

# update

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2020 is on the horizon –  
is it the view we imagined?

## Inside...

The view from here...	
The world we imagined & the NDIS in 2020	2
NDIS 2020	6
A mixed scorecard	6
Efforts towards participatory democracy – the view from CAPaD	8
ACTCOSS 2020	11
Reflecting on 7 years of social justice advocacy in the ACT	12
Canberra 2020 – the view from nowhere	13
Learning & development calendar	15
AGM, new ACTCOSS Board & annual report	16
ACTCOSS staff farewell	17



## 2020 is on the horizon – is it the view we imagined?

By Samantha Quimby, Capability Manager,  
ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS)

This issue of *Update* provides a springboard for reflective practice. As 2019 draws to a close and we look toward an election year, we are prompted to think about what we had hoped to see change by 2020, our experiences of what has changed, and what that means for the future. Contributions from ACTCOSS members and staff capture the hopes and visions held for service reforms, citizen engagement and social justice advocacy. We want to celebrate the action that has come out of that hope, but also recognise that not all our visions have been realised.

When we reflect on the hopes we had that weren't fulfilled, we are faced with a choice: we can be disheartened or we can choose to renew our effort, hold fast to the vision we have and find new ways to move toward it. If we don't like the view, how are we working to change it?

We know that hope and vision are only realised when they inspire the right kind of action. All the articles in this edition express hope for social change and identify values and practices that contribute to translating that hope into action:

- Valuing equity and human rights
- Growing participation of people in decisions that affect them
- Cultivating collaboration and collective action over competitive advantage
- Advocating for and investing in infrastructure that supports the process of change.

Our hope is that this issue encourages reflection and spurs you into action that continues to grow Canberra towards a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services.

### ACTCOSS newflash

The ACTCOSS office will be closed over the holiday period from 25 December 2019 and will reopen on 6 January 2020.

The ACTCOSS team wishes you a happy and safe holiday!

# The view from here...

## The world we imagined & the NDIS in 2020

In our feature interview, Michael Bleasdale, CEO of the ACT Disability, Aged Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS), past Co-Convenor of In Control Australia and former Co-Executive Director of People with Disability Australia, shares his thoughts with ACTCOSS Policy Manager Craig Wallace, who was also involved in early discussions around the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Michael recalls the hopes people held for individualised funding, the chasm between vision and implementation, lessons for aspirational advocacy and some possible ways back in 2020...

**Craig:** Around 10 years ago, when the Productivity Commission was releasing its reports on NDIS but before the legislation was introduced and we got an idea of what this scheme might look like, you and I connected at an early conference on individualised funding called “The Big Event”. What were the hopes of people for individualised funding when we started that conversation?

**Michael:** I think people engaged at that time who had an understanding of what individualised funding could achieve had in mind a system which was at one level much simpler – providing funds directly to the individual so that he or she could purchase the services that they needed to be able to get on with their lives. It was going to be simpler but also available to everybody who needed it in Australia and therefore had a level of complexity. You are looking at a varying number of very individual and different arrangements, not so much of funding but of what that funding could purchase.

The evidence from pilot projects that had been funded overseas was that an individualised model brought about qualitative difference in the services that people were able to purchase. Mainly because people were able to communicate and articulate what they wanted in the service and if that service wasn't able to deliver, they were able to take that funding to another service to get what they wanted. And that has worked and there is quite a lot of evidence around to say that if people have that

power it can translate into quite significant and remarkable differences.

**Craig:** How would you describe the tone when people were talking about individualised funding back then?

**Michael:** There was a palpable sense of excitement and expectation. The conversation had already turned within government toward an intent to move to more individualised funding and the question in the sector was, how can we make this work and what would it look like?

Because the vast majority of people around the country would not have been the beneficiaries of some kind of pilot project in the past.

So the atmosphere was that there was excitement but also nervousness because the clock was ticking. We knew there was an end point where if we wanted to have a say in what the system looked like, we would need to have lots of conversations with people who were hearing about this for the first time.

That conference that we're talking about was an attempt to bring some of those issues to the fore. What would it look like? How would the administrative arrangements of handling money and employing staff work? How has it worked in other jurisdictions? Where have they implemented it where people might have very significant levels of cognitive impairment, for example? What supports have been available to people to give them the same opportunity to manage their own supports and services and having control over their own lives?

There were a range of issues that we were dealing with, as well as hoping people would set the template so that it was truly right from the beginning and the system had the strong imprint of what people with disability wanted.

**Craig:** What expectation did people with disabilities have that they would control the conversation, the implementation and delivery?

**Michael:** There was high expectation because they promised to develop a process where people at all levels would be engaged. To a certain extent, that was delivered through a very consultative

engagement process, but it was designed and administered around political issues and sensitivities that needed to be managed, particularly between the Commonwealth and the states.

Looking back, I think there probably wasn't as much genuine engagement with people on the ground as perhaps there could and should have been.

That would have required a longer period of time and some investment in community-based organisations to actually facilitate a lot of that prior to coming up with the model that we did. There simply wasn't enough time to do that.

I think the make-up of various expert groups and fact that we had to have different constituencies represented on each of those groups meant that some of the groups were more about representation than they were about expertise. That's a rather personal view.

There were issues with time and the political necessities of getting that through and obtaining the buy-in of the states while handing over quite a significant budget to the Commonwealth to administer over and above the interests of the states. That was quite a remarkable feat but I think it became the biggest point that needed to be won and we lost some of the qualitative detail in that.

