If you remove the advocacy of volunteer nongovernmental organisations, there is nobody to cut down (let alone revive) the suffering body. There is always hope that common sense will prevail but I have to say that hope is fading. We, the people, are the arbiters of good citizenship – not the politicians and certainly not the profiteers. We, the people, must reject the assumption that we do not care for those amongst us who are struggling and in trouble. We, the people, have an obligation placed upon us by virtue of our citizenship to protect the poor, the frail and the disadvantaged.

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

Housing

In addition to our four SAAP properties, and by utilising a variety of housing programs, ACRO has been able to greatly enhance our ability to provide short-term housing and assistance to the many homeless people who are presenting to the organisation.

Unfortunately It is becoming increasingly apparent that the SAAP Program (our supported accommodation project that has been in existence in various forms since 1983) may be under threat of defunding early in the new financial year. The "rationalisation" by the neoliberalists that saw our Community Development position defunded in the previous financial period and which follows on from previous funding losses that saw our administrative capacity greatly reduced will lead to further regretta-

ble consequences for those who depend upon ACRO for their day to day existence.

In addition we are contending with new rules for housing clients that are making it more and more difficult for disadvantaged people to access affordable low cost housing in Queensland. The groundwork is being laid by government decision-making for development of a new underclass in Australia. Some may find this acceptable—but ACRO does not.

Over the last financial year we have provided 7100 bed-nights for clients in our SAAP housing and 23575 bed nights in our short-term housing accommodation.

In addition we have received over 500 housing related calls to which our Staff have provided assistance. In summary, the future for housing services that capture real need within the community is in doubt.

Welfare

ACRO has received funding from both the state and federal governments for emergency relief. We have received over 900 calls requesting emergency relief and other assistance. Of these we have provided cash or in-kind assistance to 360 with almost 1000 calls engaging community development options. Clearly there is a surplus demand placed upon our meagre resources. There is the suggestion that future Emergency Relief funds will be contracted to larger organisations operating from a centralised hub. We remain uncertain as to whether this method is the best for the clients that we deal with—many of whom experience a number of barriers to seeking assistance including language and mobility and access issues.

Other acknowledgements

We are extremely indebted to many supporters including the Rotary Club of Toowong who provide free movie tickets annually for families in our crisis accommodation; our volunteers, particularly Fay, Christina and Del;

Other Community Organisations and public servants with whom we work in partnership to assist clients in particular staff from Multicultural Development Association (MDA) especially Lailah; the Department of Housing area office staff particularly the Inala and Chermiside offices; Kylie and staff from the Community Place; Claire from ACTS; St Vincent De Paul Settlement Services staff (Goodna) in particular Simon and Rebecca; Lawrence from the Portfolio Management area of the Department of Housing and Public Works and the many generous donors through the Givit Website. As you can see, ACRO has forged important partnerships in order to achieve positive outcomes for our clients.

The majority of clients in ACRO supported accommodation crisis housing program received offers of public rental housing within a three – six month period from the department of housing. This is an outstanding achievement and we acknowledge the Department of Housing.



Day Tripper Program

This program continues to grow in popularity with 309 people partici-



Daytripper participants on a Brisbane River Cruise during the year.



ACRO Staff members (L to R back) David Licht, Harry McKinnon, Ed Wilson, Ben Green, Jared Taylor, Paul Green, (L to R front) Fiona Begg, Jennifer Abdur-Rahman, Tina Porter, Eddie Kempe. Insert: Graham Kersnovske, Nancy Pitinga.

pating in bus trips throughout South-East Queensland this past year. Thanks to Nancy for her continuing coordination of the program amongst her range of other duties. We also thank our great volunteers.

HAS/HACC

During the year the HAS Program has provided 4536 services; 3409 of which were provided by ACRO Service personnel.

In addition we have provided 3637 HACC maintenance services; 2191 of which were delivered by ACRO Service personnel.

As well as providing these services we have undertaken 1447 modifications on behalf of clients. We received 878 referrals to 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. There remains a question mark over the future of this program as well. New government priorities and their concern for the cost to

the payer of the ageing population will undoubtedly lead to less benevolence and more user-pay for older citizens.

Youth Camps

25 Young people took part in the camps this year with camps undertaken during school holidays.



No Interest Loan Scheme (Nils) Program

ACRO issued nine loans during the year to a value of \$9380 to clients from our housing program and home assist programs for a variety of household items including white goods, TVs and computers. No repayment defaults have been recorded since we commenced the Program in 2012

and to date 10 loans have been completed.

Student Accommodation

The accommodation at Sandgate Road has now been successfully operated for almost two years. It provides the dual outcomes of income generation and accommodation for international students.

Olgas at Shorncliffe

Olga's has been working towards profitability and it is noted that significant increases in clientele and trading have been registered this past year. Whilst profit is not the cornerstone of a social enterprise, the vacuum being created from withdrawal of government funding requires organisations such as ACRO to reach out into the community for support in undertaking its important work. In time Olga's will provide the supplementary funding to enable the continuity of important social programs. We thank Olga's clients for their ongoing support and for their many financial donations. We also acknowledge the work of our Staff in maintaining the high standards required in

Below: Olga's at Shorncliffe Staff (L to R) Prue, Jodie, Dominik, Tom and Jeremy. Insert: Emily and Ashley



hospitality. I particularly note the efforts of Dominik, Jeremy, Ashley and our juniors Emily, Tom, Jodie, Sami, Prue and Jacque. We continue to provide a quality product as evidenced by our reviews on Facebook, Urbanspoon (91%) and TripAdvisor (Number 1 in the area).



Halloween at Olga's

Challenges.

This year marks 50 Years of operation for ACRO. Over the past decades the organization has evolved from a Prisoner Aid organization to a Social Justice organization but always has been concerned with the difficulties experienced by marginalized people – refugees, the homeless, prisoners and their families, the elderly, the young and other economically disadvantaged people. This longevity is an outstanding achievement for an independent Charity such as this. It is hard to believe that it has been 30 years since I started my association with ACRO. What started out as a short-term option quickly developed into a passion and career choice. During this time I have been privileged to work with many hundreds of colleagues committed to social justice. I have been honoured to work with a succession of brilliant Man-