

Executive Director's Report 2007



Achieving Social Justice

For the first time in 43 years, ACRO will, after this Financial Year, not have a working relationship with the Queensland Government's Corrective Services Department in the delivery or implementation of services for prisoners. The cessation of our historical bus services and its related family services on 30 June mean that a succession of services designed to reintegrate offenders back into the community upon completion of a custodial sentence are ended. These services have included:

"Jeays Street – Bowen Hills" (1966-1981) later to become "Catherine House" later to become "Dickson Street - Woolloowin" (1981-1992) – a halfway house for released persons;

"Charley's Place - Annerley" – a halfway house for released persons;

"Home Detention Program" – which provided accommodation for those who didn't have alternative community arrangements (Charley's Place; Warmington Street; Rose Blank House; Halcyon House; Ashgrove);

"Warmington Street - Paddington" – a halfway house in Brisbane for currently serving prisoners on home detention or release to work;

"Rose Blank House - Cairns" – a halfway house in Cairns for currently serving prisoners on home detention or release to work;

"Halcyon House - Rockhampton" – a halfway house in Rockhampton for currently

serving prisoners on home detention or release to work;

"ACRO JobClub - Wacol" – an ex-prisoner specific work preparation program that boasted the highest placement rate in the country when operating;

"ACRO Resettlement Program – Brisbane Correctional Centre, Wacol, Moreton" – operated from within the prison designed to prepare long-serving offenders for release;

"ACRO Family Centre" – operated at Annerley and Wacol for the families of prisoners (1986-2007). This service is being remodelled to meet new demands from this client grouping;

"ACRO Bus Shuttle" – providing transport services for prisoners' families between the Family Centre and prisons in the Wacol precinct (1989-2007).

In fairness it should be said that others have received token funding – by comparison with their interstate counterparts – in the delivery of highly selective services. The "out of sight, out of mind" mentality in prisons has most definitely cycled by yet again. This will disadvantage the community with ill-equipped and potentially bitter ex-offenders released back into the community without suitable support.

The advent of the latest repressive cycle in corrections is predictable. History demonstrates vacillation between models of "containment" versus "rehabilitation" based upon

the auctioning by competing political interests. The failure of non-interventionist strategies by the present government will resonate at some point in the future when the militaristic model fails to deliver safety for the community with unsupported people released from our prisons. Governments should be mindful of the fact that prisoners do eventually return back into the community.

The severance of relationship between Corrective Services and this organisation does afford us the opportunity to revitalise a primary role in corrections – that of advocacy. For too long we have been constrained in our criticism of government policy in order not to jeopardise the meagre funds made available to this constituency. The important critiques of an oppressive system that witnessed the advent of the Bredhauer, Longlands and Kennedy Reviews and the significant reforms that flowed from them find no current equivalence. This will change.

On a happier note, ACRO has provided quality services to our various other constituents across a range of activities. Our Camp Program for young people continues to flourish and our services for older Queenslanders grows in strength with highly positive outcomes. We also expanded our portfolio of activity back in the high school arena with the design and oversight of a project partnering the Meals on Wheels organisation with Everton Park

Executive Members and Key Staff

Ian Stewart, Chairperson

Stephanie Whelan, Secretary

Chris Stewart, Treasurer

Clive Begg, Executive Director

Fiona Begg, Programs Coordinator

Ashley Reid, Program Administrator

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Dr Clive Begg, ACRO Executive Director

State High School which was rewarded with a Federal acknowledgement. This year also saw the organisation relocate from the City to the suburbs to be more closely aligned with our major client base. In reviewing the year across our major service areas I am happy to report the following:

School Holidays Recreation Program

The School Holidays Recreation Program offers residential and non residential experiences for young people aged 12 -15 years. There have been approximately 8-9 participants at each of the six programs run during school holidays. A high proportion of these young people have been from indigenous and non English speaking backgrounds (Photo below).