**Craig: Looking towards 2020, what parts of that vision have been realised?**

Michael: The two submissions that I was part of for PWDA and In Control Australia were very detailed on what the scheme should look like and at one level the scheme looks similar to that. It has the component parts. It has a single national agency which at the time was up for grabs. It could've been an entity which was administered in different ways in different states.

It does have a front line of what it is calling "planners". I'm not sure whether that's what we called them at the time, but we knew there would need to be a very large front line of people to whom people with disability expressed their aspirations and the need for that to be translated into dollars. We also predicted that service providers would no longer be block funded. That they would only exist if participants chose to ask them to provide their services.

We also anticipated support coordination about needing to help people link in with services and also

working to shape services. For example, a service might want to deliver a service one way, but a participant might need it delivered in another way. There is an element of that but not quite to the extent that we had envisaged. But there's quite a lot missing even within that general architecture.

What's missing is an ongoing capacity-building presence for people with disability. It's not a case management service or case coordination service. It's a service which is based in the community that is "partisan" to the person – that can be there throughout the journey through the NDIS.

It is not as simple and it was never going to be as simple as saying, "Here is the money, here is the service, get them together and now we can leave well alone." Even if it's going well, it's going to need to be rejigged because a person's life circumstances are going to change and that's going to require constant renegotiation. Some of that is support coordination, but, and this is my biggest criticism, too much of that is being loaded into the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

The role of the planner has become one of the person who determines what a person will get and can seemingly arbitrarily rule on whether that person has a legitimate claim to the services that they're asking for and can override expert testimony as to why that person needs services. We needed a planner working very closely with the individual in the community to put forward a really well articulated claim. This is what I need, this is why I need it these are my circumstances and this is what I need to achieve it.

We envisaged something similarly stratified, but we certainly hadn't envisaged an enormous bureaucracy where every time a problem was encountered it would take that problem, disappear and try and come out with a policy and rule by algorithm. And that it would unfortunately start operating in the way the old disability departments had in the states which was a "master and commander" model.

**Craig: Why hasn't the vision that we had back then been matched by the view from 2020? What have the drivers been?**

Michael: Some of the work that we put into submissions had been informed by previous individualised funding models in [other countries],

*“Looking back, I think there probably wasn't as much genuine engagement with people on the ground as perhaps there could and should have been.”*

and my belief is that none of that was taken into account when they set up the NDIA.

Because a lot [of what works in individualised funding] is based on principles such as how do we set up a system that ensures a principle-like self-determination is exercised, not just in terms of what the person gets in the community, but in terms of the system itself.

The testimony in *The Canberra Times* today<sup>1</sup> is about how the system has further reinforced the marginal precarious state of a person such that they believe they can no longer engage with the NDIS regardless of what that is going to mean for them in the future.

It has set up very quickly this horrible power dynamic where the bureaucracy understands better than the individual. It hasn't been true to itself in terms of the promise of treating people with disability as the expert in their own lives.

Everything it does would demonstrate to the contrary – that it actually believes that it is the expert. We have very quickly gotten back to this dynamic that we had in the old system which probably wasn't articulated well enough as a problem in the Productivity Commission report so I don't think it was front and centre in the minds of those who built up the NDIS from the beginning.

We haven't got a set of foundational principles that have been embedded into the system. The main principles that I can see actually being embedded into the system are the actuarial principles and the insurance principles that seem to drive the algorithms.

Craig: I have wondered over the years as somebody who was in the same space, whether this is cause to reflect on our own strategic foresight and visioning at the time as advocates and whether some of it was naïve. To actually imagine that the Commonwealth could deliver something of this nature in this timeframe.

Michael: I don't know if it was naïve – and I would defer to your judgement on that as somebody who has worked in the Commonwealth – but I think what we were asking for was a qualitatively different bureaucracy than we have ever seen before and we handed it over to government, as we tend to do, and they said "don't worry, we'll build that for you." I think that was the first mistake.

I know that in British Columbia, for example, they got rid of the government structure and set up a community-based structure and came with a community-based governance board. They realised there was an inherent danger in setting up something like that without community-based governance. I don't think we recognised that.

How we retrofit that now is a difficult question, but the fundamental architecture is still not that far off what we had originally asked for.

Craig: Staying with this for a moment, are there lessons for advocates with aspirational visions? And not just in disability but also across social justice concerns.

Michael: I think we need to be much more involved in the process of construction rather than just critique.

***[The NDIS] hasn't been true to itself in terms of the promise of treating people with disability as the expert in their own lives.***

There was an opportunity lost at the time to fill the void that continues to exist. I am more than happy to say that is something that is not necessarily "advocacy", but it was the special role that advocates could do

because they had partisanship to the people who needed that.

And they could've built that role from the advocacy base and at the same time enhanced advocacy and extended its reach and its capability.

So we have to be open to learning new skills and being constructive and understanding new systems and being prepared to put our neck on the line and actually say, "This is the way we think it should work." I think we do that now more than we did then.

Craig: What can we do in 2020 to get back on track?

Michael: I think there needs to be significant advocacy which says we need greater community resources to provide a range of supports for the people who are engaging with the NDIA and for people in the scheme. We've been talking primarily about tier 3 – those people with disability who need funding for specific services and equipment, but there is a range of activity that we need to be doing to ensure that all people with disability are included in the community and we need to be doing much more proactive community development work. That was the role we envisaged for what are now the Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and we've lost

that vision of them being an adjunct to the planning process and dedicated in the main to the tier 3 funded participants.

