



# Executive Director's Annual Report 2006

ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated ABN 21 066 875 107  
incorporating  
ACRO Maintenance Pty Ltd ABN 15 107 348 701  
QBSA Number: 1055499

## "ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE"

## "All Our Profits Go to Charity"

### ACRO

- A Public Benevolent Institution
- Incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act (#10000)
- Sole Shareholder of ACRO Maintenance Pty Ltd ABN 15 107 348 701
- Registered as a Charity under the Collections Act # 472
- Registered with the Australian Securities Commission ARBN 066 875 107 ABN 21 066 875 107
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### Executive Members and Key Staff 2006

Ian Stewart  
Chairman

Stephanie Whelan  
Secretary

Chris Stewart  
Treasurer

Clive Begg  
Executive Director

Fiona Begg  
Program Coordinator

Ashley Reid  
Program Administrator



2006 will be the year remembered for legislative changes which will influence both ACRO and its client bases.

The government's "One Social Housing System" was implemented during the year, the impact of which will see time-limited housing services imposed upon clients. Where previously tenants could stay until a Department property became available to them (in, for example, CRS housing), they will now have considerable strictures placed upon them in terms of government support provided. Agencies are being encouraged to pursue private rental options for clients. This is clearly problematic for a number of reasons including: the under-supply of affordable rental stock; increased dislocation of tenants due to limited

lease times; increases in rent and re-sales of investment properties by landlords; and, the likelihood of our tenants already being on tenant data bases which block them from accessing private rental at all. On a more positive note, this new system include a common register of need whereby clients accessing housing will register through a common form to access housing assistance. Existing clients will be required to respond in writing or be removed from the housing list.

Appreciating that our clients are often incarcerated, transient or functionally illiterate, a system such as this may disenfranchise some who genuinely require housing but who will in all likeli-

hood be unable to respond to such notices.

The Corrective Services Act 2006 came into force on August 28 this year. A number of disturbing changes have been incorporated into the new act including the abolition of prisoners' rights to appeal decisions through judicial review. The Department has also flagged its intention to build a 4000 bed prison. ACRO is stridently opposed to the building of such a facility believing that other options would prove more beneficial to the community such as housing, health, education and community based support and prevention programs. Research the world over highlight the failure of prisons at all levels. Perhaps instead of focussing on Cops, Courts and Cor-

rections governments could consider focussing on Prevention, Programs



and being Proactive.

ACRO has participated in consultations with the Department of Communities centred on the concept of "Strengthening non-governmental organisations". Although the goals of the project are stated to be about strengthening and supporting the non-governmental sector, some concerns are raised about the potentiality for

the amalgamation of smaller NGOs into larger structures moving away from small community based services. Whilst in theory the "economy of scale" arguments that could see the creation of greater efficiency within the sector there may be a concern that larger sectarian religious-based organisations may not meet the pluralist multicultural needs of the changing Queensland

**Dr Clive Begg ACRO Executive Director**



community. The "strengthening" process also has a strong requirement for NGOs to comply with new standards and performance reporting measures deemed by government. Whilst no one would argue against the need for accountable procedures and practices, there is an inherent danger in adopting such an approach with a community sector becoming so bureaucratized as to mimic government service-delivery – a process that, as has been seen in some cases (notably health), is fraught with negative outcomes for clients. These are important debates which the community sector must consider if we be-

lieve in a community based service delivery model that is separate and independent of government.

Other ACRO programs and outcomes for the year will now be reviewed.

#### **YOUNG PEOPLE**

ACRO's School Holidays Recreation Program has successfully operated since 1999. Funded by the Department of Communities, this program is facilitated by two females who are under 25 years of age with social science backgrounds. The Camps offer both residential and non-residential components for groups of eight or nine partici-

pants aged between 12 and 15 years.

#### **INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

##### **WACOL FAMILY CENTRE**

Some 3 600 clients accessed services through the ACRO Family Centre during the year. 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. In December 2005, the Sir David Longlands Correctional Centre was closed for "renovations" with inmates moved to other centres primarily

Woodford and Maryborough. It is noted from family's comments that this has caused a significant amount of stress for inmates and families with no assistance offered to families for the extra expenses involved in visiting centres further away from Brisbane.

