



Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2001/2002



ACRO Chairperson Ian Stewart and 2002 Young Queenslander of the Year and ATAC Member Danielle Begg.

This has been a year of reassessment and acknowledgement. In terms of reassessment, the year has seen the organisation revisit its originating mission with the release of ACRO's latest publication, *Serving Time on the Outside – A Survey of Visitors to Correctional Centres in the Wacol Region, Queensland*. It is anticipated that this important document will considerably value-add to the public understanding of the problems associated with imprisonment for the families of prisoners. As a year of acknowledgement, the ACRO youth movement, ATAC, was honoured when one of its founding members became the Young Queenslander of the Year. The work of these young people continues to make important inroads against intolerance and bigotry and on behalf of the membership I thank them for their dedication and enthusiasm.

I would also like to acknowledge the tireless work of my colleagues within ACRO, particularly Ashley, Fiona, Janine and Angelina. These people put into action the high ideals that ACRO strives for. Together with the efforts of Larry, Jennifer, our Volunteers, our remarkable Executive Committee and supporters, they give life to our concept of social justice.

Program Overview: The balance of this Report will address the program streams articulated within ACRO's 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



ATAC Founding Members (LtoR): Seung-Yi Lee, Adrian Begg, Danielle Begg and Chris Stewart.



ACRO Patron His Excellency Major General Peter Arnison, AC, CVO Governor of Queensland with 2002 Young Queenslander of the Year Danielle Begg and Suncorp Metway General Manager Steve Jones at Parliament House.

The work of ATAC – Australian Teens Advocating Change - has been profiled considerably through the announcement of the **Young Queenslander of the Year** award to one of the group's founding members. Although Danielle received the award, the accolade is shared by ATAC as a whole for all the work of the young people who have been involved in the program since its inception in 1998. Through the increased profile that the award has brought the work of the group has been promoted widely throughout the community and the young people involved continue to pursue their program of youth social justice issues. ACRO congratulates the program participants and continues to pledge its support for this important program.

Camp Program

This program continues to provide positive recreational experiences for a range of young people (including a number of indigenous young people) aged 12 – 15 years during school holidays. Throughout the year another sixty-three (63)



young people took up the opportunity to participate in this increasingly popular program. Funding continues through the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. Typical examples of feedback which this program receives include the following from participants “ I loved every part of the camp” “ When can I go again?” “We like it cause you get treated fairly” and from parents “ I thank you for helping me give me kids something I could not afford otherwise” “the kids had a really great time”. The key to this programs success are the young people who facilitate the program and ACRO acknowledges the ongoing commitment of our young facilitators who most often run these programs in their own holiday time. Acknowledgement is made for the efforts of Aisha, Jade, Louise and George.

Happy Campers on ACRO's Camp Program

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

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

An average of 300 people per week access the services of the organization through our family centre at Wacol. This number is largely made up of women and children who visit to one of the four correctional centres at Wacol each week. The service received a much needed boost this year through a successful submission to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. A number of equipment purchases were made to assist the staff, volunteers and clients at the centre and ACRO gratefully acknowledge the funding made available.



Ongoing clothing and footwear assistance remain as a popular addition to the family support services offered particularly for visitors unaware of the correctional centre rules on these matters that may result in a visit refusal where inadequate footwear or clothing are identified by correctional centres staff. ACRO's Information for Families of Prisoners Brochure was updated during the year and remains our most sought after information source.

Member for Mt. Ommaney Julie Atwood MLA with Jim Heynes (Queensland Ombudsman Office), Maureen Dunn (Department of Family Services), Fiona Begg (ACRO) and Nigel McReedy (Assistant General Manager, Sir David Longlands Correctional Centre) at the launch of *Serving Time on the Outside* at the ACRO Family Centre

An important research project commenced in 2001 involving visitors to correctional centres in the Wacol area surveyed by ACRO. This was completed during 2002 with a report

entitled **Serving Time on the Outside** launched at the Family Centre during September 2002. Copies of the report have been forwarded to all ACRO members, relevant government departments, members of parliament and libraries throughout the State including tertiary institutions. The report was completed in order to provide a resource for persons seeking information about some of the issues for families visiting inmates and to provide visitors to correctional centres a voice in expressing their views and concerns. A copy of the report was forwarded to the Minister for Corrective Services and Minister for Families prior to publication. ACRO would like to acknowledge the considerable contributions made by visitors who took the time to complete our surveys and who shared their often-painful experiences with us. It is gratifying for the staff and volunteers who work at the Family Centre that their efforts are clearly valued by the clients who access the services with the program receiving glowing praise in the survey.

