

# update

Issue 65 • Spring 2013 •  
Housing & homelessness

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### ACTCOSS newflash

Come to ACTCOSS' 50th birthday! We will be hosting a party alongside our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 14 November from 4pm to 6.30pm at the ACT Legislative Assembly. We will also exhibit a display of objects and images that tell the story of ACTCOSS over the past fifty years. Please join us! [www.actcoss.org.au](http://www.actcoss.org.au)



## Housing & homelessness

By Susan Helyar, Director, ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS)

Our Spring newsletter brings together the experience of organisations across Canberra who are concerned about affordable housing and homelessness. We have shared case studies, statistical snapshots and advocacy work. The Australian Human Rights Commission has said:

People experiencing homelessness face violations of a wide range of human rights. Access to safe and secure housing is one of the most basic human rights. However, homelessness is not just about housing.

A person who is homeless may be facing violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education, the right to liberty and security of the person, the right to privacy, the right to social security, the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to vote and many more.

Being unable to find a place to live that you can afford to pay for is not only a violation of human rights. Homelessness and housing stress drives unsustainable growth in demand not only for housing

support services but also demand for other services (like emergency relief and financial counselling). Lack of access to housing can be a barrier to leaving violent relationships. Unsuitable and insecure housing exacerbates physical and social health problems, interrupts caring roles and can stop people from completing education or keeping a job.

The 2011 Census estimated there were around 1785 people without a home to call their own in Canberra. A recent report by the National Centre for Economic and Social Modelling (NATSEM) found 9910 households in our community experienced housing stress. There are currently over two thousand households on the ACT public housing waiting list.

We often look to government to fix housing problems. Government certainly has a role in promoting building of affordable housing, in funding tenancy support services and in providing social housing. But the private sector can and should step up to providing houses for rent or purchase that are affordable to people living on the minimum wage or income support.

# The fear of losing your home

By Julie Evans, Manager, Supportive Tenancy Service

Robert<sup>1</sup> thought he had to leave his home within days when he contacted the Supportive Tenancy Service (STS). He and his partner Jody had accrued substantial rental arrears when he had lost his job and her casual work had been irregular. While they were both working regularly now and trying to pay back the debt, the landlord had issued a Notice to Vacate. The relationship between landlord and tenants had deteriorated. The STS worker spoke to the landlord on Robert and Jody's behalf, and assisted them to work out an affordable repayment plan, which the landlord accepted. The STS worker then supported Robert and Jody to follow through the agreement and address other issues that had come up.

The fear of losing their home is real for many people in Canberra, such as Robert and Jody, and can have wide ramifications for relationships, employment, study and generally participating in our community. Some tenants in private rental are struggling with housing affordability given relatively high rents and low vacancies. The *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, released in April 2013, concluded that there were practically no affordable rental options in Canberra or Queanbeyan for any of the low-income households studied.

STS provides early intervention, outreach and crisis support to tenants at risk of losing their home, covering all forms of tenancy, including public housing, private rental and mortgages. The service started in November 2010, and is run by the partnership of Woden Community Service, Belconnen Community Service and YWCA of Canberra. While rental arrears are a common problem, other types of difficulties that can put a tenancy at risk include neighbourhood conflict, overcrowding and poor property condition.

STS tenancy support workers talk with tenants about their difficulties, issues and goals, and work with them to develop a plan to address these, recognising there may be a range of underlying issues that could impact on a tenancy. The nature of support is very flexible and will depend on each tenant's situation. The support from STS includes

providing information, talking about options, making referrals and connections to other services (including specialised legal and financial advice), supporting tenants through legal or administrative processes, and advocating for tenants with other parties. Since the service started, STS has assisted over 1500 people and has been extremely successful. Tenants report that the assistance and support from STS enabled them to get through difficulties and sustain their tenancies.

The experience of STS has shown the value of being involved when tenants first encounter issues, rather than when the threat of eviction is imminent. However, having resources for early intervention can be a challenge when there is considerable demand for support during crisis. STS was established with a focus on sustaining existing tenancies, but there are wider demands for support to establish tenancies from people who have to leave a tenancy (e.g. if a private rental is no longer affordable) or who do not have current tenancies (e.g. couch surfing or living with family members).

