

update

Issue 93 • June 2021 •
**Celebrating & supporting the ACT's
 community sector workforce**

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Celebrating & supporting the ACT's community sector workforce

By Dr Emma Campbell, CEO, ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS)

Welcome to issue 93 of the ACTCOSS journal, *Update*.

In my role as CEO of ACTCOSS, I am often advocating for more resources as our sector works to meet the needs of Canberrans who face disadvantage and vulnerability. In particular, ACTCOSS focuses on increased funding to enable us to recruit and retain a motivated and skilled workforce, of a size that can enable us to do our important work.

ACTCOSS works closely with the Australian Services Union and our members to ensure the viability and sustainability of the community sector. In our advocacy, we highlight challenges – uncompetitive salaries, challenging conditions, resource-poor workplaces. These are the realities. Yet, I have chosen to work in the not-for-profit sector for many years. In fact, I left a lucrative role in business to first go into academia and then the not-for-profit sector. It is in the not-for-profit sector where I feel the most driven and fulfilled by the work that I do.

That is because there are many wonderful things about working in our sector. Number one of those is our workforce. The community sector provides opportunities to work with colleagues of varied background and experiences. There is comradery, peer support and friendship. The sector is filled with people driven by the desire to help and care for others, people with their own lived experience or who have made active choices to make a contribution.

There are challenges. Salaries can be uncompetitive when compared with alternative careers like the public service. We often feel unappreciated by many outside of the sector. It can be tiring – even exhausting – and there is frustration and sadness. But there is also tremendous joy and pride at the outcomes we achieve and the contribution we are making to build a better Canberra. Each day we can go home knowing that we did something positive and good. That we were there for someone else. Not many other industries can provide that opportunity.

ACTCOSS newflash

ACT Budget consultation is open until 28 June 2021. We invite members to talk with us about your submission or position.

Ph: 02 6202 7200

This edition of the ACTCOSS *Update* journal celebrates the contribution of the community sector workforce and looks at ways we can ensure its ongoing success. It highlights ways that we can protect our mental health and wellbeing and provides examples of good practice in our organisations. It also shares work being done across the

community sector to ensure that we build a sustainable, professionalised and respected workforce. I hope you enjoy this edition of the journal and welcome your engagement with ACTCOSS on ways that we can celebrate and support the ACT's community sector workforce into the future.

Want to contribute to the ACTCOSS journal?

We welcome articles from ACTCOSS members exploring and sharing their experiences and research on the theme.

Check the back page for next issue's theme.

Community sector workforce at a crossroads

By the Industry Strategy Steering Group (ISSG) Chair

The [ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026](#) (Industry Strategy) sets a 10-year vision for the ACT community services industry. As part of this, it identifies the need for a skilled workforce to meet the growing demand for services and provide more flexible and responsive client-centred care. The Industry Strategy Steering Group (ISSG) was established to monitor the implementation of the Industry Strategy and comprises community sector and ACT Government representatives.

The ACT community sector not only supports Canberra through the provision of services and advocacy, but it is also a major employer and contributes significantly to the ACT economy. A diverse workforce delivers its frontline services in areas including care, policy and advocacy, corporate services and executive leadership. This diversity allows the sector to do complex work that delivers meaningful outcomes.

Over the past five years, the community sector and ACT Government have worked closely to better understand our sector and to work collaboratively to identify key recommendations to support our workforce into the future.

Workforce data, frameworks and guides

In 2017 the ISSG developed the ACT Community Sector Workforce Plan with the following objectives:

- Grow the community sector workforce to meet current and future needs
- Strengthen capability and career development

- Improve retention of the current workforce
- Cultivate leadership and succession planning.

To meet these objectives, a range of frameworks and tools have been developed to support community sector organisations:

- [Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis](#)
- [Emerging Leaders' Framework](#)
- [Guide to Onboarding \(pdf\)](#)
- [Guide to Supervision \(pdf\)](#)
- [Guide to Peer Support, Coaching, and Mentoring \(pdf\)](#)
- [Supplementary Guide to Probation \(pdf\)](#)
- [Supplementary Guide to Performance Appraisal \(pdf\)](#)

The *Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis*, completed in July 2019, provides a rich profile of the current staff and skills mix in the ACT community sector and projected community and workforce need that will need to be addressed in the coming years.

