

Executive Director's Report 2009



Dr Clive Begg, ACRO Executive Director



Achieving Social Justice

During the year I presented a Paper at the *Humanities Conference* in Beijing, China. Titled *Democracy: Good Night and Good Luck*, this presentation explored a potentially sinister aspect of a redefined notion of "civil society" which has gained currency across Western democracies in recent times.

The more benign and usually lauded concept of Civil Society traditionally implies the acceptance of a common set of behaviours which help direct community living and encapsulate elements such as courtesy, respect and "community".

The current incantation appears to have a quasi-legal status, has moral overtones and is driven by government. It can include issues as diverse as use of language and curfews for young people through to religious and race relations. The newer version of "civil society" finds expression through government sponsored "partnerships" at local levels. In theory the process is designed to provide a non-legislative mechanism for consensus development amongst citizens — and bears some resemblance to Citizens Initiated Referenda.

My assertion is that, in practice, consensus by Committee can be corrupted for the purpose of instilling fear within communities and advancing dubious fundamentalist or moral agendas which may

not reflect the broader position of the community.

This occurs when questionable ideas and attitudes are promoted by those with a vested interest in ensuring that their views are adopted. Community Consultative mechanisms which are nurtured by government and whose membership comprise those who are either self-appointed or politically appointed pose a very real threat to our communities in purporting to represent the mainstream. They become, therefore, vehicles for social control rather than social enlightenment.

Throughout history those who oppose a collective position are viewed as outsiders and are denied privilege. Contemporary elite "Committees" or "partnerships" reconstruct community values based upon their own worldview (or that of their political masters), which potentially excludes many community members.

Whilst a manipulation such as this is allegedly anathema to western democracies — and, it is argued by some, a method of keeping populations in "socialist" countries under control — I am of the opinion that the

difference in application between both "worlds" is becoming indistinguishable. The Paper proved to be somewhat controversial, particularly amongst the American and British colleagues whose governments extol the virtues of the "new" civil society. This is no surprise as it provides the justification for the advancement of their conservative agendas.

In our sector ACRO promotes *community development* at a local level (as opposed to the bolstering of civil society). By this I mean that our agenda is more aligned to achieving fairness and parity between and within classes of people who are directly affected by failing systems rather than aggressively promoting a sameness of opinion that discourages dissent—thereby creating outsiders.

It is not our role to direct a moral imperative.

This application requires a high degree of advocacy and empathy for social differentness (in addition to the delivery of direct services)—both of which are becoming more and more unpopular within the funding framework of new social democratic administrations. Their concern is

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Achieving Social Justice

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Resettlement Housing

In addition to our Supported Accommodation ACRO also provide longer term accommodation for families in need. Our resettlement program has provided 2,614 bed nights of accommodation for those who otherwise would be chronically homeless. Many of our clients in this program are families from other parts of the world seeking to resettle in Australia.

In addition to Short Term Emergency Accommodation and Resettlement Housing services, ACRO staff have provided advice and support on accommodation to a further 300 clients during the year.

Home Assist Secure

The Queensland government has long acknowledged the needs of older people within our community. The Home Assist Secure Program provides trade and trade referral assistance for those eligible to assist older people to remain living independently in their homes for as long as they wish. As we approach our 10,000th client milestone, the



Daytripper Client Phil

range of services provided is broadening as the needs of older people expand. This past year saw the project provide 3,848 client services representing 2,230 Project services and 1,618

external contract services plus 804 completed first interviews.

Home and Community Care (HACC)

In tandem with the Home Assist Secure program is the Home and Community Care program. During the 2009 Financial Year, 3,444 client services representing 1,336 Project Services and 2,108 external contract services (including 572 Occupational Therapist referrals) were delivered under the HACC Program.

Emergency Relief

During the year some \$22,955.00 worth of emergency relief was dispensed. ACRO assisted 279 respondents with financial assistance of one form or another. A significant number of clients receiving this assistance are families of prisoners who continue to receive support particularly at Christmas. It is clear that the Global Economic Crisis has impacted on a great many Australians and the Federal Government has responded by



Booke (SCDG), Fiona and Councillor Genevieve Knapp (Brisbane City Council)

increasing the amount of Emergency Relief available this year. ACRO is grateful for this response by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Federal Government) and the Department of Communities (Queensland Government).

Community Development Programs

ACRO has facilitated community development enterprise for over two decades. Its Family Centre continues in Wacol in partnership with Sisters Inside and the Samoan Community Advisory Council in Queensland. In addition, ACRO is a member of the Stafford Community Development



Brisbane Airport Corporation Workers at the BACyard Blitz helping older people

Group (SCDG) in partnership with four other local groups delivering programs in Stafford. ACRO is auspicing funding from the Brisbane City Council for a housing project to be undertaken in Stafford in 2010. An outstanding financial and labour contribution by the Brisbane Airport Cor-

poration (BAC) provided much needed gardening and other support for a range of our elderly clients during the year.