We are beginning to see a growing recognition of the support that's in the community and is non-individually funded.

Within the agency itself, and I don't claim to be an expert on administrative architecture, I would much prefer many of the mechanisms which the agency is taking on operating in the community rather than in the agency.

At the moment, we run the risk in a competitive environment of not sharing learning. There is so much missing in the community's capacity to become inclusive that we needed to make the investment there and share that openly.

I think we could still do that but there needs to be a willingness in the agency to rejig the way it operates. I'm not seeing that at the moment.

There's a lot of criticism of the agency, a lot of calls for more planners and better planners and I would support all of that, but I haven't seen many calls for actually relooking at the way we set it up in the first place.

*Craig: Thinking about what we said originally for the scheme, we always saw it as one part of a shared national project which would involve the community, business and government stepping up to create a welcoming community for people with disability. Is this happening?*

Michael: I think there are signs that this is happening. I've seen a willingness at least in the ACT Government in the short time I've been here to acknowledge that even with the NDIS there are significant gaps.

But I don't think we succeeded in making people aware of how big and how wide the gap is between what we have now and an inclusive community. There has been a tendency in the initial stages of the NDIS for the states and territories to go, "Well, we've handed that over to the Commonwealth and that's up to them."

The reality is that even if the NDIS was working really well, people would still be experiencing great difficulty – because you would have a terrific individualised funding system that is providing support and goods for people to engage with a community that isn't ready to engage.

Employment, education and housing are examples. In this territory, housing is particularly difficult. We need to crank up the pace of change. We need affordable and accessible housing and, while we've got the light rail, a lot of the bus routes are inaccessible and people are completely isolated where they need to live to access community. We need to be looking at a much more inclusive education system generally and articulate a clearer and inclusive project for people with disability in schools.

*Craig: I want you to imagine that by some miracle of technology you could Skype into the In Control conference of a decade ago and appear on screen, providing the view from here as we approach 2020. What would you say?*

Michael: You've got to be very specific about the nature of the agency that you want to run this thing.

By all means, let's get it out on the table about what it is the NDIS has to achieve and what its outcomes are. All of that is pretty neatly embedded within the legislation. Similar to the old Disability Services Act, it looked pretty good on paper – and it still looks good on paper – but be aware that if you get the dynamics of that wrong, you are going to have the same problems in 2019 that you have here today.

You are going to have to come, cap in hand, to this agency which is not going to give you what you need. You have to say things in the right order and fill the form in properly and then the computer will say yes or no.

I'd be careful of that stuff, so the devil will be in the detail. By all means, let's get the vision articulated well. Let's really think about how we can embed the consumer voice in the administration of that because, again, we've handed it over.

I really don't see where the hand of the consumer is in the NDIA at the moment.

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*We thank Michael for participating in this extended interview.*

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1. K Burgess, "Verity had high hopes for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Then it became like her abuser", *The Canberra Times*, 22 November 2019, <<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6504102/verity-had-high-hopes-for-the-ndis-then-it-became-like-her-abuser/>>.

# NDIS 2020

**By Rey Reodica, Territory Manager ACT, National Disability Services**

**B**ack in 2008, disability advocates at the Australia 2020 Summit outlined a vision for Australia that included a fully funded social insurance model of support to meet the long-term care needs of people with disabilities, their families and carers. In 2014, the ACT jurisdiction became the early-adopters of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), commencing 5 years of “trial” and “roll out” phases, which culminated in “full-scheme” arrangements starting in the ACT from 1 July 2019.

But with 2020 on the horizon, so much of what was promised under the NDIS still hasn't been

delivered. Teething problems identified early in the ACT trial phase remain unaddressed, as the implementation trajectory has been pushed out by at least half a decade before the scheme reaches maturity and fundamental design issues are fully addressed.

The cumulative impacts of the prolonged NDIS transition is starting to bite for people with disability and the services that support them. There's a lack of investment and oversight in under-serviced markets, there are shortcomings in pricing approaches, and there's red tape across NDIS planning and implementation process that reduces the choice and control that was promised to people with disability and the Australian community.

The six-point plan for delivering on the promise of the NDIS

announced by NDIS Minister Stuart Robert in November provides a good starting point for reshaping the implementation issues for the NDIS. We hope the plan is successful in making 2020 a year when we start to see an NDIS that truly reflects the vision that disability advocates imagined when they looked forward to a time when all Australians with disability had access to the supports required to achieve their goals and lead ordinary lives.

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National Disability Services:  
[nds.org.au](https://www.nds.org.au)



## A mixed scorecard

**By Cathi Moore, Associate Member**

**I**n reflecting on my involvement in ACTCOSS since the mid-1970s and recalling the vision we had for the ACT community, I feel that we have a mixed scorecard.

The Councils of Social Service (COSS) from inception have always advocated for effective community services and infrastructure. In the 1970s, we were very focused on social planning and community development. Despite the best efforts and well researched arguments from the community sector, there does not seem to be an emphasis within our current government, town planning and community service agencies to ensuring community facilities and resources are in place as new suburbs are developed. As the policy for infill in urban centres is pursued, I am concerned about the lack of community facilities and open spaces in the denser environments that are emerging. I fear that in the 2020s, we will be playing catchup to

squeeze appropriate facilities and services into these areas. This will occur in an environment where the government does not appear to place a priority on early intervention or invest in social planning.

