



Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2000/2001



Clive Begg, Executive Director, ACRO

From time to time it is useful to objectively cast our gaze over the nature of leadership embedded within governance styles. This is important at all stages of our lives in order that we don't become complacent about our democratic obligations and let social aberrance slip onto that governance agenda. It is too easy to have regard to the vocalisation of minorities simply because they have access to a media machine that profits from confrontational approaches while the "silent majority" watch from the sidelines. It is not good enough for political minders to make the assumption that this minority voice is somehow representative of the community. It behoves good citizens to respond and set the pace that defines the leadership of their interests through Parliament. During the year I was privileged to address the graduating class of a Brisbane High School on this very subject. Having given consideration, I determined not to make it a *Leadership 101* lecture but rather to address the application of leadership through a series of guideposts and based upon personal experience. Central to my thinking was that the rudiments of leadership had been imbued through example by parents, teaching staff and other significant persons that the audience members had come in contact with. From my experience in speaking with these young people and having subsequently watched their actions, I can confidently say that they had in fact distilled the basic elements and applied them for the common good. But it may be a flawed notion to *assume* that all of the role models who had influenced these people had contributed to a comprehensive understanding of what leadership entails. This is also true for the adult population who, within a democracy, should always remain vigilant and question decision-making by our elected representatives.

In considering what to comment upon this year, I decided to share my thoughts given to this graduating class with the broader community. I believe they are, as one person's statement of social justice principles and in the absence of vision within our community, worthy of debate. It is my hope that they may help provide some "leadership" for those who are confused about issues such as racism, "boat people" and other such important issues and that they may be of some use.

1. Believe in the intrinsic worth of the human spirit and always struggle to understand and improve, through knowledge, the circumstances that govern the human family.
2. Don't believe everything you are told – particularly as it relates to you. Trust your own instincts and have faith in your own capacity.
3. Encourage diversity across all levels of human endeavour.
4. Create living relationships that last forever and that are based upon trust and mutual respect.
5. Take risks, particularly if those risks enhance the human condition.
6. Don't close your eyes to the perils of others and respond through action, not only words.
7. Take opportunity, as it arises, provided always that it is in the best interests of the majority of people and not specific, necessarily, to your own circumstances.
8. Recognise the shortcomings of your political and economic institutions and their impact on others in the world arena and be prepared to depart from conventional logic to improve the life-chances of your fellow citizens, wherever they may be.
9. Understand that there are forces in the world that create great personal unhappiness. Work to alleviate the causes of this unhappiness.
10. Say 'no' to all conspiracies of silence that seek to hide harassment, sexual abuse and all forms of predatory sexual behaviour that exploits or harms another human being. No "Boys Club", no collegial affiliations, no friendship is worth hiding the permanent consequences of an abuse of trust.
11. Openly debate and argue strenuously for ALL forms of human interpersonal relationships. Never accept a status quo that discriminates against a person's intrinsic right to establish their own lifestyle and pursue that lifestyle openly in the community, provided always that no harm is caused to others as an intended consequence of that pursuit.
12. Defend all members of the human community, irrespective of their race, sexual preference, religious belief or ethnicity. Be prepared to "go to the wire" even for people that you may not know even if in doing so you yourself are vilified and defamed.
13. Give young people opportunity and allow them to assume responsibility – they will never disappoint you.
14. Defend those who are powerless and vulnerable and be blind to the prejudices that inspire hatred and corruption. Understand that the rightness of your pursuit and the net effect of your endeavours, if they are in accord with fundamental human rights, are beyond any other moral imperative that may stand in your way.

15. Give back in equal measure, or preferably surpass, that which you are given. Remember always the family and community that nurtured you and the communities that went without to ensure your prosperity.
16. Always be open and accountable in all aspects of your life and demand that others are as well (Begg, C. *Seventh Trent Lang Memorial Lecture*, St. Paul's School, Brisbane, May 2001)

As I said, these are merely principles from the perspective of one person. There are many more that good-minded people apply every day in their lives. It is important that we at least recognise shared views and put them in practice in our dealings with others. It is equally important that just and sustainable principles are reminded to those in positions of leadership and governance. The "motto" for ACRO is "Achieving Social Justice" – a lofty ideal indeed and one that cannot be realised either in isolation from the community nor without regard to leadership within governance.

