

Graham and his wife Helen were longtime friends of our Housing Manager at the time, Ashley Reid and his wife Norma. Graham was also a former resident of Bundaberg and throughout his many years with ACRO, Graham delighted in leaving notes on various Home Assist clients file of how many times he found a connection to Bundaberg or the ANZ bank. Graham was very well regarded by all the clients and ACRO staff and continued beyond his home assist role to become a volunteer with Ashley and Norma in the early Day Tripper program providing low cost monthly outings across the greater Brisbane area and surrounds to reduce social isolation for older people. One of Graham's favourite Home Assist stories recounted by one of his sons at his funeral, was the day he arrived at an elderly clients home and introduced himself and was invited for a cup of tea and cake. After enjoying the clients hospitality for some time Graham advised he needed to attend to the home assist job he had been scheduled to complete. It was at this time that Graham realized he was in fact at the wrong address. Graham will be long remembered as a gentleman with a great sense of humour, a great pride in his family and belief in giving back to his community.

## The Face of ACRO, 2023



(Left to Right) Accounts Manager Neil Joseph; inset: ACRO Builder Alan Elliott; Programs Manager Fiona Begg; Field Officer Paul Green; Administration Worker Anneliess Law.



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



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In the spirit of reconciliation ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



***“Many ... in our community continue to struggle to recover from the economic and social impacts resultant from the pandemic and ongoing serious cost of living pressures.”***

The 2022/23 Annual General Meeting was convened in ACRO'S new permanent Office in Clayfield. I am pleased to report that, despite enormous hurdles leading to this year's AGM, the future of the organisation appears secure. Having said that, this financial period has been one of extremes as we plotted our way through the newly emerging post-COVID world.

We have finally received our first clients into our new homelessness facility. This means, of course, that we have now completed its redevelopment. Conceived in 2009 and revisited in 2019, the three unit accommodation building planning period started taking shape just before the pandemic hit. Not exactly good timing. In fact, our Development Application (DA) was issued just days before Australia was closed down. Four years later we can finally rest on our laurels – at least for the time being. To say this was a tortuous experience would be a complete understatement. The Project was beset by material shortages; skilled labour shortages; the occasional slippery and unreliable contractors; scalping opportunistic tradespeople; constantly changing schedules; COVID illness; unrelenting rain and flood; unchartered underground Council infrastructure that cost enormous amounts to protect; a failed sewer line that needed to be replaced and relocated UNDER Sandgate Road; cracked storm-water pipes that had to be repaired at our expense and uncooperative bureaucrats who didn't understand the difference between a Charity and a business.

Through all this, Alan Elliott, our builder, persisted, cajoled and most of all applied his considerable skills to create a first-class facility that will persist long after this writer has left the building. I'm well aware that this construction has created endless sleepless nights for Alan and for that, strange to say, we are extremely grateful. We acknowledge Alan's wife Sarah for her support and encouragement for Alan during the darkest of moments for him. For ACRO, we achieve permanency – at a cost. The budget blowout on this facility was extreme. We

were financially supported by the Commonwealth through its Safe Places Program, but that did not detract from the negative budgetary impacts on the organisation. With the assistance of private benefaction we were able to complete. In addition I would like to acknowledge those who maintained their support for us during this trying times. In particular I thank our local Councillor, David McLachlan (now retired), our local Member for Clayfield, Tim Nicholls MP and the wonderfully supportive team at the Federal government Safe Places Directorate. Each, in their own way, value-added to the work we do at ACRO. It would be remiss of me to not also mention our Consultants, Scott Connell and Scott Mars. I give a special mention to those contractors who did do the right thing by us during construction and I especially acknowledge Angelo Di Lorenzo whose attention to detail and hard work proved invaluable during the process.

The strategic realignment of staffing for ACRO also impacted during this period. Last year we advised the membership of our decision to contract out more of our home maintenance and modifications work rather than retain our own tradespeople. Some of our former staff retain contracting relationships with us whilst others have moved to new employment. Our staff compliment was reduced to six (myself, Neil, Fiona, Alan, Anneliess and Paul).

There have been many adjustments for us during a period of great uncertainty about future government funding. It wasn't until the very last moments of the financial year that we were advised of continuity of funding across our programs, albeit with termination anticipated at differing points (CHSP in 2024; HAS and SHS in 2028). Whilst the future conditions attaching to this funding are somewhat unclear, this continuity will enable the organisation the time necessary to rethink the future for ACRO as we (again)

# Executive Director's Annual Report 2023

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Dr Clive Begg Executive Director

reinvent the work of the organisation to meet the evolving needs of the community. Our Executive comprising Ian, Chris and Stephanie have been actively engaged with the Staff during reconstruction, both building and developmentally. Their hands-on approach to all aspects of the organisation's restructure has been of enormous benefit as fundamentally uncharted waters were navigated by ACRO. For this we are eternally grateful. The pandemic has impacted all our lives for extended periods and continues to do so. The maintenance of a high calibre of engagement during these stressful times is truly a testament to the quality of our Executive members.