The other issue that we did not foresee in the 1970s was the move to competitive tendering for funding to provide community services. In my view, this has led to unnecessary costs being imposed on the sector and has also meant that there is a lack of security of employment for many skilled workers in the sector.

The other policy area that is a well-documented challenge for the ACT is the ability for the government to deliver appropriate affordable housing and social housing. Without affordable and stable housing, individuals and families cannot participate fully in the community. The development of food banks is a demonstration of the impact of the high cost of living in the ACT.

In the area of human rights, significant advances have been made in the ACT. However, those with insecure housing struggle to participate fully in the Canberra community.

# why women need to boost their super



**Women haven't always enjoyed the same super rights as men. In fact, until the 1970s, some women were even excluded from super when they got married.**

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\*[www.wgea.gov.au/topics/gender-pay-gap](https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/gender-pay-gap)



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# Efforts towards participatory democracy – the view from CAPaD

By Beth Slatyer, Convenor, Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD)

The Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD) is a community organisation committed to improving democracy here in the ACT. Our vision is a democratic Canberra, where citizens trust their elected representatives, hold them accountable, engage in decision making and defend what sustains the public interest.

In the lead-up to the 2016 ACT election, the newly formed Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy invited all candidates to provide some information about their political values and priorities, and to commit to a set of principles around integrity and openness, which we then published on our website:

- The aim was to provide voters with more information about individual candidates, and how they would go about the job if elected.
- One of the questions asked them to describe how they planned to represent their constituents, i.e. how they would engage with, consult and report to the electorate during their term in office.

One of the commitments in the Candidate Statement was to promote and support participatory and deliberative methods for policy, planning and legislative decisions.

62 of the 141 candidates provided a statement, including 15 of the current Members.

## What have we done since? And what has been learnt?

### Deliberative, participatory processes

Over the last three years, the ACT Government has conducted four participatory deliberative processes in which randomly selected people from the ACT community were invited to consider and decide on specific policy questions. We welcomed these initiatives, which we observed and assessed to see if they were “trustable” in the eyes of ordinary citizens.

Our first conclusion was that it is possible to attract and select a diverse range of Canberrans to participate, for them to come to grips with complex issues and evidence, and to deliberate in the public interest. Those involved valued the experience and felt they contributed.

Our second conclusion was that the impact on improving citizens’ sense of agency and efficacy and increasing levels of trust was limited. Each process was conducted by public servants for their ministers. Remits were project specific and citizens were not able to set the agenda or define the problem.

Experimentation in other places is trying to overcome some of these challenges, focused on embedding deliberative processes into public decision-

making procedures. And there are other models for community-based agenda setting, as happened in Indi, that we could learn from here, which build the capacity within the community for agenda setting and monitoring and which create the basis for political accountability.

Time is right to look at what we want here – why, what and how.

On the engagement front – we have seen serious efforts by the ACT Government to seek out and include the voices of those dealing with the impacts of disadvantage, exclusion and stigma. Development of the ACT Wellbeing Indicators Framework is a good example.

But there is still some way to go to move from extractive “government over” models of community engagement, which extract community views to inform the policy makers, to a generative model of “government with” – where citizens working in association, and holding themselves to account, set the agenda and monitor.

### Representing

This year, we decided to follow up with MLAs to look at how they were approaching the business of representation. We approached all 25 MLAs for an interview: 14 agreed.



Our [report of those interviews](#) has just been released and is available on our website.

MLAs consistently see their role, first and foremost, as listening to and addressing issues for their constituents and the wider community. They go about the business of representation in several ways, which we classified into four categories:

- Social researcher
- Case worker
- Advocate
- Policy maker.

MLAs seem very open to much more active involvement by citizens in the political life of the ACT:

- On one level, several emphasised the importance of people being better informed about the operation of the political system and the community in which they lived.
- They also suggested that constituents should understand the power of their voice and use it, and be ready to hold government to account.

The space is open for Canberrans to explore these issues and how they want their MLAs to work and engage with them.

## Where to next?

CAPaD will run the Candidate Statement process again at the 2020 election. Before then we plan to work with community groups to develop a set of clear expectations about how we would like MLAs to do their job, for the common good.

We want to help generate community owned processes where people can come together to participate meaningfully in identifying needs, shaping policy, and monitoring outcomes. There is a strong community development aspect to this work, and we see great potential for approaches like Asset Based Community Development Efforts to help communities reimagine what their futures will look like. Implementation of the ACT Climate Strategy and monitoring of the Wellbeing Indicators Framework both provide opportunities to build community ownership and action to create mutual accountability between citizens and their government.

On other fronts for getting a better democracy, we welcome

the appointment of the ACT Integrity Commissioner, and hope that office will find ways to use citizen deliberation in its work.

We also note the recommendation in the report assessing the ACT Assembly against the Latimer principles, and hope that this will lead to a deeper discussion in the community. ACT community has a proud tradition of developing its own fit-for-purpose electoral system. As the city grows, we need to find new ways to continue that level of citizen ownership.

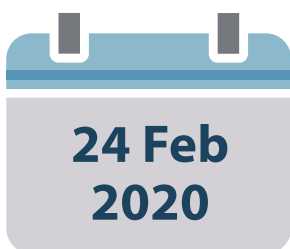
We think getting a better democracy is something we all need to work on together. It is not a matter of finding “off the shelf” solutions from elsewhere and transplanting them here. We need to work out what will work for us, in our context, addressing fundamental questions.