Funded by the Department of Communities, this project has received recurrent funding for the next three years. Having operated successfully since 1999 and facilitated by two females under 25 with social science backgrounds, the program has grown with highly successful outcomes for participants.



to pursue bigger and better prisons at the expense of community based support, education and programs, ACRO will pursue a strategy of an increased advocacy role for and behalf of prisoners and their families. A strategic planning meeting will be held later this year to develop future structures incorporating this approach.

Offender Services

ACRO was funded by the Department of Corrective Services to provide assistance to released inmates from the Arthur Gorrie and Woodford Correctional Centres. Services contracted by the Department included: Assistance accessing ID require-

Staff throughout the program this year have been : Shannon Huber, Melly Niotakis, Julz Cottone, with ongoing support from Aisha Damali from the Department of Communities.

Wacol Family Centre

Some 4,500 clients accessed services through the family centre during the year.

Several new volunteers commenced work at the centre and we thank both these and



our established volunteers for their efforts and ongoing commitment. A thank you dinner for family centre staff and volunteers was held to mark the end of the service after 18 years of consistent quality service. (Photo above).

ments; Assistance accessing Accommodation; and, Assistance accessing welfare services. 298 services were provided to inmates currently incarcerated or exiting correctional centres. By far the most requests were received for assistance with accessing birth certificates and ACRO paid for and sourced birth certificates for inmates across every Australian State and a number of overseas countries including England and New Zealand. This service enabled inmates to establish bank accounts and meet Centrelink requirements to ensure regular income upon release.

In addition ACRO attended regular meetings of the Community Advisory Committee at Arthur Gorrie CC to represent issues affecting inmates and their families.

DCS advertised tenders in March for transport for families and revised offender services based on providing pre release program support in prisons across the state. ACRO tendered and heard nothing by end of financial year with the existing contracted time expiring. 4,782 passengers were carried by the bus in the 06/07 financial year.

In July ACRO learnt from a media article quote from the Minister that Prison Transport Group had taken over the transport service. The department has provided no direct advice as to what organisations received funding for what services and therefore limited referrals are now possible. ACRO continues to receive ongoing requests from inmates, chaplains and other support services for transport and offender services particularly our birth certificate service to inmates. The organisation will undertake an ongoing support role for families of prisoners through emergency relief and housing support. In light of the Department's decision

Accommodation Services

Supported Accommodation services funded through the Department of Communities accounted for **5183 bed nights of accommodation** being provided to families and individuals. These services were enabled via the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP).

Community networks have expanded during the year to enhance support services for humanitarian refugee families accommodated by the organisation

A considerable number of tenants case managed throughout the year were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including Sudan, Vietnam and Afghanistan. A family support day was held during the year with families accommo-

dated in ACRO housing invited to visit Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary (Photo right). This initiative proved to be very popular with all families and is planned as an annual event. Three babies were welcomed into the world by families accommodated by ACRO during the year.

The addition of several additional properties provided throughout this financial year by the Department of Housing's short term head lease program was very beneficial to clients of the organisation with **an additional 5230 bed nights** of accommodation

able to be provided to families in need. Although the properties are now required to be returned to the Department for public housing stock the organisation and our clients are most grateful for the opportunities this program provided. It is unfortunate that in the current housing crisis environment in Brisbane that we are unable to expand our current affordable housing stock. The most notable trend in ACRO's housing program over the last twelve months has been the in-



for this is that short term housing programs such as ACRO provides have limited vacancies as options for tenants seeking exit options are decreasing. It also requires additional staff time and resources to be targeted towards assisting clients to access the private rental market.

The One Social Housing System put in place by the Department of Housing over the past twelve months is yet to provide, it appears, any positive outcomes for clients seeking housing as referrals increase but affordable housing options to date appear to have seen no improvement for clients contacting our service. ACRO tenants currently on Wait lists for public housing have been advised of a minimum of 4-7 year wait periods depending upon areas nominated. Prisoners exiting correctional centres have also reported being advised that exiting a prison does not qualify them for priority housing status with the Department. Many clients who have been incarcerated or very transient have also reported that they are no longer on the housing department wait list due to the new systems put in place where people were removed from the wait list if they did not respond to written notices.

