

# The Face of ACRO, 2019



**Top Row:** Carpenter David Vincenzi; Field Officer Paul Green; Carpenter Glenn Bailey; Plumber David Licht; Carpenter Jared Taylor; Accounts Manager Neil Joseph; Housing Worker Emily Drew (absent); Construction Manager Ben Green; **Bottom Row:** Programs Manager Fiona Begg; Occupational Therapist Kristine Eyles; Administration Worker Anneliess Law; Occupational Therapist Helen Uhlmann; HAS Administration Worker Jennifer Jones; **Left:** Daytripper Coordinator Sarah Green.



**Left:** Executive Committee Members Ian Stewart, Chairperson; Stephanie Whelan, Secretary; Chris Stewart, Treasurer.



place in the event of funding loss;

3. Action Plans have been devised for implementation as necessary.

#### 4.0 Action to Date:

- Bonney Avenue is under contract to be sold in the new financial year;
- Sandgate Road will be redeveloped to enable an open community space and three units of emergency accommodation. This will also be the potential site for Office Relocation post 2022. Construction should be completed by 2020;
- Literature Review nearing completion on

ageing in place options with recommendations for future action to follow;

- In the event that funding contracts continue post 2022/23, the status quo at Finsbury Park will be maintained, otherwise an additional asset realignment will be necessary.

#### Acknowledgements

The reality for the nongovernmental sector is that there is no future without the concern and care of generous citizens who freely give of their time and energy to ensure continuity of service. ACRO has been privileged to have been supported by some outstanding people

since its inception in 1965. Almost from that time, Ian Stewart has been involved as an active volunteer. He has been involved with Management Committees since my commencement in 1984 and for most of the period since has been ACRO's Chairperson and mentor. We, as Staff, are deeply indebted to Ian for his considerable contributions. I am also privileged to work with Stephanie Whelan and Chris Stewart who, with Ian, comprise our Executive Committee. They have guided us through many challenging times without fear and applied their considerable energies and skill to ensuring our continued growth and development. Again, this past year, they have ensured the smooth and accountable maintenance of the organisation.

The organisation can only be as determined and strong as its Staff. With Fiona, Neil, Ben, Glenn, David, Paul, Jared, Emily, Sarah, Jennifer and Anneliess we have a team that is exceptional. On behalf of the membership I thank them for their dedication and trust.

#### The Future

Speculating about the future is always fraught with inherent danger. Importantly, the systemic changes that are influencing the landscape for disadvantaged people will demand that organisations like ACRO survive and grow. We have a collective mindset as Members and Staff to ensure the viability of our services albeit, perhaps, from a different perspective to that which we have adopted in the past. We have an obligation to provide a voice of reason when many others appear to be stuck in the rut of false information and venomous banter. We are a research organisation as much as a deliverer of services and we have a moral obligation to challenge the misinformed who seek to negatively influence citizens through bigoted and prejudicial commentary.

I wish all our clients, Staff, Members and supporters a prosperous 2020. I urge governments to be proactive and caring in their policy-making on behalf of Australian citizens.



*Whilst acknowledging the plight of the working poor, there is an equally urgent need to house those who are not working and who are desperately poor.*

There are recurring themes in my Annual Reports that you would think would disappear over time. Like a checklist or shopping list you would imagine that, with enough discussion and sufficient resolve, you could slowly count each item as collected as completed and move on. Nothing could be less true when it comes to social justice. Our catchphrase of "achieving social justice" is an ideal. The truth is that social inequality is like an infinite loop that leads back upon itself and never appears to resolve. The more one works in the social justice area the more it tends to feel like a Groundhog Day phenomenon. Each year I review progress on a range of social issues and I come up wanting when I try to put something, anything, in the shopping basket of life as being done and dusted. It's like a shortage of a particular product in the supermarket. You want it; it is fundamental to a recipe; it has intrinsic worth; it is just one of many ingredients that make the recipe work – but you just can't find it. When it was there you are indifferent but when it is gone it is tragic. Social justice is like that, but regrettably becomes a privilege rather than an intrinsic right. Sometimes, you always had privilege like being white and middle class; other times it evolves over time and in response to many voices, like a referendum to enable a basic human right to indigenous people as voters or same sex partners rights as couples. Other times it was just never there and may never be – having a job, not having a job; being poor, not being poor; being a man, not a woman; being a refugee, not being a refugee; having a home, not having a home; living in a democracy. You get my drift.