The Supportive Tenancy Service is jointly funded by the ACT and Commonwealth Governments under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) to June 2014. The recent election campaign included very little discussion of the issues around housing and homelessness. Thus, it is not clear whether NPAH will continue beyond June 2014, and services such as STS may cease in the middle of next year if no continuing funding is available, from NPAH or other sources. However, the experience of STS shows the value for people such as Robert and Jody of having a service providing support to keep a tenancy and the greater demand for support to find an appropriate home.

For more information about STS, see [www.wcs.org.au/community/support/tenancy-service](http://www.wcs.org.au/community/support/tenancy-service), call 6207 2427 or email [supportivetenancy@bcsact.com.au](mailto:supportivetenancy@bcsact.com.au).

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1 Names have been changed to protect privacy.

The Supportive Tenancy Service (STS) provides early intervention, outreach and crisis support to tenants at risk of losing their home, covering all forms of tenancy, including public housing, private rental and mortgages. The service started in November 2010, and is run by the partnership of Woden Community Service, Belconnen Community Service and YWCA of Canberra.

[www.wcs.org.au/community/support/tenancy-service](http://www.wcs.org.au/community/support/tenancy-service)



## Youth housing & homelessness

By Natalie Oliver, Deputy Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT

**H**ousing is a fundamental determinant of the wellbeing of young people. Safe and stable housing is also a basic human right, protected by a number of treaties which Australia has ratified. However, despite this, many young people still experience housing stress or homelessness.

### Housing affordability & young people

Many young people in the ACT experience severe financial hardship associated with the high cost of living.<sup>1</sup> As young people are often working casually or still completing training, they struggle to compete in the private rental market—which in the ACT is amongst the highest in Australia. Many young people also report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability and discrimination.

In December 2012, median weekly house rentals in the ACT were \$480 per week and median weekly unit rentals were \$430 per week.<sup>2</sup> Over the last three years rents have risen by an average of 10% nationally, while the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent

Assistance (CRA) have increased by only 2.7%.<sup>3</sup>

Even if students receive Rent Assistance, 43% of recipients experience housing stress because they are paying more than 30% of their income in rent.

Housing stress for a young person means having to forego living close to shops, schools and public transport. It could also mean forgoing other items such as food. Rent assistance paid to students is subject to more restrictions and is paid at a lower rate than rent assistance paid to people on other payment types.<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth Rent Assistance is capped at the rate of inflation, but due to extremely low vacancy rates (especially in the ACT), rents have risen much more quickly than the inflation rate.

### Difficulty of access

Consultations with young people indicated it is difficult to access affordable housing in Canberra given the expensive rental market and high student population.

In the 2012 *Rate Canberra* survey conducted by the Youth Coalition, 12% of respondents indicated 'paying rent, board, or mortgage

repayments' was worrying them.<sup>5</sup>

Vulnerable young people also report they may have forgone proper nutritional meals, struggled to pay utility bills, especially in winter, and had difficulties paying rent due to the amount of income support being inadequate for their needs.<sup>6</sup>

Various groups of young people have particular problems accessing housing including tertiary students, apprentices, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and women.

In general, young people require housing that is located close to transport, educational institutions, employment, and universal services. They also require a range of different accommodation models and choices to ensure their needs can be met to the highest possible standard.

### Youth homelessness & homelessness support

Housing support services that exist across Australia are struggling to cope with demand.

In the ACT in 2010-2011, 59% of all people seeking immediate accommodation were turned away.<sup>7</sup> Young people identified

that if an initial request for housing support is unmet, this may negatively influence their decision to seek assistance in the future.<sup>8</sup>

The national rate of homeless in Australia has also increased by 8% to 105,237 since 2006.<sup>9</sup> The ACT has the second highest rate, with 50 in every 10,000 people being homeless. 42% of those people are under 25 years of age.

Whilst the topic of youth homelessness can invoke images of 'street kids', many homeless young people are invisible. Some live with relatives and family, or even complete strangers, often couch surfing, while others are in boarding houses or refuges.