Daytripper Program

As indicated in my opening remarks, the need to address social isolation for older citizens is a priority issue. Our Daytripper Program indicated from the outset that there are many older people whose recreational options are limited. This past year Daytripper enabled 188 older citizens to enjoy time away from their homes on a range of adventures. With the expansion of the program and the introduction of other facilities for this client base in the

coming year, I expect that these numbers will increase significantly.

Social Isolation Centre / Homeless Centre

Following logically from the need to provide meaningful services for older people is a discussion being held to refurbish the Clayfield property to incorporate a Social Isolation Centre and a homeless persons facility. No doubt the Executive will have many submissions before it next year to push ahead with plans in this area. The idea of creating multipurpose

spaces at Clayfield (Offices / Social Isolation Centre / Homeless Centre) has been raised before and I hope that we can advance this process during the 2010 Financial Year period.

Services for Younger People

2010 will mark the tenth year of operation for our School Holidays Camp Program. Hundreds of young people who otherwise would not be able to enjoy the camaraderie that a camp environment provides, have participated in our Program.



Camp Participant Thomas

about electoral control and power. It is important that we continue to question the motivations of those who claim that civil society is the panacea to social injustice. There can be some decidedly uncivil actions within "civil society".

Whilst I was in China I did have an opportunity to observe a radically different culture to our own. What struck me, in particular, is that the role of the older person is far more important – both to the family and to the community. In China everybody has a job or set of responsibilities. As a consequence the extended family becomes extremely important for the care and nurturing of children – particularly by the grandparents. During my travels I noted that older citizens are actively engaged and whilst clearly busy caring for their grandchildren, appeared happy.

It was rare to see an older person without a smile. Within our constituency of older citizens, I am deeply

concerned about the social isolation of many for whom there is no such responsibility and no corresponding satisfaction. Many older citizens are prisoners in their own homes. This is not to say that other older people are not actively involved in their communities and with their families. However, for those who are not, the isolation is debilitating and heart-rending.

ACRO has moved to deal with this issue. Its DayTripper Program is the first of a number of initiatives designed to get older people out of their homes and into social activity. As the Home Assist Secure Program

moves towards processing its 10,000th new client, we are resolved to place the social isolation of older people on the radar as one of highest priority. The rapid expansion of the DayTripper Project demonstrates the need. ACRO will be committed to the reduction of social isolation as a key objective in its new Strategic Plan.

Our school holiday Camp Program continues to prove highly successful giving younger people without resources the opportunity to develop camaraderie and team building skills in a friendly set of environments. This year marks the 10th year of operation for this program and this commemoration, together with the 10,000th new client in Home Assist Secure, affords us the opportunity to celebrate.



Executive Committee Members 2009
Ian Stewart, Stephanie Whelan and Chris Stewart

During the coming year we are producing a high quality photographic chronicle of our older and younger friends "at play" to mark both events. Our Camp Facilitator and talented photographer Melly Niotakis has offered to assist with this venture. The photos of older and younger people in this Report are hers and I thank her for allowing us to use them.

This has been a year of preparation for change. Over the coming years ACRO will once more demonstrate its resilience and ability to rapidly respond to changing circumstances. Various inquiries, including a Senate Inquiry, have been looking at the

future role of Public Benevolent Institutions. This organization is preemptively moving to realign its mission both in anticipation of the outcomes from these inquiries but also in preparation for a time when our population is older aged-skewed and government further devolves responsibility for social programming to corporate entities. In affirming its charitable mission, ACRO separated itself from its corporate building and plumbing entity this past year. In reinforcing its primary goal away from for-profit enterprise, the Charity was able, nonetheless, to guarantee an

income stream from investments in seeking to achieve two long term goals: to enable a consistent income stream to be applied to charitable purpose; and, to consolidate a longer term aspiration towards independence from government funding.

This has been a good year for the organization with many wonderful accomplishments thanks to our Executive Committee Members (Ian, Chris and Stephanie), our Staff and Volunteers. Ashley Reid, our Finance Manager, will retire in the coming months after 20 years of service to ACRO. I join with members and fel-

low Staff in thanking him for an invaluable contribution in maintaining and progressing the work of this organization. We wish both him and Norma a wonderful retirement.

We are, as always, indebted to our various government sponsors including the Department of Housing; Department of Communities; Disability Services Queensland; Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Brisbane City Council; and, Brisbane Airport Corporation.

I will now outline some of the many outcomes from our work this past year.

Short-term Emergency Accommodation

ACRO has a 35 year history of providing emergency accommodation for citizens in need. This generalist service not only provides housing for homeless persons but also equips the clients with the necessary skills to enter the private rental market through support provided by

our Housing Workers. This year saw the appointment of Chloe Kempe as new worker in the field. The service continues to provide much needed accommodation and support in a shrinking marketplace albeit a greatly stressed service given the increasing numbers presenting for assistance. 2009 saw 340 clients unable to be accommodated as a result of this increased need. We did, however, provide 6,263 bed nights of accommodation.