I once quipped that our work would, over time, become redundant when social justice needs were ultimately accomplished. But that dogged infinity loop just swings by like a pendulum and back again and the need for organisations such as ours persists. It is easy to become disillusioned or disheartened but, on the contrary, I am heartened as I know that there are genuine people in my community who care and who shape their lives around positive principles and action rather than pathetic rhetoric. These are people who care for their fellow citizens and are not swayed by populist or extreme sentiment that engenders fear and mistrust. Truthfully, there will always be those who have more than others and still others who have enormously more than the rest. It is the nature of capitalism. Don't get me wrong – there are wins. The problem lies with the shifting sand that we all stand upon. There are undoubtedly insoluble problems that exist in our world like certain diseases and genetic anomalies. However there are also problems that could have been solved but that, through inaction and neglect, may prove now to be beyond repair. The manmade climate crisis confronting our world is an example. However, the vast majority of problems confronting civilization can find resolution given the right mix of determination and compassion, including the alleviation of poverty, housing all people, providing food and potable water to all.

I have formed the view that social justice in the First World, as a set of principles, is a continuum which hinges upon the access that citizens have to the collective wealth of their community. At one end of the scale are those for whom access has been historically denied and at the other are those who expropriate far more than they could ever consume. The mass in the middle progressively shrink and fall to the lower category as

the rich take more and more. Mediating the process are the minders that either try to equalize economic relations or who reward privilege to the disadvantage of the majority. We could, euphemistically, refer to these minders as "politicians". We could, again euphemistically, Now, refer to this process of administration as "democracy". Perhaps I am being overly cynical but, sadly, I think not. I look at the great philosophers over the centuries that have guided us to our present economic and social systems and despair that their great (commonly shared) ideals for equality, fairness and empathy have been corrupted beyond all recognition.

There are compelling arguments for a social revolution but this requires all citizens to become actively engaged at a grass roots level and leaves no room for complacency and apathy. In the last year (and in several decades before this) we have witnessed the evidence of neglect canvassed at several Royal Commissions of both our government and our institutions against the most vulnerable in our community. As citizens we have a responsibility to hold our elected representatives - people who represent us, and the institutions, established to serve the community, to account. Not to do so is an abrogation of our responsibility as citizens. If we do not engage now at all levels with our government and our institutions we will witness, over the next decade, a large numbers of older citizens mercilessly exploited and left to become the elderly poor. There will be dramatically reduced opportunity for all as services continue to be outsourced to unregulated profiteers that are given control over vital public services such as healthcare, education, utilities, welfare safety nets and so forth. We cannot afford to wait as the seeds of this new social reality unfold with our administrators becoming more authoritarian. We need to embrace social justice considerations and human rights for all as a nonnegotiable social contract and reset our priorities to reflect this as a community and engage with our representatives and institutions on this basis. We live in a reality of shrinking resources and clear evidence of social justice and humanitarian abuse. Social justice and human rights must be placed at the centre of community expectations. A fundamental federal Bill of Rights and treaty arrangements with indigenous Australians and a less cynical approach to refugees might step us in a better direction. It is sobering to read the interim report from the Royal Commission into Aged Care the findings of which are possibly best summed up in the title "Neglect". We simply need to do better and to do better we must all engage. I remain optimistic.

At the risk of being accused of returning to those recurring themes I spoke of in the beginning, I now turn my attention to the delivery of services by ACRO over this past financial period.

#### Housing Services

ACRO has provided emergency housing options for Queensland citizens in crisis since 1975 and has enjoyed the patronage of State and Federal agencies in the delivery of these services since this time. There has been a major service review ongoing by the



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# Executive Director's Annual Report 2019

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Federal and State governments into future arrangements in the provisioning of these services. As noted in previous Reports, the privatization of historically government sponsored services has been progressing over several years. The advent of free market agreements and the strictures that foreign governments place upon domestic arrangements in the operation of enterprises that operate for profit is incapacitating the Welfare State and denuding the nongovernmental sector. The provision of government owned housing for disadvantaged people is not immune from this process. We have witnessed the development of a tiered accreditation process some time back to move housing stock owned by the State into the hands of privateers. I have already been critical of the view that "bigger is better", that larger organisations are better situated to meet the housing needs of those in crisis. I remain unconvinced that the warehousing of the poor implicit to this logic is an acceptable way to go. Undoubtedly it meets the government agenda in that they only have to deal with a limited number of service providers thereby reducing the impost (and liability) upon them bureaucratically. However, the abrogation of social responsibility is not something to applaud. The replacement of concern for those truly disadvantaged within our community in favor of middle-class welfare is reprehensible and politically motivated. Providing opportunity for low wage earners through affordable housing options is commendable but it must never be at the expense of support for those without resources. Whilst acknowledging the plight of the working poor, there is an equally urgent need to house those who are not working and on low fixed incomes. In adopting the American or UK models in the manner we are, we are laying the seeds for social dissent and social dislocation. I, for one, do not relish the thought of increasing numbers of people living in tents in parks or in cars parked by the side of streets. This is not the Australia that I grew up in. Access to opportunity should be the right for all, not just for some.