### Root causes

Family breakdown is a major factor in homelessness. Women and children represent a large proportion of the homelessness statistics due to issues such as domestic violence. 24% of all clients of specialist homelessness services report domestic violence as their main reason for seeking assistance.<sup>10</sup> This is the most cited reason for seeking help.

The complexities and issues faced by young people experiencing homelessness are still in need of more attention. For many young people, simply providing a place to live is insufficient to addressing the root causes of homelessness, and does not always end the potential pathways to homelessness in later life.

Issues around mental health, employment, education, alcohol and other drug use can be barriers to stable housing.

For many young people, living out of home for the first time can be an extremely difficult, as they may lack the necessary living skills, experience isolation and feel disconnected from their peers.

Innovative, responsive and evidence-based models of supporting young people through various transitions, such as from experiencing homelessness to crisis accommodation, and from supported medium term housing to independent living, are needed to ensure these transitions are successful.

It is also important to understand that for many young people, a linear move from homelessness to independent living is not possible. The Youth Coalition supports the concept of a spectrum of support that recognises this.<sup>11</sup>

Please see the ACTCOSS website for this article's footnotes:

[www.actcoss.org.au/publications/newsletter.html](http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/newsletter.html)

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory and is responsible for representing the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years of age, and those who work with them.

[www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)



## Community housing: An untapped social housing option

By Leigh Watson, Executive Officer, ACT Shelter

**R**ecent years in the ACT have been marked by a shortfall in crisis accommodation, increased public housing waiting lists and a dramatic decrease in housing affordability.

While the ACT can be seen to be performing well on many counts—including that we have the highest proportion of public housing nationally—this must be balanced against the ever increasing un-affordability of most of the territory's housing.

Reports by real estate bodies that point to the ACT's high affordability status are based on average, not mean incomes and do not reflect an accurate picture of people on Centrelink payments or other low incomes.

On any given night in the ACT 1785 people are estimated to be homeless<sup>1</sup>. For the 40% of low to moderate income renters and 40% of low income mortgage holders estimated to be in housing

stress<sup>2</sup>, the very real prospect of homelessness also exists. While more than half of all people who seek emergency accommodation each night are turned away because services are full<sup>3</sup>, the real problem in the ACT is simply that there is not enough housing that is affordable, permanent, safe and secure.

## Complexity & government approaches

The issues of housing affordability and homelessness are complex and require a whole of government approach—working in partnership with the community and private sectors to develop and implement a range of solutions.

There is currently uncertainty around the agreements between federal and state/territory government that fund housing and homelessness, with housing advocates nationally holding their collective breaths to see how an Abbott Government will respond. However, jurisdictions still exert a measure of control and influence over the nature of their public and other housing responses.

The ACT Government is to be commended for solutions it has undertaken through its Affordable Housing Action Plans. These have established, among other things, the not for profit affordable housing provider, CHC Affordable Housing, which develops housing available for rent at 80% of market rent; plus the LDA-managed *Own Place* program which, combined with the innovative Land Rent Scheme, provides incentives for affordable purchase.

Unfortunately, as the government is all too well aware, problems still remain. Housing provided under such programs does not meet current need and for many is still unaffordable. The gap between public housing at 25% of income and affordable housing at 74.9% or 80%<sup>4</sup> of market rent is a significant one in the ACT housing continuum. People who fall into this gap include those on Centrelink payments and workers in a range of occupations with moderate incomes (such as retail, hospitality, community workers).

## Community housing

With these contexts in mind, nationally there is an increasing focus on encouraging the growth of community housing:

Community housing is rental housing that is provided by not-for-profit, non-government organisations. It is intended to be affordable and appropriate for low to moderate income earners,

and/ or for groups whose housing needs are not adequately met in other forms of housing.<sup>5</sup>

The ACT Government is also committed to the growth of community housing, but not at the expense of investment in public housing<sup>6</sup>—a view that is strongly shared by ACT Shelter.

