

funding which make our programs possible (Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability and the Department of Housing; Commonwealth Department of Health).

Also we acknowledge the National Australia Bank, Good Shepherd Micro Finance (particularly Karen Denham for the funding, knowledge and support that allows us to assist our clients to access no interest loans for the affordable purchase of essential household items. As any Administrator will admit, your service is only as good as the people behind the organisation. In our case we are blessed with outstanding supporters both at the Executive / Management level and at the Staff level. The guidance of Ian Stewart, Stephanie Whelan and Chris Stewart has ensured that the work of ACRO has been accountable, transparent and in accord with both government and community expectations. We thank them again for their insight, knowledge and decision-making. The dedication of the ACRO Staff is beyond reproach. Under the guidance of our highly skilled and patient Programs Manager, Fiona Begg; our industrious Accounts Manager Neil Joseph; our extraordinary administrative Staff Jennifer Abdur-Rahman and Nancy Pitinga; our skilled and adaptable tradespeo-

ple Ben Green, Harry McKinnon, David Licht, David Vincenzi, Rod Stegeman and Jarod Taylor and our Housing Staff Julie Ann Woods and Amanda Karo, ACRO has provided coordinated and meaningful contributions to a range of clients across Brisbane. I thank them sincerely for their efforts and ongoing commitment.

The Future

I would be less than candid if I were not to express some concern about the future of the organisation. As an entity that has grown to be substantially reliant upon public funding through Government departments, we are facing a new Chapter with the very real possibility of major funding ending in June of 2018. We have been fortunate to consolidate sufficient funds to continue on however the way in which we do this will be governed by decisions that are yet to be made by the Executive Committee. This body will meet during the coming Financial Year to review our current Strategic Plan which was first crafted in 2000. This plan, and its subsequent reviews, has served us well but it is time to re-think our direction if we are to retain both our charitable status and to provide meaningful ser-

vices for disadvantaged and dispossessed citizens.

In my opening remarks I spoke of the difficulty for us in the past to retain an advocacy role within the community and of my belief that we can do better to redress the concerns that we should feel about particular government policy. These may prove to be the start points for any future strategy for ACRO. It has been stated before that we started as a Volunteer organisation and that we may well return to the same status. There is no shame in this. Indeed, it may provide an opportunity to more proactively reconnect with the community in new and more innovative ways.

I look forward to a bright and active future for ACRO and I ask that the membership support the difficult decisions before the Executive and the Staff.

I wish you well in 2017 and ask that we all remain vigilant and responsible citizens.



ACRO Staff members [below] (L to R) Top Row: Jared Taylor, Julie-Ann Wood, Nancy Pitinga, Helen Uhlman (OT); Second Row: David Vincenzi, Ben Green, Fiona Begg, Jennifer Abdur-Rahman, David Licht, Harry McKinnon; Front Row: Christine (OT), Neil Joseph, Amanda Karo. Inset: Sarah Green



Below: Olga's at Shorncliffe Staff (L to R) Emmett, Ashley, Tom, Fiona, Jacqui, Jeremy, Jodi and Dominik



Fear is a powerful social aphrodisiac it is true. But it also the precursor to social decay and anarchy.

There was a time when nongovernmental organisations were responsive to genuine need within the community; when their motivation was not governed by funding arrangements nor by fear of reprisal by government for critical assessment of perceived flawed policy. The role of advocacy on behalf of various constituencies was not only accepted, but encouraged. When I came into ACRO in the early 1980s, its work was primarily centred on criminal justice and the prison system. Founded by Judges and senior members of various Churches, politicians and eminent citizens during the 1960s, the organization provided services for the families of those in prison and prisoners upon their release into the community.