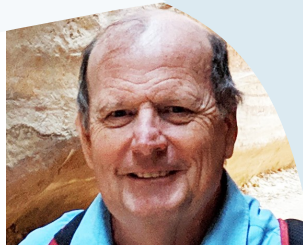
As reported last year ACRO was compelled to relinquish a number of Head Lease properties back to the Department due to a new compliancy regime under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing Providers. This created significant hardship for those housed in this accommodation as they scrambled to find alternative arrangements. We are grateful for the support of other Agencies in assisting with this significant rehousing task. It remains a mystery to me how some within government ranks can be creative and caring and others inflexible and indifferent.

We continue to support families in need of emergency accommodation through our Crisis Accommodation program housing provided by the federal government. The provision of housing stock coupled with the case management that recurrent funding from the State Government provides helps people to transition through crisis into long-

er term affordable housing in a supported sustainable manner. We also provide mobile case management support to homeless families living in a range of circumstances including many who are couch surfing and living in severely over crowded housing or living in cars due to lack of available affordable housing. Many of these clients represent the hidden face of homelessness. ACRO achieved outputs well in advance of contracted targets providing support to more than double the number of clients we are contracted to support in our short term housing and achieving 128% in mobile support hours for clients. We acknowledge the important partnership with Department of Housing Area office staff in achieving these outcomes for clients particularly staff at the Inala office and would like to also acknowledge in particular the strong leadership and advocacy role undertaken by Trish Muddle Senior Housing Officer at Buranda area office.

## Crisis Accommodation Program

ACRO has four houses for accommodation for families under the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) which provided 5816 bed nights of accommodation in the past financial year. The number of properties made available for this short term accommodation has remained constant for over twenty five years and is consistently full. The Specialist Homelessness sector is under constant pressure with too few properties available and a growing number of people unable to be adequately housed. Adjusting policy settings and redefining housing "pathways" is the equivalent of re arranging the deck chairs on the titanic. Our government representatives need to accept that providing housing, health and education are core nonnegotiable services and that social housing construction should be a number one priority. One of the advantages Australia has is that we can look to overseas examples where countries have and are struggling with similar issues. However one of the most frustrating policy settings that Australia seems to embrace is to import those policies that are failing particularly from the UK and America instead of looking further afield to more successful models for example in many of the Scandinavian countries. As the system gears towards "affordable housing" for families on stagnant low wages, we can expect an exponential growth in homelessness for those with little or no income. The pattern of car and tent housing will continue and increase. The conspicuousness of homelessness will become as much a feature of the Australian



Dr Clive Begg, Executive Director

landscape as it has the European and American experience. A recent article by Associate Professor David Madden in The Guardian from the UK sounds an ominous warning " Housing should be a critical electoral question. The private rented sector has been expanding rapidly growing by 63% between 2007 – 2017. As a result of landlord friendly policies as well as global investment strategies being a renter in the UK frequently means feeling precarious, exploited and powerless. At the same time social housing has shrunk. Since 2010 alone more than 170 000 council homes have been lost due to demolition or privatization. Housing associations, which were supposed to fill the space that councils were forced to vacate, have been increasingly acting like private developers, leaving a gap in secure, truly affordable housing".

## Temporary Supported Accommodation

The decision by the organisation to generate its own short-term emergency housing will culminate with the redevelopment of ACRO's Sandgate Road property during 2020. We will create three new units of accommodation for vulnerable clients. This is a far cry to that which is needed but it is a contribution nonetheless. The Housing Staff are growing weary of case managing people who are self-housing in cars. As suggested previously, I have no problem with affordable housing for low wage earning families but I do take offence to those who provide such accommodation not acquitting profits derived to the construction of low cost accommodation for the income-less homeless and to governments who fail to see "value" in providing such housing.

## Services for the elderly

I dedicated a lengthy discussion last year to the plight for the elderly in our community and the escalating problems that will arise as the population of older Australians increases over the next decade. The current state of play for our older citizens was illuminated by the Royal Commission into Aged Care. The opening salvo from the Media Release at the publication of the Commission's Interim Report speaks volumes:

*The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's Interim Report has found the aged care system fails to meet the needs of its older, vulnerable, citizens. It does not deliver uniformly safe and quality care, is unkind and uncaring towards older people and, in too many instances, it neglects them.*