We welcome your involvement in our work.

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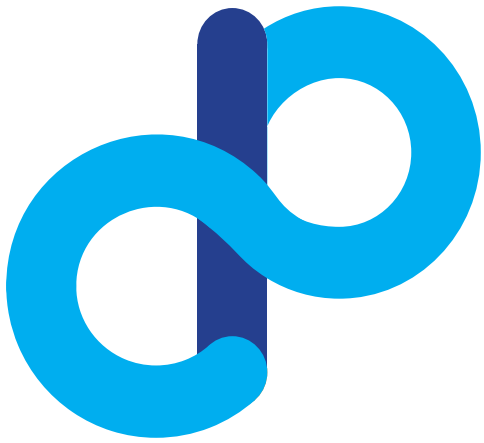
Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD):  
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**CAPaD** - *Awakening Democracy*  
The Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy



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# ACTCOSS 2020

By Jenny Kitchin, CEO, Woden Community Service, and Associate Member

I first joined the ACTCOSS Board in the early 1990s, giving me many years to reflect on where ACTCOSS has come from and what 2020 looks like for the peak. Advocating for social justice has been pivotal in ACTCOSS's history, expressed in different styles through consecutive Directors and Boards. Some key advocacy platforms have been:

- Housing for disadvantaged people – this historically focused mainly on a fight for more public housing. Over the years, the debate has broadened to demand affordable housing in many different forms with different economic modelling to support these options. ACTCOSS has played a key role in leading this advocacy and will continue to do so.
- Higher wages for community sector workers – this was fought both by the unions and the COSS agencies across Australia. The initial success of this was significant as governments passed on the Equal Remuneration Order. However, it soon became apparent that the staff base funding formulas were unable to change. This left many anomalies in worker payments and agencies having to pick up the tab to maintain pay equity for all staff. The urgency of this has led ACTCOSS to revisit with government and will hopefully in 2020 embed pay certainty for workers across the sector.
- Community infrastructure subsidy – over the years, infrastructure needs have become more sophisticated and expensive as agencies try to keep up with new data systems, regulatory compliance, increased governance, greater insurances, etc. It is timely that ACTCOSS is taking up the fight in the upcoming Budget into 2020 to lobby for adequate funding in this area.
- Building sector capacity following the introduction of the NDIS – the advent of the NDIS threw agencies into turmoil involving developing a whole range of new business systems to provide disability services. A number

of providers merged and some went under. This posed ACTCOSS with a difficult advocacy position as the NDIA was a national body bringing on the change, not just ACT Government. Where ACTCOSS stepped up was to help the community sector become more robust by offering training, development and business resources. This advocacy and resourcing for sustainability will be a key focus going into 2020 and beyond.

In the late 1980s, the ACT became self-governing. This heralded in a large and very inexperienced Legislative Assembly with members who often didn't have the experience in working with advocacy bodies like ACTCOSS. Likewise, ACTCOSS had a whole "new machinery" to navigate. Over the years, the Legislative Assembly has developed a sophistication and expertise in how to work with all sectors of the community. Likewise, ACTCOSS has become more astute in knowing how to lobby the Assembly and balance this with working with government departments and other peaks.

In the upcoming election year, it will be an exciting time for ACTCOSS to be out there again, tailoring its messages to get the best possible social justice outcomes for the community sector and citizens of Canberra.

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Woden Community Service:

[wcs.org.au](http://wcs.org.au)



# Reflecting on 7 years of social justice advocacy in the ACT

By Susan Helyar, former CEO of ACTCOSS

This article first appeared in *CityNews*, 12 November 2019, with the title "Leaders told: stop neglecting city's social heart".

**A**fter almost seven years advocating for social justice in Canberra one thing that's clear is that this is not the Canberra of 2013.

Our skyline has filled with apartment blocks while the Molonglo Valley, near the ACTCOSS office, has changed from a mostly bare landscape to one filled with plenty of new housing but not the right mix of social infrastructure to provide the level of amenity older suburbs enjoy.

Many people in the ACTCOSS membership doubt this new Canberra is a city that works well for everyone.

Political debate has caught up to the community with its increased focus on the utility, affordability and accessibility of transport, housing and shops and neighbourhood amenities.

There have been good investments and an ambitious agenda for town centres, but we still have a long way to go to deliver the municipal-level social infrastructure – in buildings and in community development workers – that regional centres across the border see as core business.

We need to see more focus on resourcing neighbourhood workers who can create harmonious places all across the city, not just

in locations targeted for "property value uplift".

Political debate still lags behind the community on vital local services.

Every election, Federal and territory, the major parties compete for who is going to be the best investor in health and education. These universal services are, of course, valuable. I would agree a great hospital and a high-quality school are essential for quality of life in our city.

Local community services are just as important, but never get the visibility or support that is their due.

Like services that put a meal on the table when the household budget is overwhelmed with rent or mortgage payments as well as a shocking energy or car-repair bill.

Or the family support program when parents split up and the kids need some support beyond the family.

Or the community service that comes to meet you when you face a crisis bigger than your family and friends can manage. And the home-care worker who changes your sheets and transports you to appointments during your recovery from a major health crisis or as you age.