The prison system, at the time, was fatally flawed with outdated militaristic methods in place that were draconian and which jeopardized any possibility for the safe reintegration of prisoners back into the community. Recidivism rates were high with little evidence that imprisonment either addressed behaviour that led to crime, or rehabilitation. In fact, it was argued by us, that the prison system was generating better educated criminals rather than productive citizens. With the support of the Human Rights Commission and others, ACRO advocated publicly for a reform of this system. This lobbying led to a Commission of Review into Corrections, a reform agenda for prisons and the development of expanded options for alternatives to imprisonment which would address aberrant behaviour that would hopefully reduce crime levels and impact to reduce harm in the community. With the reform agenda underway, ACRO then turned its attention to the core reasons for offending behaviour. Our research indicated that our prisons were still fundamentally pauper prisons with huge over-representation within its population of the poor and Indigenous with socio-economic factors such as homelessness, inadequate education, lack of access to employment opportunity and later, drug and alcohol abuse as indicators to opportunistic offending activity. We undertook various interventions at social and educative levels involving whole-of-government approaches that we believed would reduce crime. Crime rates did progressively reduce for a range of reasons including as a function of an ageing population with young people "growing out of crime" and yet, the bidding war between political parties as to which could implement the harshest punishment regime for offenders, persisted in the belief that such measures would receive general public support. Unreasonable concern developed throughout the community, however, with the "talking up" of crime. And a new age of repression began.

Over two decades ago this organization investigated a phenomenon we called the **Crime of Fear** where we hypothesised (and were able to conclude) that the public perception of crime greatly

outweighed its actuality (Begg, C. & Boorman, C., 1994). This seminal work which, whilst heralding a new holistic approach to community safety and the development of a federally funded Safer Australia program, left nagging doubts as to the reasons why those fears were exaggerated in the first instance. An answer came in 1995 when a subsequent study undertaken by ACRO established that media exaggeration was directly feeding fear in the community (Whelan, S., 1995). In 1998 ACRO broadened its research into the phenomenon with cross-jurisdictional studies which affirmed the original findings of 1994 and 1995 (Whelan, S. & Begg, C., 1998.). The linkages between media hype and fear of victimisation were clearly established through these studies. A nexus between the insatiable appetites of politicians to legitimize themselves (the political imperative) and the media whose schedules led them to publish anything fed to them by the politicians (sales and profits) became blatantly apparent. You would like to think that community attitudes would evolve based upon reason and not the agendas of opportunistic politicians and lazy journalism. Not so it seems.

How sad an indictment that during the intervening years since ACRO's work on the fear of crime, that the fear of becoming a victim of crime that we know was generated by media hyperbole *then* has now generalized and extended to fear across other aspects of our community *now*. This phenomenon, as previously, is as an act of political expediency and sensationalism by contemporary political parties and media outlets—not of objective fact or considered research.

We live in fortunate circumstances here in Australia. Having travelled extensively I have seen at close quarters the difficulties experienced by citizens in other parts of the world. Basic needs are not met in so many places and the spectre of starvation and lack of potable water for vast numbers of people looms as the greatest potential catastrophe for humankind into the future. We, as Australians, can afford to be charitable. And yet, the perpetuation of fear of others, particularly refugees, persists. I would ask that you consider the meaning of the word "refugee". They are a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. An asylum seeker is a refugee who is seeking protection from another country from that from which they have escaped. A refugee or asylum seeker is not defined by the transport method used to achieve sanctuary – be it plane or boat or on foot. From our experience within ACRO, refugees are people with legitimate claim. These people are not, as popularly character-



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Executive Director's Annual Report 2016

We were told as children that there are times for silence. We are neither children nor is this the time

ized, terrorists or people Australian citizens should be fearful of. The perception that refugees are terrorists or potential terrorists and the fear that this perception generates for the public is fuelled by government policy that alienates "them" from "us". And we imprison refugees, including children, on far flung islands because of this fear. Many good citizens are saddened by the hard-line approach to asylum seekers adopted by all political parties. In a civilized society people in need deserve compassion and should not be portrayed as outsiders who would do harm. This approach is cynical in the extreme. Yet the general public view, it seems, has been to accept, a priori, and without question, the precepts of the government – to fall prey to the crime of fear. Our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers has been cruel to say the least. Their further victimisation at our hands is deplorable and our actions will come back to haunt us all.