Statistically, the ACT community housing sector is small but diverse, with just a handful of community housing organisations managing 662 dwellings, compared to 11,063 public housing dwellings.<sup>7</sup>

In May this year, the ACT Government passed a Bill to adopt a national regulatory framework. The ACT Minister for Housing, Shane Rattenbury announced the Act aims to:

...develop a strong and vibrant community housing sector that can increase choice for tenants, drive improved performance through the introduction of new providers, and support growth in social housing stock ... (and) provide a uniform set of national guidelines, making it easier for providers to operate across jurisdictions, strengthening the community housing sector.

One of the advantages of community housing is the ability to maintain flexibility including around approaches to rent-setting, funding relationships with government and investors, and in responding to the needs of specific cohorts.

For example, community housing organisations may set rents in a variety of ways, i.e. rebated at 25% of income or as a discount of up to 74.9% of market rent, including at different points between.

While nationally there is a trend for extensive transfer of public housing dwellings to the community housing sector, ACT Shelter believes this is not the best approach for the ACT. However, it may be that minimal and strategic stock transfers could assist existing providers to be more sustainable and grow, or even encourage large interstate providers into the space.

## ACT Shelter Housing Research Project

In these contexts then, this is why ACT Shelter is currently undertaking a research project on a housing option that may go some way to filling that gap—community housing.

The ACT Shelter project aims to take stock of the ACT community housing sector, and consider options and barriers to the future growth and viability of community housing.



To be presented in a report to government in late October, the project has included extensive consultation with existing providers, community housing tenants, and housing advocates—with the objective of ensuring that any future development delivers positive and improved outcomes for tenants.

Consultation was also undertaken with the broader housing sector including through a roundtable which brought together high level representatives from government, private and the not-for-profit sector to seek their input and advice. Facilitated by national housing expert Dr Tony Gilmour and with presentations by another expert Andrew McAnulty, the roundtable provided valuable information and ideas that will help inform recommendations and options in the project's final report.

### Other advocacy

Whatever the outcomes of the report, ACT Shelter will continue to advocate to government to prioritise public housing for accommodating people on low to moderate incomes, not just as a means to address

affordability, but also to provide a measure against other market failures that can cause discrimination and erode security of tenure.

For more information, please contact Leigh Watson, Executive Officer ACT Shelter.

Please see the ACTCOSS website for this article's footnotes: [www.actcoss.org.au/publications/newsletter.html](http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/newsletter.html)

ACT Shelter is an independent peak community organisation funded by the ACT Government to provide strategic advice and advocacy on housing policy issues that affect people on low to moderate incomes.

[www.actshelter.net.au](http://www.actshelter.net.au)



## Housing & socially inclusive health

By Kiki Korpinen, Director, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service (Inc)

**W**innunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service (Inc), known as Winnunga, is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service that commenced in 1988 as an access point for comprehensive primary health care for Aboriginal people.

Over the 25 years Winnunga has operated, advocacy for accommodation, shelter and housing has been, and continues to be a service function.

The advocacy for accommodation, shelter and housing Winnunga provides is part of integrated social health which was formalised only as recently as 2006, when performance reporting for social health indicators was included

in the national Aboriginal health performance framework.

In the context of the national Aboriginal health performance framework, the goal of integrated social health is to reduce poverty and to improve health.

### Integrated social health

Winnunga's function in integrated social health is to support the housing sector to reduce homelessness and overcrowding among Aboriginal people. The advocacy Winnunga provides in this environment is interdependent with a social determinants of health platform which covers environmental factors, socio-economic factors, community

capacity, health behaviours and person-related factors.

### Homelessness funding & changes

Winnunga's comments on the impact of homelessness funding changes on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT and surrounding region should be read both as advocacy for people experiencing disadvantage, and as an invitation to private providers to engage with the community health sector, to plan effective strategies for achieving affordable housing in the ACT.

Changes to homelessness funding were designed to have the most

impact for disadvantaged clients and to cumulatively achieve an intergenerational health benefit. However, because the Aboriginal community in the ACT is the fastest growing community in Australia<sup>1</sup>, to meet existing need, public resources for housing need to be supplemented by private and not-for-profit principles, so the Aboriginal community is able to secure a relationship with coordinated care providers, which secures home-based health care for Aboriginal people into the future.