One of the disappointments of my time as leader of ACTCOSS is that I have not been able to get governments or oppositions to prioritise investment in community services as core infrastructure considered as vital as health and education.

Another contrast with the Canberra of 2013 is the erosion of financial security further up the income scale.

The costs of living in this city mean increasing numbers of people can only cope with one or two missing pay periods before looking down the bleak tunnel of homelessness.

Our work with income-support recipients to push to raise the rate of Newstart (a wincingly Orwellian name), youth allowance, sickness allowance and similar payments demonstrated how quickly you use up your savings, find you are unable to meet the most basic costs of living and get caught in a web of debt. Any of us can end up on the slippery dip to addiction, how wide the harms reach and how difficult the financial and emotional recovery is.

Shifting the public debate to focus more on the issues advocated by ACTCOSS has been rewarding. A deeper understanding of housing affordability challenges and the experience of poverty are two things that I'm proud were achieved as a result of the collective advocacy of the whole community sector over the last few years.

Our coming together over housing delivered \$100 million for public housing, the biggest per-head-of-population increase of any state or territory in Australia. Tripartisan recognition of the increasing cost-of-living pressures on low-income Canberrans has led to better investment in concessions, extending subsidies for energy-

efficiency improvements and affordable-housing targets in all developments.

As I walk off the public stage, ACTCOSS will, as it always has done, continue to advocate for actions to follow words. Away from the shiny apartment

towers around the lakes and beyond the revitalisation of town centres, community advocates will continue to call on the ACT government to grow the infrastructure and human resources that will deliver connectedness, accessibility and fully funded

responses to people dealing with difficult circumstances.

If Canberra has a chance of staying as a city we want to live in, then acting on the issues ACTCOSS talks about and our members work on every day, is essential.

## Canberra 2020 – the view from nowhere...

Remember the 2020 summit? Does your bookcase creak with all the strategies and promises issued since the turn of the millennium? Or even since the 2016 election? What would Canberra be like if they'd all come true? Well, thanks to *next year's* ACTCOSS annual report dropping from a parallel universe during a freak climate-change-induced lightning event, now we know...

**2**020 has been a busy year for ACTCOSS, with an important election focusing on competing platforms to provide adequate funding to the community sector, affordable housing, blanket coverage of bulk billing clinics and adequate and sustainable community transport.

Parties offered alternative visions to undertake needs assessment work, prioritised community transport provision and invest in community-led human service responses such as work to create harmonious neighbourhoods through community development.

The ACT's ambitious target of 20% affordable housing from new land releases available to the people in the bottom two income levels has proved a boon for housing development here in the ACT.

Community housing is available to those who need it, while Universal Design is the norm. Very few people require residential aged care because their own housing is fit for purpose and aged care supports blend seamlessly into community settings where older people feel valued, supported and respected. There are no people under 45 in any nursing homes in Australia.

This year also marked the third year of a fully integrated and totally accessible transport network in the ACT. Our ageing population is able to access

a seamless path of travel, regardless of the mode of transport. Public transport was made free last year after a business case undertaken by government identified that the social and economic benefits of connecting people through seamless travel far outweighed the income collected.

Two years ago, the federal government abolished its notorious NewStart payment and introduced FreshStart – which really does provide a fresh start through adequate funding for housing, clothing, food and the extra expenses associated with looking for work.

FreshStart payments are set by an independent commission, just like politician's wages, so they cannot become a political football. The results are in, with fewer people presenting at emergency relief services, begging for loose change in group centres, queuing at homelessness services or becoming entangled in the justice system.

Meanwhile, an extreme proposal to issue estimated automated debt notices to recipients based on calculated averages from tax office information was quietly dropped after it was vetoed by Australia's powerful Welfare Rights Ombudsman who declared it "a potential program of authorised state criminal fraud worthy of The Sopranos".

This year also marked the tenth anniversary of the Productivity Commission report which saw the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the ACT. Despite some early problems, the scheme is now running well in Canberra.

A turning point was governance changes agreed three years ago which meant package implementation is now undertaken by disabled people though a powerful individual funding co-operative run by disabled people.

There was also significant work on industry development, on a par with the kinds of packages historically offered to transitional industries like the car industry in Australia. This is now also occurring across community supports for aged care as they transition.

A mix of ongoing block funding, capacity building and individualised packages means that people with disabilities, including episodic, can select a menu of supports to exercise human rights in every aspect of their lives including sexual expression, employment, engaged social lives and family formation.

Asked to evaluate the success of the scheme in a few words, one disabled woman said – “finally for the first time in my life I feel like I am free.” Her mum, an 88-year-old carer, agrees.

For the tenth year running, a dedicated focus on community-based early intervention and prevention programs has seen positive trends in national wellbeing indicators including for health, social isolation, food security, housing stress and social inclusion. What’s more encouraging is that the indicators for diverse and disadvantage groups are level pegging and even exceeding some averages.

Housing, healthcare and other key services are now provided by Aboriginal people and for Aboriginal people in their own organisations. Aboriginal cultures are thriving, and the Ngunnawal language is taught in our schools.

This is no utopia and trouble still occurs in people’s lives. A cancer diagnosis, a family breakdown, a mental illness, a neighbourhood dispute or a job loss can all cause lost income, trauma and create the need for a helping hand. Thankfully, government has needs-based funding for financial counselling, peer support, mediation, self-help and out-of-hospital health support – as well as generous and flexible concessions which can help out during a crisis and recognise that people’s lives are complex.