It is not only refugees that have been targeted to divide our community and polarize opinion. Recent negative debates about same-sex marriage, Climate Change, Euthanasia and a Treaty for Indigenous Australians are all symptomatic of governments that have lost touch with the heartbeat of its people. The net result of generating fear is to create extremism. Those who are fearful move to an appropriate comfort level not unlike the creation of the brown shirts in pre-war Germany in the late 1930s or the McCarthy era of the United States during the 1950s or indeed the White Australia movement. Fear is a powerful social aphrodisiac it is true. But it is also the precursor to social decay and anarchy. What I find disturbing is the lack of advocacy for those whose interests are being so blatantly violated. Good Citizens must always defend the dispossessed – regardless of consequences.

The Pandora's Box of ultra-conservatism and baseless argument, now opened, cannot be closed without advocacy. The beasts unleashed cannot be contained as long as reasonable people sit idly by. And reasonable people cannot be moved in the absence of reasoned argument and a strong voice. ACRO will, as part of its charter to "Achieve Social Justice", advance debate and become one of those voices.

There is a responsibility for all citizens to challenge the dictums and strategies of gov-

ernment. It is the responsibility of academics to question policy that is in opposition to research findings. It is the responsibility of nongovernmental organisations to advocate on behalf of those whose voice is weakened by arrogance, misinformation and prejudice. We were told as children that there are times for silence. We are neither children nor is this the time. We are a prosperous people in a prosperous country. We can do better and we must do better.

Annual Review of Programs.

Housing

ACRO has been providing support to families in our short term crisis housing since 1986. Funding historically provided through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) remains in place although the future of the program is unclear beyond the current contracted period to 2018. This is a valuable program which provides targeted short term case management support to families, has a long history of demonstrable outcomes for clients not only in terms of enabling them to access long term, affordable stable housing but also in the development and nurturing of life skills and problem solving practices crucial to sustainable independent living. The challenges in locating and accessing "affordable" long term stable housing are growing as governments have increasingly moved away from building public housing stock and instead moved towards the funding of "affordable housing" programs. Increasingly this term is becoming meaningless to the families that we work with as it is most often defined as rental housing that is rented at 25% less than the market rent in a particular location. For most of our clients this means that sustainable housing remains out of their reach. There is a growing pool of people who are unable to be housed in reducing public housing stock and also cannot afford private rental or what is deemed "affordable housing". A more equitable and realistic model of "affordable housing" is clearly needed if public

policy makers wish to avoid an ever increasing number of families experiencing extended cycles of homelessness which many in our sector are grappling with. During the past year some 6862 bed nights were provided through our SAAP program. Our other housing programs have also continued and although the number of properties available to us have decreased we were still able to provide 44 689 bed nights. The majority of families assisted were from refugee backgrounds. Despite our best efforts 433 requests for housing could not be met and clients were referred to other services.

Welfare

As a result of the loss of federal government Emergency Relief (ER) funds in the previous calendar year, ACRO has had only a limited ability to provide financial and material aid to clients. In this financial year we have continued to receive a small ER grant from the State government which has enabled us to assist a small number of families. It is a concern that ACRO has continued to receive a high number of calls requesting emergency relief where clients are indicating they are unable to access assistance from the remaining funded ER providers. 628 requests for ER assistance were received with the majority needing to be referred to other providers.

Home Maintenance and Modifications Program

ACRO has continued to provide these services to clients in their homes on the Northside of Brisbane through three discreet funding streams: Home Assist Secure (HAS) and the Community Care Program which are both funded by the State Government and Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). This funding enables ACRO to assist elderly clients



Dr Clive Begg, Executive Director

and clients of any age with a disability to stay living independently in their homes by providing subsidised assistance with their home maintenance and home modification needs. The past year has seen a continuing number of changes to how clients can access these services particularly clients over sixty five (65) who must now register and request services through My Aged Care. There have been many ongoing challenges for both staff and elderly clients in trying to adapt to a significant level of change in how aged care services are provided. The loss of clients ability to directly access a local service provider for their home care needs and the additional layer of bureaucracy and assessment processes is continuing to impact particularly where clients have existing circumstances that act as barriers to accessing services. Clients suffering from dementia, clients from a non-English speaking background, clients with mental health issues etc. are examples of this problem. The growing impact of significant changes is set to continue with the introduction of the NDIS in coming years, where clients with a disability will also confront a complete change in the accessing and delivery of services. Over the past year ACRO has delivered the following outcomes to clients: 631 first interviews conducted; 4655 services to home assist clients (3071 services delivered by ACRO staff and 1584 undertaken by contractors); 4104 maintenance services undertaken for clients eligible under the CHSP program (2204 by ACRO staff and 1900 contractors); 1196 home modifications were completed under the CHSP program with 943 occupational therapist referrals. The Australian Aged Care Quality Agency conducted an audit of ACRO's maintenance and modifications program in April this year. ACRO was

found to be fully compliant with all eighteen Home Care Standards. This is a tribute to our hard working program staff who respond in such an effective and efficient manner to client need.