I would like to acknowledge the tireless work of my colleagues within ACRO, particularly Ashley, Fiona and Leesa. These people are the shining light that illuminates the work of this organisation. Together with the efforts of Larry, Jennifer, Stuart, our Volunteers, our remarkable Executive Committee and supporters, they give life to our concept of social justice.

Program Overview: At the last AGM for ACRO, a new Strategic Plan was endorsed. The balance of this Report will address the program streams articulated from this Strategic Plan; Young People, Individuals and Family Support and Older People.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Program Goal: *ACRO will assist young people, within a supportive environment, to develop their knowledge and skills enabling them, in partnership with their peers, to advocate on significant issues identified by young People.*

ATAC – Australian Teens Advocating Change

This group of enthusiastic young people continued their work during the year with a Tour of Victoria to promote their anti-drugs message and the development of a new Community Service Announcement titled "Open Your Mind" which has been produced to coincide with the launching of a youth-moderated Mentoring Program at some time in the future. The organisation has sponsored this group since 1998 and over the past three years they have initiated and articulated important National debate across a range of issues (such as racism, peer pressure, drug use/abuse, homophobia, youth suicide) with their efforts acknowledged through various awards (Queen's Trust Young Achievers Award 1999; Nescafe "Big Break" winners 1999; Advertising media award 2000). Our role organisationally has been to provide mentorship for the work of these young people and their future role is to assume further leadership within their communities to advance social justice principles.

Camp Program

During the year 63 participants across eight (8) programs in the school holidays took part in this program, which offers residential and non-residential experiences for young people aged 12 - 15 years. Funded by the Department of Families the project is two years through a three-year funding cycle. A Program evaluation report was submitted to the Department in June 2001. This is a popular program and one that consistently receives positive feedback. The rapport developed between participants and facilitators has been exceptional. This has been achieved by employing facilitators who are under the age of 25 and who have social justice backgrounds - utilising their skills to create a high level of trust and respect with a wide-ranging menu of activities from the traditional to the innovative – canoeing to museum visits, craft activities, movie-going, abseiling to interactive art activities.

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Program Goal: *ACRO will provide programs and services to families and individuals experiencing hardship due to the effects of the social and criminal justice system and those marginalised due to ethnicity, culture, language, race and religion.*

Wacol Family Centre

The concept of the Family Centre was first realised in 1986 with the opening of a facility at Dutton Park (near the site of the now closed Boggo Road jail). With the relocation of the prison population substantially to the Wacol precinct, the Family Centre was relocated. At that time the Centre operated in tandem with the highly successful ACRO JobClub until the closure of that program in 1991. The service provides a significant range of services for the families of those imprisoned. In this past year some 16000 clients accessed services through the Family Centre. Volunteers at the Centre were recognised for their considerable efforts by winning both the State and regional Premiers Awards for the International Year of the Volunteer. It is pleasing to report that several new volunteers have commenced work at the centre during the year and we thank both our new volunteers and our established volunteers for their efforts and ongoing commitment. Due to new prison dress code regulations for visitors the centre services now include a shoe and clothing loan system. A new Corrective Services Act came into force with a copy of the Act being made available for visitors

through the Centre. Research is currently being undertaken involving visitors to correctional centres. This Survey was conducted engaging families visiting all prisons in the Wacol area (July 2001) with a Report expected to be released by the end of 2001. ACRO Staff have continued to participate in Stakeholder meetings with the Department and have undertaken annual visits to correctional centres in the Wacol area. Correctional centre staff reported high level of satisfaction with ACRO transport services and information brochures. As an endnote Moreton B Correctional Centre closed during the year. In spite of this closure the number of clients accessing ACRO services in the region remained high.

Transport

Attached to the important work of the Family Centre is the ACRO Shuttle Bus Service. The organisation has provided transport services in the Wacol precinct for many years providing a much-needed resource for family and friends to visit at the various correctional centres in the region. This year approximately 15880 clients utilised the bus service, which operates four days per week servicing five correctional centres. The Department of Corrective Services provides the funds to enable ACRO to deliver these services. An average number of 360 trips were made to the correctional centres each month with 344 Individuals and 70 Families using the one-day a week transport service in Rockhampton. With the additional capacity of the newly completed Capricorn Correctional Centre, it is envisaged that an expanded transport service may be required in the region. Community transport was also provided to a young people and the elderly accessing other ACRO programs.