Some key findings include:

- For a single industry, the sector operates in a constantly evolving environment with significant complexity. It must continually create new service models and new ways of doing business to respond to emerging needs
- Greater support is needed to support the community sector to do work in leadership

development, workforce planning and reducing high staff turnover. The focus should be on lower paid and more casualised sectors and opportunities for professional development

- Projections of rapid growth in disability services and aged care will put increasing pressure on the sector
- Active strategies are required to solve workforce challenges in worker supply, for example, recruiting and retaining younger people, seeking to improve pay and conditions, and a more strategic sector-wide approach to skills, qualifications, capabilities and professional development.

Service costing research

Compounding the above is the gap between funding levels and true cost of service delivery that captures administrative, compliance, and workforce-related costs. To address this, the ISSG agreed in 2020 to undertake research on service costing through the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre. This work will seek to address the issue of inadequate pay and conditions, changing workforce structures, cost of training, understaffing and the gender pay gap.

The findings will help us to build a contemporary evidence base to better understand how community services in the ACT are costed and funded. This will help provide community sector stakeholders and government with an understanding of what is required to ensure a fairer funding model.

This research will be informed by de-identified data from ACT Government and input from leaders and staff in community organisations, and we encourage you to participate in this research.

Next steps

Our sector is experiencing increasing challenges in recruitment and retention. The ACT community sector must compete with a large public service sector and well-resourced private sector for staff. Cost of living and housing costs in the ACT are some of the highest in Australia. The decrease in immigration because of COVID-19 is also creating recruitment challenges for the sector.

It is critical that our community sector is appropriately resourced to meet our workforce challenges, to ensure a sustainable and adaptive community sector.

You can stay abreast of key issues the ISSG is discussing and current work in progress through our [joint communiques](#), and we welcome community sector, federal and ACT Government partners to contact us at jcgrg@actcoss.org.au to learn more about the ISSG and our work on workforce and broader community sector issues.

We welcome discussions on issues including how to use or embed the workforce frameworks and guides within your organisation, participating in the service costing research, and opportunities for shared work to further strengthen our sector.

Find out more about the Industry Strategy at the ACTCOSS website: actcoss.org.au/industry-strategy



Join the Human Resources Network

The ACT Community Sector Human Resources Network brings together staff working in corporate services, operations, and human resources (HR).

If you are working in whole-of-organisation HR management, or in specific functions such as payroll, policy development, performance management, worker conditions, supervision, training and development, recruitment, engagement and recognition – you are welcome to join.

We are connected via an email network and meet regularly to share good practice, highlight gaps on workforce issues, and strengthen coordination in our sector.

Please email Ryan Joseph at actcoss@actcoss.org.au to join or learn more.

Professionalisation is the path to sustainability for the sector

By Natalie Lang, Branch Secretary, Australian Services Union (NSW & ACT Services Branch)

Equal Pay has finally been realised! After decades of struggle, campaigning and a massive history-making Equal Pay case, now, in 2020 community and disability workers have finally achieved Equal Pay. The decision of the Fair Work Commission in 2012 has taken eight long years to be phased in, a decision to ensure that services would be sustainable, while wages increased by a whopping 23% – 45% in recognition of having been undervalued on the basis of gender.¹

One of the drivers for lodging the Equal Pay case back in 2010 was the low wages of workers in the community sector, but another equally important driver was the need to ensure that community services themselves were sustainable. The low wages acting as a push factor forcing hard working and dedicated workers to leave the industry to seek decent pay elsewhere was threatening a workforce crisis. This is a crisis that I am sure we can all agree our community cannot afford. Community services have always been a reliable high-quality force in our democracy and our community. During fires, floods, drought and even a global health pandemic, they have continued to step up, unwavering in their support

and advocacy for those in our community who depend on them.

Yet here we are in what should be the nirvana. A time where services are funded properly and sustainably to provide good, secure, and well valued careers to their essential workers who play such a vital role in our sector. Whilst achieving Equal Pay has certainly taken us some way towards this goal, the ever-shifting sands of change swelling since 2014 saw the harmful practice of competitive tendering take a hold of our sector. Now we continue to face a situation where workers report a lack of access to accredited, transferable training and qualifications and career pathways resulting in insecure work and pay that does not reflect their skill or the complexity of their work. The solution is simple: Only professionalisation will deliver the sustainable jobs, services and community and disability sectors that the Australian people deserve.