Olga's at Shorncliffe

The restaurant run by ACRO called Olga's at Shorncliffe has now operated as a Social Enterprise for the past four years. It has again significantly raised the profile for ACRO during this past year and secured donations towards our work in the community. The time is coming when we will need to review this Project in the light of potential future funding cuts by government agencies. Over the lifetime of the Project, ACRO has subsidised its operation from consolidated revenue with the Restaurant running at a consistent loss. It will be necessary to be more frugal with our funding if we are to maintain (or seek to maintain) the existing style of services beyond the funding cycle (2018). We are grateful for the support of many good people from the area who have been regular supporters of the Restaurant. We thank Bev Owens who provided laundry services (both cleaning and ironing) for several years without cost. We acknowledge local patrons Tim and Jenny Mead; Robin and Douglas Spencer; Kim and Mike and countless others who have been regular smiling faces at the facility. We thank our tradespeople who have maintained equipment and services without charge. We are indebted to our Chefs and front-of-house Staff, in particular Dominik Lin our loyal Manager and his Staff including Ashley, Jeremy, Emmett, Thomas, Jemima, Jacqui and Jodie. It has been an exceptional experience and one that has created many skilled Staff who will contribute greatly to new employers into their future.

Daytripper Project

ACRO's Daytripper Program has again provided tours for elderly people on a monthly basis throughout the year. This year we had 262 participants who report great happiness with the diversity of tours and professionalism of the operation. I sincerely thank our Coordinator for much of the year Nancy Pit- inga who assumed additional duties to accommodate the needs of Daytripper clients. Her role is being taken over by Sarah Green. The monthly tours would simply not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our wonderful Volunteers, Fay Riggs, Del Hodge and Christina Williams. Thank you ladies on behalf of all the people you have given joy to this year.

NILS Program

This program now in its 5th year of operation at ACRO. It enables clients who are on low incomes access to no interest loans up to \$1200 to purchase essential household goods. This year we have provided ten new loans to clients in our short term housing and also to clients accessing our maintenance and modifications programs. Five existing loans have been fully repaid and two clients have taken up the opportunity to take out a second loan. No clients have defaulted on their repayments throughout the five years. The repaid loan money is then available for the next person in need.

Camp Program

Due to a loss of funding last year our school holidays recreational program for young people (which had operated for over 15 years) was discontinued this year. However due to a generous one off grant of \$10 000 from the Sisters of Mercy in Brisbane through CRA qld ACRO will be able to deliver two programs in the latter part of

2016. ACRO will continue to seek funding opportunities to enable us to continue to provide recreational programs for young people, particularly children of refugees who have been the main participants in our camp program in recent times. We acknowledge the ongoing role of our camp facilitators Melly and Karen and Phoebe who make the program possible.

Acknowledgements

ACRO was successful in receiving a grant from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund which will enable the replacement of well-worn furniture in the organisation's supported accommodation housing. We are grateful for the support of the local member on behalf of the many clients this will assist in our crisis housing. We acknowledge the importance of the ongoing working relationship between our staff and the following key individuals and agencies that directly supports our ability to assist our clients: Staff from the Department of Housing Area office – in particular Inala, Chermiside and Fortitude Valley office; staff from the Multicultural Development Association (MDA); Resettlement Service staff from St Vincent De Paul Inala; Lawrence Marinelli from Capital and Assets Branch of Department of Housing. We are also grateful for the ongoing donations facilitated through the Givit website from a variety of kind hearted people and from our own staff, management committee members, family and friends who continually respond when we put out the call for our families in need. We also acknowledge the various State and Federal Government departments and staff who provide the

