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ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE

ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT 2011



Highlights for 2011

DayTripper Program for older citizens funded by Unity Trust

ACRO Gallery Successes

Working with Refugees

Future Plans

Housing Projects

Home Maintenance Projects

ACRO stands with those whose life choices have been significantly curtailed as a result of persecution and intolerance.



It has become a prerequisite for ACRO as a change agent to constantly evolve in response to community need. We hear a lot about "community" and there would be as many definitions of the concept as there are citizens who constitute one. In reality we collectively comprise many communities that merge into one society. The ability for these subsets of our society to integrate into the whole is governed by the degree of tolerance and genuine resolve by all constituent members to absorb difference and blend culture. ACRO represents many communities whose interests are diverse and dynamic. They include our older citizens, our younger citizens and our emerging citizens. Our charter has embraced the needs of younger and older citizens for over twenty years. The projects that we undertake for our elderly clients via the Home and Community Care and Home Assist Secure programs have genuinely and positively impacted on the lives of many. Our Daytripper project has made considerable impact to reduce the social isolation felt by many older people lonely in our suburbs. A generous Grant by Unity Trust to advance the Daytripper endeavours will strengthen this program during 2012. Similarly our work with

young people has enabled those who otherwise would not have access to opportunity to broaden their horizons. We are proud of the accomplishments that our younger citizens involved in our youth activities have made in their adult lives, particularly as they relate to social justice and community endeavour. Our work in corrections and crime prevention in the past enabled protective responses and awareness of the social factors that lead to crime which we believe have influenced policies that address social inequality, thereby reducing levels of criminal behaviour. Over recent years ACRO has developed a persona on behalf of emerging citizens – refugees and those escaping intolerable circumstances in their homelands. The unnecessary debate on how to process refugees is tarnishing Australia's reputation for fairness. I say unnecessary as it would seem that the vast majority of Australians support refugees and understand the obligation that Australia has within the world community. As with others I grieve that principle has become the measure of last resort in terms of on-shore / off-shore processing of refugees. ACRO stands with those whose life choices have been significantly curtailed as a result of persecution and intolerance. We have



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ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated

P O Box 440
LUTWYCHE Q 4030
07 32 62 6001 phone
07 32 56 0227 fax
www.acro.com.au
acro@acro.com.au

A PUBLIC BENEVOLENT INSTITUTION
ARBN 066 875 107 ABN 21 066 875 107

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ACRO GALLERY

THE ART OF COMMUNITY

ACRO Gallery was set up in response to a clearly identified need for a community space in which aspiring artists could demonstrate and display their talents. ACRO became aware that many galleries in Brisbane were cost-prohibitive for many artists. The shopfront at Clayfield had become vacant and a decision was made to convert the space into an Art Gallery. The first use of the facility was to launch ACRO's photo exhibit and book "One to One" in October 2010. Launched by Tim Nicholls, Member for Clayfield and Opposition Treasurer, the event was highly successful. Since that time several exhibitions have been held by various artists. We have worked collaboratively with Access Arts to provide a venue for those who otherwise would not be able to do so. The Gallery has established a relationship with an art collective in Santiago, Chile and we are hoping for reciprocal arrangements that will benefit artists from both countries.



Executive Director's Annual Report 2011

"I grieve that principle has become the measure of last resort"

"IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO SEEK OUT REPLACEMENT TO GOVERNMENT GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES"

assigned resource towards our emerging citizens and will participate in community-based accommodation and support processes for them as this is what our forebears would have expected as they escaped their own persecution elsewhere to become Australian citizens.

Of course we do not do any of this work in a vacuum as there are many change agents and concerned citizens whose contributions value-add to the tapestry of community development. I have raised my concerns over several years about the fracturing of our nongovernmental sector as a consequence of Free Trade Agreements which will remove, over time, the responsibility for social welfare, health and education from the government purview. There is no evidence that this privatisation process will benefit those in need as our colleagues in the Americas and Europe have found. Regardless, the process is in train and each year more NGOs close their doors. ACRO has successfully trialled – and will continue to innovate – in the field of private enterprise fundraising. It is important for us to seek out replacement to government grants and subsidies in order that we can continue to meet our charitable charter. This will not be an easy process as the skills required can sometimes be outside our comfort zone and funding strictures can mitigate against such engagements

however to do nothing would be at the peril of this and other organisations.

As always I am indebted to the talents and patience of our Executive Members, Members, Staff and Volunteers. I am also grateful for the considerable support of government agencies in providing the recurrent funding to undertake our work. With you I look forward to another productive year in the service of those communities we support.

FUTURE PLANS

Over several years the Executive Committee has discussed the development of additional housing options for homeless people and a social isolation facility for older people. A plan was considered to redevelop the Clayfield site to incorporate short-term accommodation in tandem with refurbished office accommodation, the ACRO Gallery and a social isolation unit. Unfortunately we have been unsuccessful in obtaining permission of our neighbours for an easement which would be a requirement to achieve a Building Permit from the Brisbane City Council. After much deliberation it has been decided to find another property to purchase as both office accommodation and community development space incorporating facilities for older citizens. This plan would see the Clayfield property revert to flats (its original function) specially for refugee and migrant people



Dr Clive Begg, Executive Director in crisis. The ACRO Gallery would remain at the front of these flats.