Professionalisation can be a dirty word. Not because we don't believe in a professional workforce delivering professional services. We absolutely do.

It is a core priority determined by union members in all our industry campaigning.

This article first appeared in *The Australian Journal of Community and Disability Practitioners*, ACCDP, Issue #1 – Summer 2020. It has been reproduced here with permission from the Australian Services Union NSW & ACT.

The problem is that the term professionalisation implies that we are not already professional. What social, community and disability services need is professional recognition for their workforce and ongoing investment from governments in accredited professional development.

Already professional

In their submission to our Equal Pay case in 2010,² The Commonwealth Government cited National Centre for Vocational Education Research data that showed 82% of welfare and community workers held a post school qualification. They noted that this research indicated this was an increasing trend, an observation also made by the Productivity Commission in their 2010 report *The Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector*.³ Indeed, this and further evidence was presented to a full bench of the Fair Work Commission and was ultimately accepted when the decision to increase wages through the equal remuneration order was made.

Workers in the sector follow many different paths to attaining their qualifications. Some workers pursue social work or community service areas of study as school leavers. Some workers are supported by their

employers to undertake their studies while working in front-line services. Most workers I speak to undertake their studies as mature age students. Maybe they are looking for a career change and the growing workforce opportunities in the community and disability sectors in every metropolitan and regional community is an inviting option. Perhaps they have worked as front-line workers and decide they want to deepen their skill base, or a person with lived experience of being supported by incredible professional life-changing community services and now want to become a worker in the industry so that they can have that same life changing impact on others. Some are working in the industry already and need to undertake a qualification to advance their career.

Whatever the case, community and disability workers undertake their post-school studies to gain the qualifications that they know will give them the best skills to have the greatest impact on the lives of others, to end social exclusion and to build a civil society. What we don't see is workers' qualifications being linked to increased wages in our industrial instruments either at commencement of employment or during a worker's career. The minimal number of annual pay increments that become available to a worker on their anniversary of service or upon attainment of higher levels of accredited training or qualification indicates a lack of professional recognition in our industrial (pay) arrangements. This is holding back workers and in turn, holding back our whole industry.

Accredited training and qualifications matter

We know that accredited training and qualifications improve a worker's career prospects, and in turn, improve their working conditions, including pay and security of employment. Workers with a strong career path, decent pay and job security are more likely to remain working in social, community and disability services.

When workers remain in the sector, their skills and importantly, experience, also remain in the sector. This provides opportunity for services to flourish as workers share their experience, insights, and reflections with one another. This drives innovation and improvements in practice. There can be no denying that a sector which enables workers to remain long term in the industry is one which sees the benefit in terms of the impact on quality.

Accredited training and qualifications also drive best practice and high-quality service delivery. This is a sentiment echoed by the NSW Children's Guardian who wrote in support of our campaign to stop the federal government increasing fees for tertiary qualifications in community service fields of study.

Countless inquiries have concluded that accredited training and qualifications are essential for high quality outcomes in many areas of service provision. It is for this reason that many funding bodies require particular qualification levels for certain roles, for example:

- In the NSW child protection system, there are minimum

degree requirements. It is now a requirement that to become a Manager of an Intensive Therapeutic Care home you must have a Bachelor of Social Work or related human services degree. It is also a requirement to be a Case Manager in the Permanency Support Program (Foster Care).

- In Victoria, the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended (recommendation 208) that all family violence workers have a community services degree qualification.
- In Queensland it was a recommendation of the Carmody QC Report into Child Protection that Child Safety Officers and Team Leaders in child protection services have minimum tertiary qualification in community services.
- The Federal department of Social Services requires a minimum community services degree to work as a counsellor in its 1800RESPECT hotline.

These requirements come after careful consideration has been given to the impact of accredited training and qualifications on quality of service delivery.

The problem is that very little consideration has been given to how we support new and existing workers to attain these qualifications. We should be making it easier to attain these qualifications by making courses free or affordable and funding employers (service providers) to in turn enable workers to attend courses during paid worktime. Instead, we have seen funding that is inadequate for employers to support their workers to

undertake accredited training to the level they would choose. Unfortunately, too often we are seeing decisions being made that categorise provision of training as an “optional extra”, not “core business”.