What a sad indictment on the way we treat our most vulnerable. Perhaps, given the way we treat other vulnerable people including the homeless, indigenous Australians, the unemployed, the disabled, there should really be no surprise. We deal daily with older people who are socially isolated, depressed, lonely, dispossessed by family, ignored by neighbours and living in poverty. They have a roof over their heads but they cannot afford to maintain their own homes. Private providers exist for profit including, it would seem, the large church based institutional providers. Many appear to have little real concern for those within their remit of responsibility. As with prisons and former psychiatric facilities, most aged care facilities are isolated at the outliers of the community – out of sight and out of mind. What an undignified end to a career of contribution to community growth and wellbeing. We should be ashamed of those in "leadership" who enabled the profiteers to seize the resources of the elderly in return for substandard service. We should be ashamed of ourselves for enabling that "leadership" in the first instance. We believe community based options that provide support to citizens to remain living independently in their own homes in their own communities is a far superior model for enhancing peoples ability to live productive lives. We are reminded of this on a regular basis through delivering in home support services for older citizens which support the opportunity for them to live out their lives in their own homes. Our Home Assist Secure Program coupled with the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) provide resources for us to undertake subsidized home maintenance and home modifications to reduce the burden on our older citizens and to create safer environments for them. We will see whether the final Report from the Commissioner finds a truly sympathetic

ear by government or whether the recommendations will fall from public scrutiny and performance measurement as did the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody from 1991. Probably not, as the growing numbers of older people constitute a palpable voting voice.

## Home Assist Secure

ACRO exceeded the Information and Referral target hours for this program and achieved 130% of our target for the 2018/19 financial year. For Home Maintenance and Home modifications, ACRO exceeded the final quarter's target and achieved 97% for the financial year, which meets our contractual requirements. The organisation continues to undertake regular promotional activities. There is some movement of clients to the NDIS and My Aged Care services and this is impacting on the number of new clients and our ability to retain existing Home Assist clients. This is due, in part, to the historical limitations of the Home Assist program which stipulate maximum limits of assistance per job and per year. These have not increased over time. ACRO has participated during the year, as part of a reference group, consulting on an evaluation of the program conducted on behalf of the State Government. It is hoped that recommended changes to enable the program to be more flexible and responsive to client need may be adopted in the future. During the year we undertook 3179 in home maintenance and modifications services for Home Assist clients and conducted 686 First Interviews and 503 home safety inspections. In addition we received 629 referrals through the My Aged Care portal requesting home modifications services and 486 referrals for home maintenance requests. 3260 maintenance jobs were completed and 1206 home modifications were completed for clients under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). Staff also processed 677 Occupational Therapist referrals. This year as part of our continuous improvement strategy to inform our service delivery we have provided a wellness and reablement survey to a number of clients who have had home modifications completed. An example of the feed-

back we have received included " *I don't have to rely on others and I'm able to feel safe and secure because of the modifications. I am able to enjoy both my home and garden and safely go down to collect my own mail and also shower safely*".

## Daytripper

The Daytripper Program connects older people monthly through organized bus trips throughout South East Queensland. This past year saw 252 people participating in the program with an average of 25 participants per trip. Our outstanding volunteers, Del and Faye, have marshalled the troops every month with the support of Sarah Green. The popularity of this program illustrates the need to provide quality services for older people and the need for them to meet with others rather than be isolated in their homes. Some of the feedback from our daytrippers " *Great day from start to finish*" " *Thank you for helping me enjoy another day of my 90th Year, see you in 2020*" " *Revisited an area from my childhood, very nice memories and a great day. Thank you*" " *Too-woomba Carnival of flowers – the extraordinary floral displays have a special place in my heart and always delight*"

## School Assist Program funded by Queensland Government Dignity First Program

This was a new initiative delivered by ACRO for the first time this year and made possible through a successful grant application to the Dignity First fund. ACRO partnered with St Vincent De Paul Settlement Services and designed a program to address a specific unmet need amongst the client group our services were working with. The funding is designed to provide funding for educational costs for culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families who are homeless and accessing crisis housing support . ACRO were able to assist 43 families and expended \$29,260 of the total grant funding of \$30,000. Each quarter as part of our reporting to the Department ACRO provided a case study demonstrating the positive impact, both financial and emotional, that the funding had in the lives of the families we support and the important difference that this assistance with school uniforms and

books and provision of equipment such as computers made. Through the case studies we were able to articulate the complexity of presenting issues and the challenges for the clients we service. We are delighted that the funding will continue into the next financial year to an expanded client group.

## Major Achievements during the Year

The 2018 Strategic Planning session undertaken by ACRO was perhaps its most ambitious. It occurred during a period of dramatic change occasioned by funding reorientation by governments and amidst uncertainty about the future for Staff and programs. The outcomes are summarized:

**1.0** A Revised Charter was agreed to and published;

**2.0** There was considerable discussion about future charitable enterprise which included:

i. Asset realignment

- Sale of at least one property to accommodate;

1. The development of In-House Emergency Housing Options (ACRO Housing);
2. The creation of Community Development space for Social Justice Enterprise and advocacy;
3. The development of a new ageing in place strategy;
4. A re-engagement with volunteerism over the next two years;
5. A reinvigoration of core charitable business through innovation.

## 3.0 Program impacts:

1. It was recognised that existing contracts for the provision of government funded services may discontinue progressively from 2022 to 2023;
2. Staff Entitlements and protections have been put in