Over time, community organisations have become trusted partners of government. Services are still refreshed and contested but this is done with respect and with the shared and conscious knowledge of the long-term funding partner. Funded organisations also receive regular and meaningful feedback, insights and support to manage shared outcomes, including close to a retendering. Information flows are so clear it’s hard to remember the last time a relationship “broke down” in the sector. Above all, the focus is on good quality services and value means value to the community, not just dollars and cents.

Having seen progress on so many social justice issues and human rights problems, ACTCOSS is now turning attention to how we can build capacity within communities to respond to changes in technology, foster harmony and allow people to be their best selves. Our new series of lived experience stories focuses on what works in creating good lives in bonded communities.

We are also working to try and test new approaches to inclusive urban design, having built some important conversations about what constitutes a social licence for development in this city.

Community services and neighbourhood groups have recognised that they have much in common while property owners and developers have come to see the value in embedding sustainability into new development. A curatorial approach means areas of density in our city are being built with living infrastructure, communal facilities, access for older people and with a high standard of building quality. The tenants and owners of the future will thank us. We are also thinking differently about new suburbs and ensuring housing comes with good social and community infrastructure and proximity to local commerce. Community development workers are ensuring we create strong neighbourhoods – vibrant and generous communities, not hostels.

What a change from having to ask people to relate desperate stories of homelessness, failed service transitions, resilience after gambling harm and destitution from poor income support.

Yet we know social justice advocacy will always be a necessary backstop. It’s impossible for any of us to forget those days when being on income support was treated as a punishment rather than a lifeline offered with respect and dignity, when people were sleeping rough in our cold winters and hotter summers, when disabled people went without supports or experienced abuse, when we had prisons that overflowed and justice that didn’t focus on rehabilitation, when people lived in fear because climate change wasn’t recognised as an existential threat and when social justice, human rights and the proud and open celebration of diverse identities, sexuality, language, land and culture did not constitute situation normal in Australia.

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*Thanks to ACTCOSS Policy Manager Craig Wallace for “finding” this curious account.*

# Learning & development calendar

Training / Forum	Date / Time	Cost: Member / Non-member / Corp. or Govt.
<b>Reconciliation</b>		
Reconciliation Peer Network Facilitated by ACTCOSS	27 Feb, 21 May 10am-11.30am	Free
<b>Building Better Boards</b>		
Session 1: Board Governance & Strategy Facilitated by ACTCOSS	24 Feb 9.30am-12.30pm	\$110 / \$140 (one session)
Session 2: Financial Management Facilitated by ACTCOSS	24 Feb 1.30pm-4.30pm	\$180 / \$240 (both sessions)
<b>People Powered Programs</b>		
Opening Up Equality in the ACT: The New Discrimination Grounds, and Beyond Facilitated by the ACT Human Rights Commission	7 Apr 9.30am-1pm	Free
The Hope Project: Resilience Documentary Screening & Seminar Facilitated by the Kate Seselja	25 Feb 9.30am-1pm	\$97
<b>Improving Quality and Impact of Services</b>		
Leading Social Change: A Networking Event for Community Sector Board Members Facilitated by ACTCOSS	13 Feb, 2 Apr, 11 Jun 5.30pm-6.30pm	Free
ACT Communications Peer Network Facilitated by ACTCOSS	19 Feb 9.30am-11am	Free
ACT Community Development Peer Network Facilitated by ACTCOSS	20 Feb, 30 Apr, 25 Jun 9.30am-11.30am	Free
ACT Social Enterprise Peer Network Facilitated by ACTCOSS	12 Mar 12.30pm-2pm	Free
ACT Human Resources Peer Network Facilitated by ACTCOSS	19 Mar, 11 Jun 9.30am-11.30am	Free
CEO Forum Facilitated by ACTCOSS	30 Mar	Free

Find out more about our learning and development opportunities and how to register at the ACTCOSS website: [actcoss.org.au/learn](http://actcoss.org.au/learn)

# AGM, new ACTCOSS Board & annual report

## Board

At the ACTCOSS AGM on 12 November 2019, the new Board for 2019-20 was deemed elected. Please join us in congratulating all ongoing and newly appointed Board Directors.

## Office Bearers

- Chair: Glenda Stevens, Associate Member
- Vice Chair: Martin Fisk, Menslink (reappointed at 2019 AGM)
- Treasurer: Bruce Papps, Northside Community Service

## Ordinary Directors

- Darlene Cox, Health Care Consumers' Association (appointed at 2019 AGM)
- Sarah Murdoch, St John's Care (appointed at 2019 AGM)
- Elizabeth Samra, Associate Member (appointed at 2019 AGM)
- Frances Crimmins, YWCA (appointed at 2019 AGM)

- Beth Slatyer, Associate Member
- Petrea Messent, Dementia Australia ACT
- Alicia Flack-Konè, ACT Down Syndrome Association
- Lee Maiden, Communities@Work
- Andrew Scotford, CIT Student Association.

If you would like to contact the Board, please email [actcoss@actcoss.org.au](mailto:actcoss@actcoss.org.au) or call the ACTCOSS office on 02 6202 7200 and we will put you in touch.

## Outgoing Directors

We farewell and thank outgoing Directors Dalane Drexler (ACT Mental Health Consumer Network), Lynnice Church (Associate Member), Karen McKernan (Mental Health Foundation ACT) and Anthony Egeland (Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT). Thank you for your commitment and service on our Board.