Training as a pathway to employment and careers

Given that the community sector is one of the fastest growing workforces in the country you would think that making training pathways available to new workforce entrants would be a national priority. Whilst many state and territory governments have identified community and disability service TAFE qualifications as a priority area for access to free TAFE positions, little has been done to connect workers with these positions.

In 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 Global Health Pandemic we saw the commonwealth government announce their ill-conceived “Job Ready Graduates” tertiary reforms package. I use the term “reform” loosely, as I would not want to imply that this package provides improvements to our tertiary education sector to support “job ready graduates”. The Package increased fees for humanities courses by 113%⁴ while also reducing the funding that these areas of study receive from the government. Taking an area of study that currently costs \$6804 and increasing the cost to \$14500 will only build impossible barriers to overcome for traditionally low paid workers.

This policy would not just discourage new potential workers from entering the sector, but also put up unscalable barriers

to attaining qualifications for existing workers, already overwhelmed by financial and work obligations.

At the same time, the proliferation of competitive tendering as the primary means of determining funding has led to margins that are so tight, many organisations can barely meet their obligations around pay and conditions under the award, let alone plan for workforce development, or supporting their employees to undertake studies and advance their careers.

New entrants to the sector need free and affordable access to entry level qualifications. They also need the assurance that they will have access to ongoing professional development to build a career in the industry.

Existing workers in the sector need their services to be funded such that they can be supported to attend training and studies as part of their employment. Having to choose between the income of a shift in an insecure work environment and attending a course ensures that workers can not commit to their studies and apply the learning.

Participation in professional development, be it at the point of entering the workforce or while working and building your career, must be a funded priority for a sustainable sector. The government needs to play an active role through development and funding to enable this to occur. At the end of the day, it is the government who is responsible for the services that our most marginalised and disadvantaged community members receive. They should be high quality services delivered by

a skilled and supported workforce and the government must enable this.

The key elements of success

For our sector to provide decent work and sustainable services into the future it needs not just a growing workforce, it needs to be a good place to work! Workers need to be valued and respected for their work. They need to be secure in their knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the people that they support.

Workers need decent wages and secure jobs. They need to have mobility within their sector to deliver them career paths.

This can only be achieved if workers have access to training and qualifications, with skill sets that are recognised wherever they work in the industry – for this reason training must be accredited. Qualifications that are transferable, regardless of where the worker is employed in the sector and that build up the skills of the worker over the life of their employment, not just upon entering the workforce – for this reason accredited training must be ongoing for the whole of a career.

Workers need to be equipped to deliver services in an evolving field of practice – best practice. Our sector is at the forefront of innovation and pioneering best practice approaches to delivering services – for this reason, an accredited training framework must involve the sector in the development of skill sets and recognised accredited training.

Undertaking ongoing professional development must

be central to a worker's role as opposed to an optional extra. For this reason, service funding must recognise and prioritise professional development to enable workers to undertake accredited training during paid time and without cost to the worker, much like other professions including nursing, teaching and the legal profession.

The future of a sustainable community sector is rooted in our journey of professionalisation. Part of that is about professional recognition of the skills and qualifications that workers already have. The first step is a national plan to build a pipeline

for new workers to enter the industry, while undertaking free and accessible education pathways. Next, we must ensure the development of a consistent, sector-based skills and qualifications framework that is funded as a priority for the industry and delivers at every level – industry, organisation and program, to deliver for every worker.

Our workforce, much like our society, will be at our best when nobody is left behind.

A skilled, properly paid, and securely employed workforce will deliver strong, sustainable, and

quality essential services. Our communities deserve nothing less. The workers who deliver the services deserve nothing less.

See page 20 for footnotes.

Australian Services Union (NSW & ACT Services Branch)
asumembers.org.au



Community Sector Advocacy Training

ACTCOSS has developed a free introductory training session for community sector workers and volunteers to learn more about the role of peak bodies and how to engage with systemic advocacy in the ACT.

The initial version of this training will be 2-3 hours and cover:

1. The role of peak bodies and key guiding documents
2. The ACT Government budget cycle
3. Good practice around written advocacy
4. Finding information to support your advocacy goals.

