



Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated



ACRO Executive Director Dr Clive Begg.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2002/2003

This year marks yet another milestone for ACRO as it celebrates its 40th Anniversary. This is a highly significant event. At a time when it is acknowledged that longevity within the not-for-profit sector is by no means a certainty, it is a testament to the resolve of, and commitment by, generations of members to ACRO that the organisation continues to provide valuable services to its various constituencies. In the current climate of funding rationalisation by governments to address changing funding priorities and give effect to policy redirection as a consequence, the role of organisations such as ACRO have been increasingly placed under the microscope. During my involvement with the sector the number of organizations actively pursuing change agendas from a community perspective has dramatically reduced. It is my belief that ACRO has persisted because of its ability to rapidly change to meet the challenges (and, at times, strictures) placed upon it by this evolving government policy. It is imperative that community change agents beyond the political arena continue to be nurtured and supported in order that the fundamentals of democratic process are upheld. The absolute requirement for accountability in decision-making requires informed and balanced debate from within the community sector.

As with all organizations change is a necessary and desirable process. This year saw Brian Richards step aside as Treasurer in favour of Chris Stewart. Chris has a commerce degree from the University of Queensland and is currently completing his law degree at the same institution. At the ripe old age of 22 Chris has been actively involved with ACRO since 1998. As a founding member of the youth arm of ACRO, ATAC (Australian Teens Advocating Change) Chris has already made a significant contribution to the organisation and I wish him well in his new role. I thank Brian for his many years of service to ACRO and thank him for continuing to support our aims and objectives as a life member.



ATAC Founding Member and ACRO incoming Treasurer, Chris Stewart.

In a regeneration of ACRO Chris is joined by other young people such as Danielle Begg who, as 2002 Young Queenslander of the Year and Centenary Medal recipient, has provided a public face for ACRO as a Youth Ambassador and Aisha Damali who has been involved with ACRO since 1996 and now coordinates the ACRO Youth Camps. These young people are a few of a long line of students who have been involved with ACRO and who now hold professional positions throughout the country. ACRO will continue to mentor young people and provide the community background necessary for them to undertake their future work with a sympathetic eye to the needs of those less advantaged within our society. Organizations need to redefine themselves through the eyes of its youth otherwise they will surely wither and die.



Aisha Damali – ACRO Camp Coordinator



ACRO has continued to provide a range of services consistent with its constitutional objectives and published Strategic Plan. In essence ACRO streams its resources across three discrete areas: Youth, Individual and Family Support and services for older people.

ATAC Founding Member, Young Queenslander of the Year 2002 and Centenary Medal recipient, Danielle Begg, with the Queensland Premier Peter Beattie.

The successes of ACRO's youth arm have been well published and the elevation of its young members to decision-making positions within the organisation indicates the commitment by both the organisation to engage youth in its administration and also the strength of dedication by those that ACRO have mentored. At the halfway point in its current Strategic Plan the Program Goal set for youth engagement to "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" is well advanced.

The work of ATAC – Australian Teens Advocating Change – will undoubtedly evolve as younger members are recruited and trained. I know that it has been the source of a considerable amount of angst by ATAC members that its mentoring program remains unfunded. In spite of this, the ATAC group has advanced its work in a professional and diligent manner and remain an inspiration to older ACRO members and volunteers.



As the ATAC initiative has never been specifically funded by government and given the emerging budgetary constrictions being faced by ACRO, it is unclear as to what the future holds for this program. On behalf of members and the general community I thank those who have been involved with ATAC over the years for their persistence, faith and hard work in participating in the many important and varied debates and for their successes. As mentioned, Aisha Damali is the coordinator of the ACRO youth camps for young people aged 12-15 years. This popular program has operated for a number of years and provides positive recreational experiences for participants. Funded by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, this project engaged 60 Young people during the past year. Thanks to Aisha, Jade, and Louise.

Happy Campers on ACRO's Camp Program

The goal of the Individual and Family Support Program is to "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". Services in this category include the ACRO Family Centre, Transport Services, Accommodation and Welfare Assistance.

I am pleased to report that this past year ACRO assisted some 16000 persons at its Wacol Family Centre and a similar number utilising its Shuttle Bus in the Wacol region. The latter service operated four days a week and provided much needed transport assistance to the families of prisoners visiting family and friends in Correctional facilities. This service was also provided by ACRO in Rockhampton. In that city 108 families and 190 individuals were regularly assisted. The decision to dramatically reduce servicing for families of prisoners (from four days a week in Brisbane to two days a week and total defunding of the Rockhampton service) is regretted. The impact of this reduction is unclear but ACRO will monitor the situation.