Many others in our community continue to struggle to recover from the economic and social impacts resultant from the pandemic and ongoing serious cost of living pressures. The lack of social housing, for example, has reached a critical mass from which recovery would seem doubtful. We now have a generational crisis. For many young Australians homeownership is now an unreachable dream as we enter the perfect storm of low housing stock, high interest rates, large required deposits, extremely high rents and little resolve by governments to assist. For the elderly we have aged-care in perpetual crisis and processes for the management of the elderly in a state of constant flux, creating further uncertainty. For children we have a government position that would rather breach Human Rights and imprison them rather than deal with the root causes of poverty and social deprivation that lead to criminal behaviour. For working class people we have a Reserve Bank that openly states that it prefers unemployment to inflation. For tertiary students we have crippling debt. For the sick and those in acute pain we have long wait-periods for resolution of their medical conditions.

For all of us already experiencing the damning impacts of climate change, we have no overt desire by governments to intervene with minimal renewable investment and expansion of the coal-mining industry. For indigenous peoples we have people prepared to sabotage rights for what appears to be nothing more than blatant racism. We are a fracturing society with extremist views receiving far greater

credibility than is deserved. Somehow we, within our sector, are meant to Band-Aid all of this. Impossible! Without the full resolve of all levels of government and business to innovate and stop repeatedly importing already failed programs from the US or UK, the future is extremely bleak. We should not follow into the ideological quagmire that the United States finds itself – and yet, this is precisely what appears to be happening. These are not political statements, merely statements of fact whose impact will resonate across generations creating a large unsustainable poor class.

We will continue to do what we need to do to meet the crises confronting our constituency but this won't be an easy pathway to navigate. As an ageing Staff we need to actively plan for replacement when the time comes to continue the critical social justice work of the organisation, particularly in relation to housing families in need.

As for our performance this past year I can report credible outcomes across all Programs. The balance of my Report will address these accomplishments.

## Operational Outcomes over the past Year

i. ACRO has continued to meet our own operational targets and those assigned by our various funding agencies;

ii. The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission conducted a Quality Program Audit for Over 65 CHSP Programs with a positive Report for ACRO;

iii. One of our accommodation facilities was closed for the year due to renovation work being undertaken however all Specialist Homelessness Services accommodation units were fully utilised by eligible clients;

iv. ACRO notes that the State Government funded Home Assist program continues to impose historical low limits on the level of subsidies able to be applied by funded programs to assist clients 60 years or older with their home safety and security needs. This in turn leads to most clients over 65 needing to register with My Aged Care (MAC) to access the lev-

el of support they need for home maintenance and home modifications. ACRO has advocated with the Department of Housing and the Minister directly for several years to increase the level of subsidy available for Home Assist clients to enable greater access and flexibility for Home assist only eligible clients. There is considerable ongoing confusion about packages, Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) services and Home Assist (HAS) services and the different eligibility and subsidised assistance available.

v. ACRO has met all performance indicators in its Crisis Accommodation Program. ACRO continues to support a number of families on bridging visas who are unable to exit to independent housing.

vi. The majority of our crisis housing tenants are now only able to access longer term housing through the private rental market due to lack of supply in social housing. This has implications longer term for these families whose income is unlikely to keep pace with rising private rental increases and cost of living increases, particularly with utilities.

## Summary Statistics

The following services were delivered this past year:

- 2519 HAS Services;
- 3120 CHSP Maintenance Services;
- 475 CHSP Modification Services;
- 398 First Interviews;
- 309 Occupational Therapist Referrals;
- 6530 SHS Bed nights of Accommodation (previous year 5374). We did, unfortunately, register an increased number of people who we were unable to accommodate;
- 410 Additional Housing related requests (again, an increase over the previous year);
- 800 Calls for Assistance
- 344 assisted through additional programs
- 81 people were financially assisted this past year (previous year 59). We continue to provide Emergency Relief by way of Food Vouchers and payments to client's creditors.

## Future Strategic Direction

The Executive is in ongoing discussion with the Management Team to chart a future for the organisation which includes:

### Securing new funding;

Right-sizing Staffing capabilities to accommodate new demands and directions while maintaining existing service delivery;

Creating efficiencies by rationalising resources (telecommunications; vehicles; power and utility use; discretionary spending)

Retaining current asset with volunteer operation, or;

Reassessing and progressing the Objectives for ACRO based upon community need and redirecting activities to ensure our future.

As alluded to earlier in this Report, ACRO has an ageing Staff. In January 2024 I will mark my 40th year with this organisation. Similarly Fiona has been involved with ACRO for over 30 years and Neil, almost 20 years. With this in mind we are conscious of the need for transitioning our Staff for the future. We need to create the environment that encourages new people into the work of the Charity. This is not as easy as it seems. Cost of Living pressures demands substantial remuneration packages for new Staff in addition to the dedication required to undertake the work we do. ACRO will need to seek out innovative funding and generate income to create the packages necessary. In a competitive labour market small organisations with a small team reliant upon government funding arrangements make it difficult to attract the most talented people. This is the real challenge for ACRO's future. It is not irresolvable but it will be difficult.

## Vale Graham Kersnovske



In July 2023 our former part time field officer Graham Kersnovske passed away. A retired ANZ bank manager Graham came to work in ACRO'S Home Assist program as a part time handyman/field officer in 2000.