If you are interested in attending a future session, scheduling a session for your organisation, or would like more information – please email Ryan Joseph at actcoss@actcoss.org.au.

Attracting and retaining the right workforce

Creating a winning formula in the early education and care sector

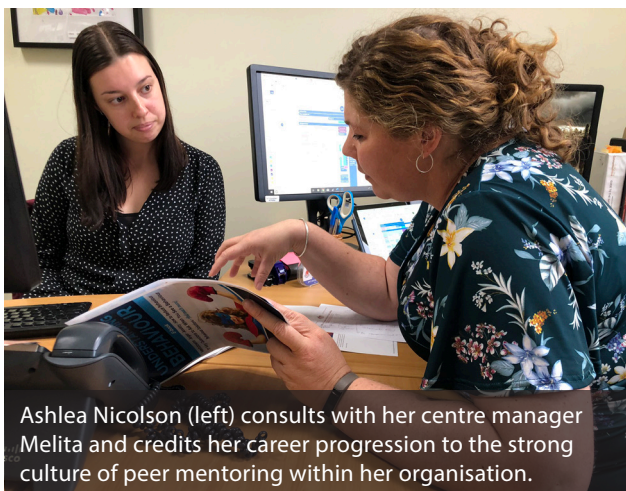
By **Communities@Work**

Attracting the right people to your organisation can be challenging at the best of times. Attracting them when your sector, unfortunately, sits in the lower end of the pay market and battles misconceptions about its employees' role and value provides an ongoing challenge.

In a sector that has been historically undervalued, early education and care continues to demonstrate its importance to our children, our community, and our economy. Over the past 18 months, threatened by fire, engulfed by smoke, hit with storms and hail, and living through the COVID-19 pandemic, our children's services have remained open, and our educators have remained on the frontline educating children and supporting families.

But how do you attract people to a career in early childhood education, in a sector equal in size to mining and the Australian Public Service (APS), but not nearly as well paid? Added to these pay pressures is the fact that those interested in working in the sector require qualifications, which can be expensive and often are not subsidised by government. This can present a huge barrier for many.

And once recruited, how do you *retain* your valuable educators? With pay rates for qualified educators working in early education well below parity with other parts of the education sector, retention is difficult and staff turnover is high.



Ashlea Nicolson (left) consults with her centre manager Melita and credits her career progression to the strong culture of peer mentoring within her organisation.

As the largest children's services provider in the Canberra region, employing almost 600 educators, Communities@Work's CEO Lee Maiden is committed to the early education and care sector: "An investment in early education and care is essential for our community," she says. "Without quality early childhood education, many children would miss out on learning that sets them up for lifelong social, emotional and economic wellbeing."

Communities@Work is working strategically to recruit, retain and grow a capable, qualified and stable workforce.

Valuing and appreciating educators

Research shows children benefit greatly from a strong foundation in their early years, so changing the way people see and value early childhood educators is a mission that Kellie Stewart, our Director of Children's Services, is very passionate about.

"Some people still see educators as babysitters. But in fact, supporting and guiding young children's learning is highly skilled work," she says.

"Our qualified educators thoughtfully develop programs tailored to each child's emotional, social and developmental needs. It's far more complex than just putting out a range of toys to keep children occupied. Educators make a significant investment in developing important relationships with children and their families, documenting children's learning journeys and making sure our centres meet the highest quality standards, particularly for health and safety."

By educating the community about the impact educators have on a child's life and the vital role they play in building foundational skills for life, we aim to grow understanding and respect for the role educators play and inspire new people to join the sector.

To support this goal, Communities@Work is partnering with the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) in a national recruitment campaign, Big Roles in Little Lives, which is aimed



Communities@Work's award-winning training programs ensure its educators have the skills and confidence to succeed in their roles.

at addressing the current workforce shortage in the sector – a growing crisis for some.

Professional development, mentoring and career progression

To ensure our educators have the qualifications, confidence and knowledge to succeed – both now and in the future – Communities@Work provides ongoing formal and informal opportunities for professional development, mentoring and career progression.

“We’re fortunate to have our own award-winning registered training organisation, The Centre of Professional Learning and Education (RTO 88148), that offers nationally recognised Certificate III and Diploma qualifications in Early Childhood Education, as well as a range of professional development opportunities throughout the year,” says Kellie.