In terms of accommodation services during the period, ACRO provided 2374 bed nights including 574 bed nights for persons released from prison. Again the significant reduction in funding to ACRO by the Department of Corrective Services will translate into the loss of low cost accommodation for those released from prison under programs such as



Home Detention. With respect to welfare assistance ACRO again performed credibly having provided direct financial assistance for over 800 individuals including some 200 families who benefited specifically from the annual Christmas project. Our services for older people program saw some 3934 completed jobs for eligible clients under the Home Assist program with a further 1600 jobs undertaken through our Home and Community Care (HACC) program. These are impressive figures given the size of ACRO and are a tribute to the dedication of the Staff and Volunteers.

ACRO Volunteers at the Family Centre on what was to be its last day of operation.

As with previous years the work of ACRO is significantly

enhanced as a consequence of the effort and dedication of its volunteer workforce. I thank them for their selfless contributions, particularly in relation to the maintenance of the Family Centre at Wacol. For a few moments it looked as if this valuable service was going to close. Indeed, a farewell celebration was held at Wacol with Volunteers (past and present) Staff and others in attendance. This closure was short lived with fresh negotiations seeing the service retained (albeit on a reduced basis). It is unclear as to whether the Family Centre will survive past June 2004. Its passing, which would seem to be an inevitability in spite of the demand for the various services offered, will end an eighteen year journey that has benefited generations of disadvantaged persons.



ACRO Staff Members (L to R) Matt Swain, Larry Scholz, Ashley Reid, Fiona Begg, Jennifer Abdur-Rahman, Damian Pokarier, Graham Kersnovske.

In spite of Ashley Reid leaving ACRO on a full-time basis, he has returned to provide much needed part-time support for the organisation. We are happy to report Ashley's full recovery from his illness last year. I am indebted to Ashley and other key Staff persons (Fiona Begg, Angelina Chisari, Jennifer, Damian, Larry Scholz and our Bus Drivers [Arthur, Danny and Merice] for their ongoing commitment to ACRO this past year. I note that Larry is moving on and his position as Field Worker with the Home Assist Secure Program will be filled during the coming months. I welcome Matt to this Program and to the ACRO family. At the same time we farewell Damien whose position ceased to exist as a result of funding cutbacks. Thankyou Damian and best wishes for your future.

The work of ACRO is made easier because of the talents of its Executive Committee. Chaired by Ian Stewart, this Committee (comprising Ian, Associate Professor Don Robertson, Bill Youatt-Pine, John Phillips, Brian Richards (and now Chris Stewart), the Executive meeting regularly and provide invaluable support to the workers and volunteers. These contributions are greatly appreciated and acknowledged. In summarising the work of ACRO for this past year, comments from the outgoing and incoming Treasurers are worthy of publication. According to both whilst the organisation finished the year with a deficit, this did not create immediate concerns. It was further noted, however, that ACRO needs to find additional means of raising income if the organisation is to continue in the longer term. It is more than apparent that ACRO cannot continue to be completely dependent upon government funding as a consequence of an apparent shrinkage of funds available generally in the social justice area. This year should see the development of new business plans for ACRO that will hopefully address this ongoing problem.

This was also the year that I completed my Doctorate at the University of Queensland. I thank the organisation for its patience over the past eighteen months and feel confident that this latest qualification will prove to be a considerable asset for ACRO particularly in relation to its research objectives. My thesis was based on *third way* politics. As an advocate involved in social justice work for the past 20 years I returned to study in July 2000 because of a concern I have (and still hold) about the future of the non-governmental sector in the context of the politics of the *third way*. The recent emergence of the *third way* or new social



democracy as it is now termed was formalised by Anthony Giddens and charts the middle ground between social democracy and neo-liberalism. My research drew on the perceptions of 35 elite informants within government and non-governmental organizations and for-profit union and community sectors across four inferred *third way* sites: the UK, Canada, the US and Australia.

The findings indicate the primary intent of the third way is the maintenance of government at all costs. In short, the non-governmental sector is under threat of redundancy or worse, disestablishment should it become overly critical of government policy or practice. As an historical voice of reason and a check on the possible excess of government the potential for this to happen presents a real threat to democracy.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the passing of former ACRO Chairperson, the Honourable Justice Douglas Campbell. Judge Campbell contributed in no small measure to the development of this organization through the difficult times of reformation following the Kennedy Review into Corrections in Queensland.

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.



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Registered with the Australian Securities Commission, A.R.B.N.: 066 875 107 ABN: 21 066 875 107
Incorporated in Queensland under the Associations Incorporation Act, Number 10000
Registered as a Charity under the Collections Act, Number 472

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