PROGRAM REVIEW HOUSING

The availability of Public Housing in Queensland continues to be a problem. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that the movement of people from other parts of the country to Queensland has slowed (and may be reversing), there is still a chronic housing shortage in the State. The more fashionable movement to affordable housing requires those who would be beneficiaries to have a stable income, whilst those who are unemployed and homeless have few options available to them as rents sky-rocket. ACRO has been supported in its work for the homeless and has accessed government owned housing for the purpose. At some point in the future ACRO may need to consider joint-venturing with others in the provision of its own housing stock along the lines as proposed for Clayfield. Our four properties providing short-term supported accommodation (3–6 months) have provided some 5000 bed nights during the year. More importantly, an increased number of our accommodated families obtained public housing as a direct result of advocacy by ACRO staff. Our medium-term housing (6 months or more) achieved a similar outcome demonstrating a higher level of productive working relationships between the Departmental area offices. Our eight properties for medium-term accommodation provided 10132 bed nights of accommodation during the



year.

Overall ACRO increased its bed nights of accommodation by almost 3000. Unfortunately we were unable to meet requests for housing from 561 families with unmet need on the increase.

MAINTENANCE SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

These services continued to grow over the past year with 770 new clients being registered with the programs. 3281 jobs were completed under the Home Assist Secure program and 3875 minor maintenance jobs were undertaken under the Home and Community Care program. In addition, a further 1253 minor modifications were completed (ramps, grabrails and bathroom modifications) which enabled older people and those with disabilities to remain living independently in their own homes. The program also processed 800 referrals from occupational therapists.

EMERGENCY RELIEF AND WELFARE SUPPORT

ACRO assisted over 475 individuals and families during the year with emergency relief payments towards rent, utilities payments and food. As a result of the floods earlier this year there was an increase in requests for assistance and this was recognized by the federal government who provided additional funding to meet increased demand. ACRO continues its annual Christmas appeal with assistance to over 160 families receiving a Woolworths gift card.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Stafford Community Development Group of which ACRO is a member was unable to secure on-

going funding. In spite of losing its community development worker the five organisations representing the group have continued to meet and, with resource limits, address identified community development needs. The group determined to produce a targeted resource directory to assist householders in Stafford and surrounding areas. ACRO enlisted the services of a placement student, Lora Warman, who applied herself to the considerable task of identifying a number of key service providers in the region who could assist local people. ACRO is grateful for a donation from some local Sisters of Mercy which was used for printing of the final booklet. In addition some local politicians have been approached to make the publication available to residents. An electronic version will also be made available to local service providers including Centrelink, Department of Communities/Housing Services and so forth.

DAYTRIPPER PROGRAM

Between July 2010 and June 2011 343 people participated in trips covering a significant area of South-East Queensland including Mt Tambourine, Boonah Winery, St Helena Island, Bribie Island, Maleny and Government House in Brisbane. We gratefully acknowledge the commitment of our volunteers Christina, Del and Fay who have graciously "hosted" the monthly trips and ensured everyone has a lovely day. We also acknowledge the work of staff member Nancy Pitinga who took over the program from Ashley and Norma. We are also grateful for the Grant received from the Australian Unity Foundation which will ensure the viability of the program in 2012. ACRO Program Manager Fiona Begg with Australian Unity Foundation Chairman Alan Castleman and ACRO Management Committee Member and Secretary



Stephanie Whelan (pictured above right) at the Grants ceremony in Melbourne during the year.

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS YOUTH CAMPS

After celebrating its 10th year of operation in 2010 this program continues to provide some beautiful experiences for both the young people who participate and the committed staff who facilitate the program. Like the older members of our community who participate in our Day Tripper program, the young people who take part in our school holidays programs report gaining so much from the opportunities provided through this recreational based program. Whether camping at Stradbroke Island, canoeing up the Noosa river or doing a hip hop dance workshop, these young people embrace every chance to try something new and value the time spent together in friendship. Each school holiday time our facilitators Melly and Jules pack up the van and head off with eight to ten young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, to embrace the great outdoors. Like the Day Tripper program, all participants want to go again and again and it is a tribute to the program that the facilitators secretly tell me this is their favourite job of all time.

NEW STAFF

We are pleased to welcome new Staff to the work of ACRO.

ACRO Staff members (L to R) Ed Wilson, Ben Green, Nancy Pitinga, Paul Green, Harry McKinnon, Graham Kersnovske

Paul Green commenced work with us during the year in the role of HAS Handyman. Although not technically new staff, Nancy Pitinga assumed a permanent part-time position with us as Administrative Support as does Melly Niotakis (pictured below) who is now working permanent part-time as our Housing Support Worker. Again I thank the volunteers for their tireless work. In particular I acknowledge Frank Koopal who has notched up five years of continuous service with ACRO. Thank you Frank!



KNOWING ME KNOWING YOU

This social justice photography project was undertaken by ACRO in 2010. Engaging young people from refugee backgrounds under the creative tutelage of photographer Melly Niotakis has continued to shine across Brisbane during 2011. The photographs produced through this dynamic project have toured through Brisbane City Council libraries and other community-based venues. In the future the photographs will be hung in ACRO supported accommodation facilities as an enduring legacy of the outstanding work accomplished by these young people.

Clive Begg, Executive Director.