Transport

The shuttle bus service which operates four days a week from Thursday to Sunday at Wacol carried 16 756 passengers during the year. In addition, the ACRO bus service in Rockhampton expanded operations during the year to include a service to the new Capricornia Correctional Centre as part of our weekly service. This service assisted 162 individuals and 136 families to access visits at the Rockhampton and Capricornia centres. Surveys conducted by ACRO with clients utilising the transport service provided at Wacol indicate that the ongoing provision of this free service (made possible through funding by the Department of Corrective Services), is a very important support mechanism for families who, through circumstances most often not of their making, have to shoulder a significant financial and emotional burden. ACRO acknowledges the ongoing commitment of our bus drivers who often provide services above and beyond the call of duty.

Accommodation

ACRO has continued throughout the year to provide accommodation assistance to both single people and families in crisis. Over three hundred bed nights of accommodation was provided to persons leaving the correctional system and 2609 bed nights were recorded for families in our supported accommodation program. These services are made possible through funding provided by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care and provide short term accommodation and a case worker to assist clients to attain long term secure accommodation. It is noted that housing vacancies are becoming increasingly rare in the Brisbane area with the loss of a significant number of housing options for persons at the lower end the income scale, including closure of caravan parks and a significant number of clients unable to access private rental due to their blacklisting through real estate data base systems. This has resulted in clients requiring supported accommodation services for extended periods of time and subsequently less vacancies being available. During the year ACRO was requested to provide an article to *Parity Magazine* which is published by the Council for Homeless persons based in Victoria. This Magazine focuses on issues surrounding homelessness and the Editor chose accommodation issues for people leaving prison across Australia as the topic for this particular issue. ACRO contributed an article outlining issues that affect Queensland ex-offenders and their families.

Welfare Assistance

478 families were assisted through emergency relief payments during the year. A significant number of these clients received support through the annual Christmas project which ACRO operates each year to assist families with a loved one in prison. The greatest level of assistance was provided through food vouchers with the balance in rent relief, gas and electricity payments. Like accommodation services welfare funds are similarly stretched by the increased financial strain of higher cost of living on clients seeking emergency relief. Levels of rent and utilities have increased significantly in the last few years which over time decreases the number of clients able to be assisted. Funding levels unfortunately do not reflect this growth.

Staff / Volunteer Matters

This year has had a significant number of ups and downs for the staff and volunteers who make up the ACRO "family". Our long time Housing Programs Coordinator



Former Family Centre Bus Driver Phil Hasset with ACRO's Housing Support Worker Angelina Chisari and current Family Centre Volunteer Claire Wilson



ACRO Staff Members Damien Pokariea, Ashley Reid, Fiona Begg and Arthur Burton with former Family Centre Volunteer Jack Pollentine.

Ashley Reid has resigned his full time position with ACRO due to ill health. Ashley is expected to make a full recovery and is taking a well earned rest. Long time bus driver Phil Hasset also retired during the year after many years of long

service both as a volunteer and staff member. Phil will be sadly missed by all at ACRO and most especially by the clients at the family centre.

ACRO was fortunate however to attain the services of several new staff and volunteers during the year. We welcome to

our team Housing Support Worker Angelina Chisari, Family Centre Bus Driver Suellen Blanco, Youth Camp Facilitator Jade Hurst and our Accounts Administrator Neil Joseph.

On a sadder note ACRO would like to acknowledge Ms Janine James who accepted a position with ACRO as a housing support worker towards the end of 2001. Unfortunately Janine was unable to remain with ACRO due to her husband's diagnosis with a terminal illness. We wish Janine and her children all the best for the future and were honoured to share some of that precious short time with Janine and her husband Tony.

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.*



ACRO Home Assist/Secure Staff Jennifer Abdur-Rahman and Larry Scholz.

The Home Assist Secure program continues to be one of our fastest growing programs with the service recording its 5000th client this year. Currently in its ninth year of operations and funded by the Department of Housing program staff assist elderly people and disabled people of any age to remain living in their homes. The program provides practical assistance through information and advice, qualified trade referrals, home security assessments and subsidised assistance for minor maintenance related to health, safety and security. This year the program was featured in the ABC Rod Henshaw radio program as part of Crime Prevention Week. The Program has also completed an appraisal conducted on behalf of the Department of Health. The program received an extremely positive review and hoping to repeat this with the annual review conducted by the Department of Housing later this year. 3405 jobs were completed for clients during the year under the Home Assist program with an additional 1275 services provided through HACC funding.

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 and Support Services for the families of inmates in the Wacol and Rockhampton regions;
- 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.



Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated

A Public Benevolent Institution

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