

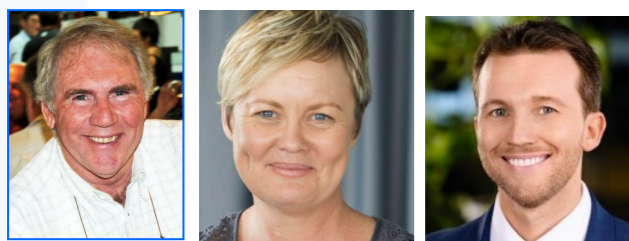
- commodate;
- 426 Additional Housing related requests (again, an increase over the previous year);
- 1250 Calls for Assistance
- 586 assisted through additional programs
- 117 people were financially assisted this past year with Emergency Relief and payments to client's creditors.

These results could only occur with the professional determined and creative efforts of Fiona and Neil particularly. I also wish to thank Alan, Anneliess, Paul and Emily. Naturally we are, as always, indebted to our fearless Executive Committee Members Ian, Chris and Stephanie.

The Face of ACRO, 2024



(Left to Right) Accounts Manager Neil Joseph; inset: ACRO Builder Alan Elliott; Programs Manager Fiona Begg;; Field Officer Paul Green; Administration Worker Anneliess Law.



Executive Committee Members Ian Stewart, Chairperson; Stephanie Whelan, Secretary; Chris Stewart, Treasurer.



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 Incorporated in Queensland under the Associations Incorporation Act (#10000)
 Registered as a Charity under the Collections Act (#472)

In the spirit of reconciliation ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

ANNUAL
REPORT
2024



“I wish that ours was a niche market, but the reality of increased violence within families is a cancer that is spreading across the Australian community.”

For 60 years ACRO has provided a wide range of services for those most disadvantaged in our community. We have been blessed with a solid base of concerned citizens and workers whose dedication to the principles of social justice is exemplary. The countless thousands who have been positively impacted by this dedication is the true measure of success for our work. Over the decades we have provided services for older people, younger people, prisoners and their families, victims of crime, unemployed people, those needing emergency relief and the homeless to name a few.

The provision of housing for those in crisis has been particularly central to the work of ACRO since its inception. During the 1960s and 1970s the organisation provided “halfway house” accommodation for those released from prison. The 1970s also saw the emergence of the Homeless Persons Assistance Program (HPAP) to which ACRO became an inaugural participant, which greatly expanded possibilities for families who otherwise would have been homeless. Over time, this program was to change its name and focus but persists, albeit on a reduced basis, to the present day, as a governmental response to the ongoing and expanding housing crisis confronting the Australian community.

The 1980s witnessed the development of home detention alternatives to prison, with organisations like ACRO providing supervised accommodation operating from within the community for those convicted of relatively minor offences who would otherwise have been in prison. Our earliest facility in Paddington, Brisbane was joined by other projects in Rockhampton and Cairns (Halcyon House and Rose Blank House).

Whilst numerically the number of houses operated by the organisation has never been large (we are not a “tiered” housing provider), the impact and diversity of

client outcomes has been outstanding with countless thousands benefiting from the accommodation provided. Housing Corporations have emerged as homelessness took on the mantle of an industry. These corporations have been charged with the responsibility for the provision of homelessness facilities and they, like other social services I believe, appear to have been seduced by profit-making and expediency, rather than being client-centred.

Today ACRO accommodates families across seven locations who otherwise would be homeless and in desperate need. Our client base includes those escaping partner assault and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people whose lack of access to services by virtue of their visa status would have otherwise placed them in extreme peril without low or no-cost housing.

I wish that ours was a niche market, but the reality of increased violence within families is a cancer that is spreading across the Australian community. Women and children are daily confronting extreme circumstances. Housing options are barely keeping pace with the exponential rise in partner assault and violence. The problem, it seems to this humble observer, is that our efforts to provide alternative housing for multiple members of families enables offenders to stay in family homes and continue to enjoy the benefits that the family home provides. Would it not make better sense to relocate the offender well out of reach of family members rather than displace and punish the victims? Is it not easier to isolate the individual rather than the group? This would undoubtedly require significant legislative innovation, but it would seem that community safety should demand nothing less.

Executive Director's Annual Report 2024

"The unintended consequences of homelessness are profound. A lack of basic hygiene and nutrition is accompanied by poor educational opportunities for children, increased exposure to further violence on the street, depression, other physical and psychological impediments and many more."



Dr Clive Begg Executive Director

And whilst we have witnessed a significant reduction in the number of refugee arrivals it is only a matter of time before Australia will need to respond, as a responsible international player, to the enormous displacement of citizens caused by conflict and expansionist wars throughout the world. The horror and dislocation that we know historically follow in the wake of prolonged war and persecution will require all free-world democracies to respond by providing sanctuary to those displaced. This looming humanitarian demand will further exacerbate the housing problems confronting Australia. We should be considering a plan of action that is responsive to both domestic and, potentially, international need.

We know that these issues are not unique to Australia. Fiona and I were able to attend the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANSTA) Conference in Vienna during the year. The issues for that place are profound as cross-border incursion of refugees creates angst throughout Europe, in addition to increasing poverty and lack of affordable housing. Their set of circumstances are different to those of Australia, primarily since we are an island and share no borders with other nations. However, the degradation of economies exacerbated by the COVID pandemic coupled with the international movement to the political right are creating great tension and division.