Welfare Assistance

grand son Noah and Frank's grand son Brayden.

During the year a fire at a storage facility at Sherwood impacted significantly on ACRO. This was the facility where the majority of organisational records were stored—all of which was lost, including important documentation required by law to be retained for seven years. This loss will impact into our future.

Services for Older People

As one of the first Home Assist Secure services established in Queensland this program continues to assist a growing number of older people and people with disabilities within the Stafford/Wavell project area.

and an additional part time carpenter – Matt Broe. These additional members of the team have value added greatly to the program throughout the year and we acknowledge their role in service delivery and increased outcomes for clients. It was with deep sadness therefore that we report the death of Geoff Hewitt who generously provided his time and expertise to our Home Assist clients and whose friendly demeanour and jovial manner will be missed by all at ACRO and the Home assist clients.

In closing, I acknowledge the contributions by our various government supporters including the Department of Communities,

Over 300 individuals and families were assisted during the year through emergency relief payments including food assistance and financial payments for rent relief, gas and electricity payments. Many of these families received a voucher as part of the annual Christmas project. The voucher is available to families of prisoners and enables them to purchase either food or goods such as toys prior to Christmas. In addition funds were provided to inmates to gain access to their birth certificates to assist them to establish a bank account on release to attain continued access to centrelink payments after their release.

A considerable number of clients accessed staff and volunteers also seeking information, advocacy services and appropriate referrals with over fourteen hundred contacts received through head office and the family centre.

Other Programs and Initiatives

1. ACRO involvement with Everton Park State High school and Stafford Meals on Wheels project results in Evaluation document being undertaken by ACRO, program received favourable mention in Federal Parliament and program nominated for Prime Ministers Business Partnership

Funded through the Department of Housing this program provided over 4000 services to clients during the year in relation to health and safety issues in their home. As a service designed to assist people to maintain their independence through assisting them with home maintenance and minor modifications this program enhances the quality of life for a wide range of clients in the community. Over the past year the Department provided additional funding to enable eligible clients to receive free water saving showers and free smoke alarms to assist clients to meet new legislative requirements.

An additional 2276 services were provided to clients through the Home and Community Care (HACC) funding which ACRO receives from Queensland Health. Most of

Queensland Health, the Department of Corrective Services and the Department of Housing. I also thank our Executive Members, Ian, Chris and Stephanie for their tireless efforts in overseeing the management of ACRO. Thanks are also extended to all our workers who continue to meet the rigorous demands placed upon them.

Awards 2007 (Photo above).

2. Camp facilitators had the opportunity to undertake program development training through the Outlook Outdoor Education program at Boonah

3. ACRO successfully applied for assis-



tance with rates relief on our SAAP properties through the BCC Community Support Funding Program

4. Staff and volunteers were provided opportunity to update First Aid certification

5. Several new "ACRO babies" were born during the year and we welcome Dale's daughter Rebekah, Matt's baby Daniel, Graham's grand daughter Mackenzie, Ed's

this funding is dedicated to installing grabrails, ramps, chair and bed raisers and other minor modifications which enable both older people and people of any age with a disability to remain living in their homes for as long as they choose. Staff work closely with occupational therapists through community health centres and hospitals to assist people being discharged from hospital and also to help prevent admissions to hospital through falls prevention. 500 referrals were received from Occupation Therapists during the year generating over 1000 jobs. As at July 2007 the program has 8500 active clients on our data base.

The program was fortunate to secure the skills of two volunteers this year - Frank Koopal and Geoff Hewitt (pictured below)





ACRO People

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(Above Left to Right) Matt, Graham, Ed, Geoff and Frank



Above. Matt



Above. Dale



Ashley



Jennifer



Fiona



Stephanie



Ian



Chris