## Farewell of CEO Susan Helyar

At the AGM we also farewelled our CEO of almost seven years, Susan Helyar. After some tear-filled speeches from Susan and our Chair, Glenda Stevens, members and guests had a chance grab a snack, mingle with each other and say goodbye to Susan.

## Annual & financial reports

The ACTCOSS Annual Report 2018-19 is now available. It highlights some of the great work and outcomes we achieved during the last financial year, including the *Stories of Chance* publication and other ways we've amplified the voices of lived experience, food security, affordable housing, the Gulanga Program and more.

The Financial Report 2018-19 is also available for your review.

You can access the reports at [actcoss.org.au/ar-2018-19](http://actcoss.org.au/ar-2018-19)



A full room at the ACTCOSS 2019 AGM.



Chair Glenda Stevens farewelling CEO Susan Helyar.



# ACTCOSS staff farewell



**Susan Helyar**  
CEO

At the helm of ACTCOSS since the start of 2013, Susan Helyar has led our organisation with passion, skill and a level of commitment that cannot be faulted.

Her strategic focus, ability to build valuable connections and her relentless advocacy on behalf of the sector and Canberrans living in difficult circumstances has delivered many great outcomes, including the ACT Government's commitment in 2018 to a \$100 million investment in affordable housing in the ACT.

As Susan leaves the sector to begin a new chapter at ANU, we know that she will be missed both professionally and personally by many who have had the pleasure of working with her over the last seven years.

The ACTCOSS staff wish Susan all the best and look forward to staying in touch as she continues to support people living in the ACT.



**Samantha Quimby**  
Capability Manager

Starting work at ACTCOSS in 2015 and leading the capability team since 2017, Samantha has been a wonderful asset to ACTCOSS. With a strong head for organisational and community

development, Sam has been at the forefront of our work in assisting members navigate the ACT operating environment and strengthen their organisational capacity.

Sam has a heart for people, which has seen her build many strong relationships with our members, between our members, with our ACTCOSS partners, and with the ACT Government. We're sure many across the sector will be sorry to see her leave.

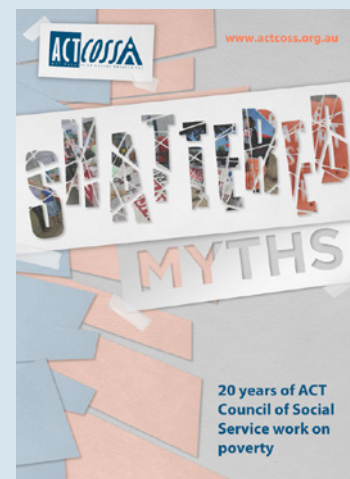
In the office, we will miss Samantha's positive attitude and kind, thoughtful nature – she has been a great friend to all of us here. We wish Sam all the best on her new role and life in Melbourne.

## Shattered Myths: 20 years of ACTCOSS work on poverty

ACTCOSS has launched *Shattered Myths*, a retrospective of 20 years of our work on poverty. Through quotes, clippings and timelines, the report traces ACTCOSS's work to create a basic understanding that people in Canberra experience financial hardship and our work to reframe poverty through the lenses of social exclusion and entrenched disadvantage.

The publication shows that ACTCOSS has a long history of speaking up about uncomfortable realities, through a commitment to robust data and engaging Canberrans to speak on their lived experience of poverty.

We are starkly aware of the ongoing need to work on eliminating poverty. We hope this retrospective affirms the valuable work that has been done and ignites in all of us a passion to continue to lead positive social change.



Download here:  
[actcoss.org.au/  
shattered-myths](http://actcoss.org.au/shattered-myths)

## Next issue:

Update Issue 91, Autumn 2020 edition

# Wellbeing in the ACT

Members are welcome to contribute articles on the theme.

## Copy deadline: 24 February 2020

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

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

Ph: 02 6202 7200

Issue 91 will be distributed in March/April 2020.

## Advertise in Update

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Size/Type	Member	Non-member
1/4 page	\$25	\$60
1/2 page	\$40	\$85
Full page	\$60	\$120

## ACTCOSS board

### Chair

Glenda Stevens, Associate Member

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### Treasurer

Bruce Papps, Northside Community Service

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Elizabeth Samra, Associate Member

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Frances Crimmins, YWCA Canberra

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Sarah Murdoch, St John's Care

Alicia Flack-Konè, ACT Down Syndrome Association  
If you would like to contact the Committee, please contact us:

Andrew Scotford, CIT Student Association

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

Darlene Cox, Health Care Consumers' Association



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/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contributions to the ACT community.

## ACTCOSS

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Phone: 02 6202 7200

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Twitter: [twitter.com/actcoss](https://twitter.com/actcoss)

Facebook: [facebook.com/actcoss](https://facebook.com/actcoss)

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

## ACTCOSS staff

### CEO

Susan Helyar  
(until Nov 2019)

### Gulanga Program team

Julie Butler

Kim Peters

### Policy team

Craig Wallace  
(Policy Manager)

Geoff Buchanan

Eliza Moloney

### Operations team

Stephanie Crosby  
(Operations Manager)

Suzanne Richardson

Kathy Ehmann

Holly Zhang

### Capability team

Samantha Quimby  
(Capability Manager)

Ryan Joseph

Tara Prince

*Update* is a quarterly journal that provides an opportunity for issues relevant to ACTCOSS's 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.