## Responding to community health priorities

To respond to the needs of a growing population which is geographically dispersed and generally impoverished, Winnunga has worked with the ACT Elected Body to engage local service providers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community health priorities.

The past six years of engaging with the social services and housing sector in the development of integrated social health systems has shown homelessness and overcrowding among Aboriginal people in the ACT and surrounding region is poorly understood.

This is possibly because the shift of care from institutions to the community which has occurred over the past ten years has happened more quickly than the community's ability to respond to the needs of individuals with complex care requirements.

## Ongoing issues

Within Winnunga's client base, the day-to-day challenges of sharing care of chronically ill

or incapacitated persons across the community, and the extent to which people's wellbeing has been supported by family care networks, is often overlooked. For instance, while overcrowding is an issue for some families, others function very effectively. This is because either they are part of coordinated service delivery networks or have effective systems for making ends meet; and good access to broader social activities.

It may also be the case that the most misunderstood aspects of Aboriginal people's housing needs and aspirations stem from outmoded, irrelevant or narrow-minded interpretations of the social milieu in which the urban Aboriginal community maintains a network of care.

The modern network of care maintained in urban Aboriginal health responds to the effectively medieval existence of larger numbers of people in need of a permanent home-base, who from time to time receive support from people whose household is rarely equipped to respond to their ongoing medical or social health care. Every person who has ever been incarcerated or taken into institutional care for example—would generally have such need.

## Winnunga responses

To respond to the burden of disease, the scarcity of public housing and the greater shift towards home-based care, Winnunga has provided an advocacy service which has delivered some good results in the public housing sector but has been less effective in the private sector.

This is thought to be because of incorrect assumptions about eligibility and exclusivity, and

fundamentally because the expectations of the community in responding to persons who require ongoing and regular medical and social health supervision, far exceed community capacity.

In this context, the specific way that private providers may respond to issues surrounding housing and homelessness, is to fill the gaps that public housing might not. In this regard, the major gap is for housing for people who require ongoing and supervised medical care and social health supervision/assistance.

Winnunga works with the community and advocates for individuals to address the complexity of a given individual's interactions from a collective perspective. In the paradigm of partnerships and integration, representation of the most disadvantaged among our community, continues to be Winnunga's major concern and priority.

Winnunga invites the community to provide comments and insights into community housing issues so these can be used in relevant submissions and advocacy statements.

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1 In the 20 years between the 1986 Census and the 2006 Census, the population of Aboriginal people resident in the ACT more than tripled from 1216 to 3875 (ABS 2007a). In 2006 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprised 1.2% of the ACT population, yet accounted for 13.6% of all Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) clients. As a whole the ACT is a relatively affluent community. Disadvantage and social exclusion is geographically dispersed and the National Centre for Economic and Social Modelling has recently highlighted the need for an integrated service response which ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people are able to experience the benefits of full social inclusion.

At present intensive support is required by increasing numbers of families. The majority of these families receive integrated health services provided by Winnunga and have a median

household income of \$1221 and care of six or more people. There is a major social divide and clusters of severe poverty particularly among householders with a total income of less than \$689 per week and five or more dependents. 25.6% of

households are in this bottom income range. The majority of households rent their accommodation. 10% of households have five or more people and 51% of households have six or more people.

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service (Inc) is an Aboriginal community controlled primary health care service operated by the Aboriginal community of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Winnunga's primary purpose is to provide culturally safe and holistic health services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the ACT and surrounding areas.

[www.winnunga.org.au](http://www.winnunga.org.au)



## Housing & HIV

By Esther Ross, Education Coordinator, AIDS Action Council of the ACT

**S**arah<sup>1</sup> has been living with HIV for almost 25 years now. Whilst taking medication life has become easier, but it hasn't always been that way. For almost four years Sarah lived in a state of fear and anxiety due to the discrimination and stigma she faced from the other tenants in her housing complex.