It is a sad reality that successive governments in Australia, both State and Federal, have determined to abrogate their responsibility in the provision of housing by selling off housing stock, in the past, that is so desperately needed today. The price of land, housing and rental in today's market make it virtually impossible to restock housing or subsidize rents to meet the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. There are other models that could be implemented, and governments are attempting to address the problem, but the process may prove to be too slow to provide utility for the expanding demands that homelessness creates. We need to be more proactive as the number of those sleeping rough in cars, parks, tents, sheds and on our streets increases.

The unintended consequences of homelessness are profound. A lack of basic hygiene and nutrition is accompanied by poor educational opportunities for children, increased exposure to further violence on the street, depression, other physical and psychological impediments and many more. Whether it is believed or not, we have a collective responsibility for all constituent members, regardless of their financial capacity. Our community health is measured by the circumstances of those less fortunate. Put simply, we are failing, and our community well-being is degrading. A further complication is that the number of effective and grass-roots services historically providing support and relief for the poor appears to be diminishing. In a bid to maintain survivability many are resorting to profit-making enterprises with middle-class welfare becoming a prime focus for service delivery.

Much has already been written about "affordable housing" but, in essence, it is housing designed for those on wages or salaries with reductions to market rent being offered. "Build to Rent" projects again rely upon clients who have regular income. We can and must do better. Rent caps, better public rental subsidization, enforceable long-term leases (such as those provided to Department of Defense personnel), discouraging short-term accommodation options with penalties and higher taxation, regulating the purchase of property (untenanted and empty) by foreign nationals and heavily taxing unoccupied dwellings could form a suite of initiatives that would vastly improve the current circumstances for our poor. We need a social contract that is responsive to need and not the market. Until then we are only promoting the fracturing of our community between those who have and those who don't. The negative mental health aspects of this approach will be profound as will be an increase in crime, despair, drug and alcohol dependence, gambling and violence.

I'd like to believe that common sense and decency will prevail and that better people than I will promulgate and agitate for "solutions" to homelessness, sooner rather than later. Without that hope there is

a genuine fear that the heightened disparities that exist in other parts of the world will be visited upon Australia and that our society will become increasingly stratified, fractured and sink further into crisis.

The Year in Brief

During the year ACRO's office relocation, as reported last year, has been seamless. Our staff complement now consists of three full-time and three permanent part-time workers, which is a considerable streamlining of the organisation from the past. We continue to be concerned about our ability to find suitable Staff as replacement to our ageing workforce whilst cognizant of the needs of our existing Staff members to continue their employment and exit on their own terms.

In terms of funding, ACRO has guaranteed continuity of funding under its existing funding arrangements: Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) funded until 30 June 2025 with an anticipated extension to June 2027. It is noted that this funding is now paid in arrears which has placed some financial burden on the organisation; Home Assist Secure (HAS): Funded until 30 June 2027; and Specialist Homelessness Service: Funded until 30 June 2027.

As for our new Homelessness Centre designed specifically for CALD Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women and children who have experienced Domestic Violence, it is now fully occupied. Some modifications became necessary to accommodate need (screen doors for cross-ventilation, enclosing of garage area for child safety). We were also able to install solar panels and batteries with a grant from the Gaming Fund to reduce electricity costs, for which we are very grateful. We also acknowledge a range of donations for our clients secured through the GIVIT website.

As noted at the last AGM, without new funding options, all existing recurrent funding will most likely cease on 30 June 2027. We have been unable to secure any on-going new staff funding this past year. In anticipation of the discontinuance of funding post-2027 we have implemented a future-proofing program to increase economic efficiency. We have reduced our vehicle fleet to two, with one being a hybrid. This has had a significant impact on recurrent expenditure. As noted, we have installed a solar system,

and this is proving to also lead to a significant reduction in recurrent spending. Further, we have changed our telephony arrangements with a cloud-based PABX phone system and new cheaper contracts for our mobile phones. Again, this is impacting to reduce recurrent expenditure. We have also decommissioned our Servers in favor of OneDrive cloud storage, thereby saving highly significant costs associated with the maintenance of the Server infrastructure and monthly service contracts with internet providers. We are also reviewing our auditing system moving forward. The current cost is not proportionate to the reduced funding that we now process. Changed rules by ACNC also reduce requirements for Organisations of our size. Finally, we have implemented a new reporting system for Home Assist Secure and Commonwealth Home Support Programs to replace the ageing HASlink program. This is a cloud-based system that does not require local server administration. The endgame for the Executive has been to put in place measures aimed at securing the continuity of the organisation as funding options dissipate. Major staffing changes are foreshadowed from FY 2027.

Operational Year Outcomes

- i. ACRO continued to meet its operational targets and those assigned by the various funding agencies;
- ii. Performance Audits undertaken by government agencies were highly positive and speaks to the professionalism of our Staff and our Programs Manager Fiona;
- iii. ACRO again notes that over 65s registering for My Aged Care (MAC) continues to impact on the number of new clients services by HAS. New interventions to assist eligible people of this service have been implemented. Confusion about packages persists particularly in relation to CHSP services.
- iv. ACRO has met all performance indicators in its Crisis Accommodation Program. ACRO continues to support families on bridging visas who are unable to exit to independent housing.

Summary Statistics

- 1974 Home Assist Services;
- 2828 CHSP Maintenance Services;
- 609 CHSP Modification Services;
- 185 First Interviews;
- 417 Occupational Therapist Referrals;
- 7278 SAAP Bed nights of Accommodation. We did, unfortunately, register an increased number of people who we were unable to ac-