#### **OFFENDER SERVICES**

ACRO is funded by the Department of Corrective Services to provide assistance to released inmates from both the Arthur Gorrie and the Woodford Correctional Centres. Services contracted by the Department include: assistance accessing identification requirements in anticipation of release; assis-

tance accessing accommodation; and, assistance accessing welfare services. During this past year, 150 services were provided to inmates exiting correctional centres. ACRO promote the service through out the correctional centres and through information fliers and other community networks (including ACRO's membership to the Community Advisory Committee for the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre, local Centrelink offices, and community corrections) however due to the nature of the prison system many inmates and correctional centre staff remain unaware of services available from ACRO or other services offered by other com-

munity agencies. It is becoming more evident that the present model of service delivery which promotes a reduced level of support to inmates exiting correctional centres is increasingly problematic for integration of prisoners back into their communities. Services offered in the past such as post-release housing; half way houses and employment programs positively impacted to reduce rates of recidivism. It is regrettable that no apparent resolve exists on the part of government to community safety through proactive responses to discourage criminal behaviour and provide options to offending. This is an important issue that permeates

the Queensland "Correctional" system with no community organisations funded by the Department of Corrective Services (as far as we have been advised) to assist inmates released from Palen Creek, Darling Downs, Rockhampton or Maryborough.

#### **TRANSPORT**

Over 5000 clients utilised the ACRO Shuttle Bus service during the last twelve months. This Shuttle, which operates on weekends at Wacol, services

the Arthur Gorrie, Wolston, Womens and Sir David Longlands Correctional Centres, provides transport for the families and friends of inmates visiting the various Centres. Funding for this service is provided by the Department of Corrective Services. On average the Shuttle makes 150 trips to correctional centres each month. It is noted that the Department is currently undertaking an ongoing review into funding provided to non government services for offender services and transport

for several years. To date no outcomes have been advised. Our current funding agreement ends in June 2007. It is sincerely hoped that this important service does not go the way of programs such as the Wacol and Cairns JobClubs for released prisoners; the Warmington Street, Rockhampton and Cairns Halfway Houses for Currently Serving prisoners; Catherine House and Charley's Place (post-release halfway housing). Transport was also utilised by young people for

school holiday programs and families accessing other ACRO programs, for example, housing. Increased fuel costs have been a feature of all programs this year. The Department of Corrective Services has recognised this and provided an additional payment for next financial year to assist with the increased fuel costs.

### **ACCOMMODATION**

Supported Accommodation services funded by the Department of Communities provide important assistance to eligible persons and families in desperate need of accommodation. This year ACRO provided 4126 bed nights of accommodation to

families and individuals in the Brisbane area in need of short term supported accommodation. Furthermore, Community networks have expanded during the year to enhance support services for humanitarian refugee families accommodated by the organisation. Some 45 % of tenants case managed throughout the year were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including the Sudan, Vietnam and Israel. In addition, 15% of tenants were women and children exiting a correctional centre; 20 % of tenants identified as indigenous; and, 20 % of tenants identified as requiring housing due to domestic violence. Several additional prop-

erties have also been provided during the year as part of the Department of Housing's Transitional Housing program. The Department provides properties on a short term rental basis (6months) and organisation staff assist tenants to move to longer term stable accommodation through either accessing private rental or Department of Housing long term rentals. An additional 700 nights of accommodation has been offered during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of this financial year as a consequence of the transitional housing program. ACRO successfully applied for assistance with rates relief on our SAAP properties through the BCC Community Support Funding

Program.

### **WELFARE ASSISTANCE**

Over 350 families were assisted during the year through emergency relief payments including food vouchers and financial assistance for rent relief, gas and electricity payments. Many of these families also 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. In addition funds are provided to inmates to gain access to their birth certificates to assist them to establish a bank account on

release to attain continued access to Centrelink payments after their release. Prisoners who are unable to meet these requirements lose the ability to claim Centrelink benefits – so the provision of service is proving to be an important adjunct to resettlement options for released persons. In addition inmates who are returning to a household where their partner may be working may well be excluded from claiming any benefit due to his partner's income. This is especially difficult for inmates who are required to provide an address in order to meet parole conditions with the partner required to fully support