There are now effective medications and lifestyle changes that mean a person who has HIV can live a long life. However, it is still a life that is full of illness, discrimination—including when trying to find a life partner—and medications have side effects such as nausea, skin irritations and chronic fatigue. For these reasons it can be difficult for a person living with HIV to find and sustain a full time job. According to the HIV Futures Study, 31% of people living with HIV live below the poverty line and 42% of the respondents identified their main source of income to be government benefits or pension. It means that affordable housing needs to be available, and in a rental market like Canberra's it is often difficult or more likely impossible to find housing outside of the government housing schemes.

Sarah is no stranger to any of these hardships. In the late 80s she moved to WA with her husband and their young son to get away from the 'drug scene'. Sarah said, 'We were thinking we were lucky to have escaped it' (HIV), which was ravaging people who injected drugs or men who had sex with men. Unfortunately, about five years after moving to WA

her husband became increasingly ill. After a number of tests they found out the devastating news. He had HIV. So did Sarah.

The main concern Sarah had at this point was for her husband and son. Her son did not have HIV, but she needed to 'stay strong so my son could at least have one parent to get him through.' After the devastating experience of her husband passing away, Sarah became quite ill herself. It was at this time she decided to move back to Canberra and family support that was here. Through ACT Housing, she found a rundown place for herself and her son.

Sarah was placed next door to people who were drug addicts and dealt from their home. There was a lot of noise and a large number of people streaming in and out of the property. At some point her HIV status 'got out'. Sarah explained:

There was a lot of discrimination; particularly towards my son... everyone assumes that he is positive because I am. They did nasty things like breaking into my house, pouring coke (which is corrosive) over my car and one day they even set their dog onto my son.

Sarah tried taking the medication that was available at this time for HIV. But she found the side effects were making her lethargic, ill and unable to be the mother that she wanted to be:



I chose not to be on treatment because the drug's side effects turned me into a sickly person with no energy and constant diarrhoea. This was not the mother I wanted to be for my son. I chose quality over quantity. I wanted to get him to 18.

This is why she was not on HIV treatment when living next door to people who were constantly harassing her and her son simply because of her HIV status.

Sarah said she had contacted the ACT Housing manager a number of times about these incidents but she got the impression 'they didn't seem to believe that it was going on.' She then supplied a number of supporting letters from the police, doctors and her support worker to ACT Housing: 'Housing ACT were pretty supportive once they believed me. After they had these letters it didn't take a lot to get me to the top of the priority list<sup>2</sup>'. Any HIV positive person in that situation would be stressed and wanting to move.

However, even on the priority list it still took another three years before Sarah was moved to the townhouse she is now living in. So for three years Sarah and her son lived in a place that induced constant stress. This, as you can imagine, is highly damaging for a person living with an auto immune disease like HIV. Her health deteriorated during these three years whilst she waited for better accommodation. Her concern for the future of her then-11-year-old son increased.

When Sarah first saw the townhouse she is now living in, she said she did a double check of the address: 'It was just beautiful. It was a relatively modern place with good heating. Heating can have a large impact on someone living with HIV'. This is especially the case in a cold place like Canberra and the surrounding regions.

After Sarah moved into the new place her health improved dramatically. Additionally, soon after this move, new treatment was available which had fewer side effects and she is now on these medications.

Sarah says life is good for her now. There are still side effects from the treatments and her health sometimes suffers, but her house is stress free and she has a place she can call home.

1 Sarah is a pseudonym.

2 The 'priority list' is a list of people who are requesting to move to different accommodation because their current tenancy was not suitable.

The AIDS Action Council of the ACT provides services to the ACT community, aimed at eliminating further transmission of HIV and minimising the personal and social impacts of HIV and AIDS.

[www.aidsaction.org.au](http://www.aidsaction.org.au)

## Good for the climate, good for tenants!

By Adelaide Rief, Tenancy Advisor and Project Worker, Tenants Union ACT

Summer is swiftly approaching here in Canberra and surviving hotter summers will require significant financial and social investment in energy efficiency measures—which can have flow on effects for housing affordability. While housing affordability is often discussed in the context of the cost of rent, energy bills which arise from low energy efficiency rental properties also clearly have an impact on housing affordability. Access to the private rental market for middle to lower income often means accepting older and

lower quality dwellings. These properties often suffer from lack of owner investment, poor ongoing maintenance which results in low energy efficiency—higher energy costs and lower quality of life.