Accommodation

The organisation has historically been involved with the provisioning of housing services for currently serving prisoners, prisoners on release and disadvantaged persons within the community generally. During this past year some 1129 nights of accommodation were provided to offenders on Work Release or Home Detention in the Rockhampton region prior to the closure of Halcyon House in June 2001. The Department of Corrective Services provided the funding to provide this service. Supported Accommodation services funded through the Department of Families serviced some 769 bed nights of accommodation to individuals resettling in the Brisbane area after a period of imprisonment and some 1525 bed nights of accommodation being provided to families and individuals in the Brisbane area in need of short term supported accommodation. It is noted that Community networks have expanded during the year to enhance support services for humanitarian refugee women and children accommodated by the organisation.

Welfare Assistance

ACRO has always sought to assist disadvantaged families, either through advice and advocacy or financially. This year over 500 families were assisted through emergency relief payments including food vouchers and financial assistance 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. Each year ACRO receives a number of letters and cards from clients expressing their thanks for this small yet seemingly important assistance. A considerable number of clients access staff and volunteers seeking information, advocacy services and appropriate referrals with over fifteen hundred contacts received through head office and the family centre.

Staff / Volunteer Training

A number of opportunities have arisen during the year for staff and volunteers to develop their knowledge and skills including an internal staff/volunteer skills development workshop which was held in September 2000 to allow all programs staff and volunteers to meet with each other, learn more about each ACRO program and review the updated policy and procedures for the organisation. The workshop was well attended and feedback was extremely positive. Several staff have also completed first aid training including members of the Home Secure Assist team and our school holidays youth program facilitators. One head office staff member completed mediation training through the Queensland Department of Justice. ACRO successfully applied for funding through the International Year of the Volunteer to enable volunteers to undertake further training. A grant of \$3000 has recently been received and volunteers are currently being consulted as to the training they would like to undertake. It is anticipated that this training will be undertaken by the end of 2001.

SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Program Goal: *ACRO will actively promote the value of older people and people with disabilities in our community and practically support their lifestyle choices through consultation, developing strategies and providing options to optimise their independence while reducing fear and isolation.*

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. Funded through the Department of Housing this program provided approximately 3000 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. An additional 1500 services were provided to clients through the Home and Community Care funding

which ACRO receives from the Department of Health. Highlights for this program during the year have been a number of letters from clients endorsing the quality of service provided and a letter from the Department congratulating the project staff on the quality of service reflected in a recent survey conducted by the Department. Project Staff were also congratulated on their involvement in the Seniors Information Expo held as part of Seniors Week celebrations. The event was well supported by a number of community organizations and businesses from the local community and provided an excellent opportunity for older people to meet with a wide range of service providers in an informal but informative manner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRO would like to acknowledge the significant level of support provided to us by a number of organizations and individuals, in particular:

- North Star Mitsubishi
- Bob Aldons

In addition, ACRO would like to also recognise the contributions of various government departments and funding bodies that have continued their support and financial commitment to ACRO over this period;

- Department of Corrective Services - Transport Services for the families of inmates in the Wacol and Rockhampton regions; Halfway House for Currently Serving Prisoners, Rockhampton;
- Families, Youth & Community Care Queensland – Community Support Services, Homelessness, Outside School Hours Care Activities and Emergency Relief,
- Housing Queensland - Home Assist Secure Program,
- Department of Family and Community Services - Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program, &
- Queensland Health - Home and Community Care Program.

Last but not least a special mention should be bestowed upon the Executive Committee, Individual and Corporate Members, Organisational Staff and Volunteers for their tireless support and contribution throughout the year.



Left: ACRO representative Phil Hassetts accepts the Premier's Award for International Year of the Volunteer on behalf of ACRO Family Centre Volunteers from the Honourable the Premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie MLA



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A Public Benevolent Institution

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