them until such time as they can find work. Finally, a considerable number of clients access staff and volunteers seeking information, advocacy services and appropriate referrals. Contacts such as these represent over fifteen hundred contacts 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. An internal staff/volunteer skills development workshop was held during 2005 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. Cultural Awareness training was also provided through the Department of Housing for members of the Home Secure Assist team. Our school holidays youth program facilitators had the opportunity to undertake Facilitator training at the Outlook at Boonah. Housing workers had

the opportunity to undertake training with the Department of Housing in relation to the new Social Housing System and new Rent Payment Schedules and NDCA data-base training to undertake reporting requirements for the SAAP program. Home assist secure staff also undertook Manual handling training during the year to assist in work place health and safety and also undertook training in the Linking Seniors program designed to reduce social isolation of older people in our community.

### **SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

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 by the Department of Housing, this program provided over 3000 services to clients during the year relating to health and safety issues in their home. As a service designed to assist people to maintain their independence



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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 2614 services were provided to clients through Home and Community Care (HACC) funding which ACRO receives from the Department of Health. Most of this funding is dedicated to installing grab-rails, ramps, chair and bed raisers and other minor modifications which enable both older people and people of any age with a disability to remain living in their homes for as long as they choose. Staff work closely with occupational therapists through community health centres and hospitals to assist people being discharged from hospital and also to help prevent admissions to hospital through falls prevention. As at June 2006 the program has 7500 active clients on our data base.

**ACRO MAINTENANCE**

ACRO is the sole shareholder of ACRO Maintenance Pty Ltd, a building and maintenance group which generates funds that are fully dedicated to charitable purpose. Another successful year for the Company has value-added to the charitable work of ACRO.

**NEW INITIATIVES**

**Intergenerational Trial program between Everton Park State High School Students and Stafford Meals on wheels**

After participating in a forum with Older People Speak Out (OPSO), ACRO set up a meeting with a local Meals on Wheels provider at Stafford and developed a written proposal to present to a local high school (Everton Park State High) designed to involve high school students directly in assisting with the preparation and delivery of meals with other volunteers in their local area. The program was designed to encourage inter-generational contact between

young people and older people in a local community and also reduce the social isolation experienced by many older people who may have limited ability to leave their homes. A trial partnership program was proposed involving Year 11 students and the local Meals on Wheels (MOW) with joint coordination between a nominated school staff member and MOW coordinator. A meeting was held between the school Principal, nominated staff member/s, MOW and ACRO representatives to develop the proposal and timetable within the school curriculum. After the initial go ahead was granted, ongoing meetings with relevant school staff, MOW and ACRO were organized to monitor day to days. The Initial program was scheduled to run over one (1) school term with a class of Year 11 students who would all rotate through the program by undertaking a regular day each week with MOW. The Program ran as part of the school curriculum for students undertaking Food Studies and students received credit for work undertaken. Students worked alongside MOW volunteers in food preparation and meals delivery to people in their homes. Students undertook the program on the same day each week to enable older people and younger people to get to know each other. The program requires a four (4) hour commitment between 8am and 12pm on specified days. Young people worked in pairs and the program utilised six students per week over four school terms.

The program has now run for two terms and ACRO has been requested to undertake an evaluation of all participants to assess the success of the program and any improvements that can be made. The program has



**Ian Stewart**, Chairperson (right)  
**Stephanie Whelan**, Secretary (below)



**Chris Stewart**, Treasurer (below)



**Matt Swain & Dale Lazarides** (below)  
 ACRO Maintenance Plumber & Builder



received significant publicity on local radio and local press and the MOW coordinator Jack Pool has reported to ACRO in late August that three additional Meals on Wheels providers are interested in providing a grant. **Jennifer Abdur-Rahman, Ashley Reid, Graham Kersnoske, Ed Wilson and AFBO's Brigitte Wilson** (below) have also requested ACRO provide a copy of the proposal for the State-wide Meals on wheels conference to be held on the Gold Coast in September. Meetings will be held with the school in the coming weeks with the evaluation anticipated to be completed by the end of October 2006. The program has also been included in a kit produced by Older People Speak Out (OPSO) entitled

*Generations A Go-Go - A kit for Intergenerational Activities.*