Recently the Tasmanian Government introduced legislated minimum standards for rental properties including requirements for weatherproofing, heating, curtains and adequate ventilation. These standards will result in direct practical improvements in quality of living for tenants who

have little bargaining power, and they also represent a step in the right direction of potential future innovative legislation which includes requirements for energy efficiency measures to be installed.

Closer to home the ACT Government is currently investigating how to provide tenants with useful information on energy efficiency and whether this may improve energy efficiency investment by landlords. This is a start, but more progressive measures such

as programs providing energy efficiency incentives by both ACT and Federal Government, would better meet the needs of tenants struggling with energy bills and decrease our emissions significantly. Here at the Tenants Union ACT we continue to advocate with the ACT Government on these issues.

The ACT Tenants' Union is an organisation for tenants by tenants that seeks to enable all tenants to enjoy appropriate, affordable, accessible and secure housing in the ACT.

[www.tenantsact.org.au](http://www.tenantsact.org.au)

In Anti-Poverty Week ACTCOSS & ACTSmart will launch a new **energy efficiency resource** with tips for landlords & property managers on working with tenants to reduce energy & water cost & provide more energy efficient & sustainable housing for people experiencing disadvantage.

## What's ACTCOSS been up to?

Since the Winter newsletter, we have been promoting justice, equity, social inclusion and reconciliation in the ACT by...

### Running seminars & forums

- ACTCOSS Budget Submission Members' Forum - September 2013
- Aboriginal Culture, History & Heritage - September 2013
- Raising the Standard - for Managers - September 2013
- ACTCOSS Federal Election Candidates Forum - September 2013
- Recruitment & Retention of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Workers - July & August 2013
- Racism in the Workplace - July & August 2013
- Tailored Governance training for a number of community organisations

### Advocating on policy & programs

- *Beyond the sound bite: Report to the community from the ACT Council of Social Service 2013 Federal Election Candidates Forum*
- Comment on the *Out of Home Care Strategy Issues Paper*
- Developing the Housing Policy Consortium

### Other activities & events

- Development of our new Strategic Plan for 2014-18 in consultation with members from mid-October
- Review of our governance arrangements and revision of the ACTCOSS Constitution
- Successfully completed Pre-Qualification
- Review and redevelopment of our Governance, Raising the Standard, and other training programs

- Contributing to the Community Sector Reform Project planning and progress
- Informing the development of the Human Services Blueprint

Visit [www.actcoss.org.au](http://www.actcoss.org.au) for publications, upcoming seminars, and other news.

## What is the Gulanga Program?

The Gulanga Program (previously known as the ACTCOSS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Project) has been funded for five years to support ACT homelessness service providers. ACTCOSS recently secured funding to expand the Gulanga Program to the children, youth and family sector to develop and/or improve upon good, culturally appropriate practice standards. Gulanga employs Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander workers and facilitates better engagement with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples and their families so they can access the services that will best meet their needs.

The program includes the following:

- A number of tools and resources to assist services to adapt their organisation to better respond and deliver culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Consultancy support for organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers
- Professional cultural awareness training, including recruitment and retention, racism, and engagement protocols

For further information about the Gulanga Program please contact Keith, Julie, or Kim on 02 6202 7200, or visit the web page:

[www.actcoss.org.au/secdevel/gulanga.html](http://www.actcoss.org.au/secdevel/gulanga.html)

# ACTCOSS staff introductions & farewell

## Introductions...



**Roy McNamara-Smith**  
**Policy & Development Officer**

Roy joined ACTCOSS in August 2013 and has taken on the essential infrastructure policy portfolio including housing, energy and transport. Roy is supporting our HACC sector development work and will also contribute to the delivery of sector development training.

With a background in developing, facilitating and evaluating sustainable community-driven projects both overseas and across Northern Australia, Roy is looking forward to contributing to the growth and capacity of community organisations in the ACT and the people that the sector supports.

As a self-confessed political aficionado, Roy is excited to have the opportunity to live and work in the nation's capital.



**Kim Peters**  
**Sector Development Officer,**  
**Gulanga Program**

Kim commenced in the Gulanga team in September. Kim is working three days a week and will focus on building cultural awareness and competence in services funded through the Community Services Directorate's Children, Young People and Families Program.

Kim is a proud Wiradjuri woman from Wellington, NSW. Kim and her family have lived in Canberra for the past 18 years where she began working with Lowana Youth Services. Kim has also worked at the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre. Kim shares with us the knowledge and experience she acquired from working in the community youth sector and she has extensive networks within the local community.

Kim enjoys meeting new people and loves to explore opportunities that empower others on their journey of healing and learning.

## Farewell...



**Adele Williams**  
**Policy & Development Officer**

After almost two years of working with ACTCOSS Adele Williams resigned in July to move back home to North Carolina to be close to her family and re-connect with her southern roots. Adele did a great job working in our Home and Community Care sector development program. A recent highlight was her facilitation of a closer dialogue between hospital discharge planners and social workers with community organisations supporting people when they leave hospital. We miss Adele's warm and generous nature and her great sense of humour.



You are invited to the

## ACTCOSS 50th Birthday Party, Exhibition & AGM

Thursday 14 November 2013, 4.00-6.30pm  
ACT Legislative Assembly

Stay tuned to the website  
for more information:

[www.actcoss.org.au](http://www.actcoss.org.au)

## Next issue:

Update Issue 66, Summer 2013-14 edition

## Co-design

### What is it? Is it useful? Examples in the ACT

Members are welcome to contribute articles on the theme.

### Copy deadline: 18 Nov 2013

Space is limited! To guarantee your spot, let Suzanne know as soon as possible.

Email: [suzanne.richardson@actcoss.org.au](mailto:suzanne.richardson@actcoss.org.au)

Ph: 02 6202 7235

Issue 66 will be distributed in December 2013.

## Advertise in Update

Would you like ad space? Or a loose-leaf flyer insert? Contact us!

Size/Type	Member	Non-member
1/4 page	\$30	\$90
1/2 page	\$60	\$150
Full page	\$100	\$225
Flyer insert	\$70	\$100

## Dates for your diary

### ACTCOSS training

#### Wed 9 Oct 2013

Building Better Boards:  
Board Basics

#### Tue 15 Oct 2013

Building Better Boards:  
Financial Management

### Events

#### 13-19 Oct 2013

Anti-Poverty Week

#### Tue 22 Oct 2013

COTA/ACTCOSS talk:  
Assistive & Enabling  
Technologies for  
Consumer Empowerment

#### Fri 1 Nov 2013

1 Day Torres Strait Culture  
Awareness

#### Fri 15 Nov 2013

Aboriginal Culture,  
History & Heritage

#### Thu 24 Oct 2013

ACT 2014-15 Budget  
submissions due

#### Thu 14 Nov 2013

ACTCOSS AGM &  
50th Birthday

For more information on ACTCOSS training and events, please call us on 02 6202 7200, email [actcoss@actcoss.org.au](mailto:actcoss@actcoss.org.au), or visit us at our website:

[www.actcoss.org.au](http://www.actcoss.org.au)



The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for people living with low incomes or disadvantage, and not-for-profit community organisations in the Australian Capital Territory.

ACTCOSS acknowledges Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay respects to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

## ACTCOSS

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Web: [www.actcoss.org.au](http://www.actcoss.org.au)

ACTCOSS welcomes feedback. Please visit the 'Contact' page on our website for our feedback form, or contact us using the details above.

## ACTCOSS staff

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Keith Brandy

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### Research Project Officer

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### Communications & Membership Officer

Suzanne Richardson

*Update* is a quarterly newsletter that provides an opportunity for issues relevant to ACTCOSS' membership to be discussed and for information to be shared. Views expressed are those of individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy views of ACTCOSS.