“When funding is available, we are also able to deliver subsidised study and our popular Ascend traineeships provide a tailored pathway that combines hands-on experience with award-winning training. We’ve also established a monthly Educational Leaders group to share experiences from the field, work on sector and organisational initiatives, and develop quality improvement strategies.

“We’re looking at running a training conference for our out of school hours care educators later in the year as there are very few formal professional development opportunities available for this group.”

To support our educators’ formal training, Communities@Work actively encourages our educators to share their knowledge and experiences with their peers. With almost 600 educators spread across its broad network of early education and care, out of school hours care, family day care and in-home care services, there’s a wealth of collective knowledge to share.

“Our professional development and training program is backed by a strong cultural mentoring network where our educators learn from each other, both formally and informally, in a mentoring and coaching space. It’s something we all highly value,” Kellie says.

For Ashlea Nicholson, the supportive network of mentors around her was a critical factor in her career progression from trainee to educator, team leader, educational leader and now assistant manager. “I’ve been very fortunate to have worked alongside some great mentors in my eleven years with Communities@Work,” she says. “I credit a lot of what I’ve learnt to these fantastic educators and leaders.”

Kellie Stewart (Director of Children’s Services) and Lee Maiden (Chief Executive Officer) are testament to the career and succession planning opportunities available at Communities@Work, with both beginning their careers as educators. The diversity of Communities@Work allows employees to find career opportunities across a variety of services. The Director of Social Programs, Ruth Zanker, for instance, began her early years in children’s services before moving to lead our community support program. ▶



Lee Maiden (left), Communities@Work CEO, and Carla Scalia, RTO Manager, with the 2020 ACT Large Employer of the Year.

Communities@Work’s commitment to ongoing professional development and training is demonstrated by the fact that we have won the Large Employer of the Year at the ACT Training Awards for the past two years.

Meaningful and appealing employee benefits

There are some issues that Communities@Work advocates for, such as improving educators’ pay, increasing subsidised training for educators, and improving the Child Care Subsidy system.

Communities@Work also strives to be an employer of choice, offering a values-based and positive workplace culture, with meaningful and appealing employee benefits, which complements our commitment to ongoing training and professional development.

Communities@Work’s employee benefits currently include generous salary packaging, free vaccinations, healthy activity reimbursements, discounted childcare, and employee assistance.

Communities@Work works hard to improve and expand our range of employee benefits, and our Staff Consultation Committee, made up of representatives from across the organisation, provide consultation and advice to further improve these benefits.

Dedicated and professional people, culture and wellness team

The glue that binds together all the elements of a successful workforce is, of course, Communities@

Work’s People, Culture and Wellness (human resources) team.

Following an extensive review in 2020, Communities@Work recently restructured, rebranded and relaunched our “human resources” team to more closely align with the organisation’s values and commitment to placing people at the centre of everything we do.

The People, Culture and Wellness team is bringing new energy and vision to Communities@Work and working closely with employees to develop a workplace where the rewards, benefits, and opportunities meet their social, emotional, and professional needs, as well as the ever-growing needs of the community.

Communities@Work will continue to work to become an employer of choice and advocate for the community we serve. We welcome input from our community and if you have any ideas or feedback, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with us via our website.

Communities@Work
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Communities@Work



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In partnership with ACTCOSS

Mental health on the frontline

Protecting the mental wellbeing of community sector workers

By Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT)

It is without a doubt that 2020 was a year of challenges for everyone. Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) CEO Heidi Prowse says that even more importantly the pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of many Canberrans. The ACT Government understood the need in the community and provided additional funding to MIEACT in April 2020 to deliver free mental health training to local community organisations on the frontline who were handling an unprecedented increase in an uptake of their services while learning how to deliver these services in an entirely new COVID environment.

The funding enabled MIEACT to deliver 25 free sessions over a three-month period to community organisations in 2020 with our team of volunteer educators delivering their personal stories of lived experience.

MIEACT realised there was still a significant need for these programs when the funding came to an end. If anything, the need had significantly grown, and continues to be strong into 2021. We looked into ways we could continue to deliver these workshops to frontline organisations – ways that didn't rely on government funding. We decided to expand our Pay It Forward program

– originally meant for school children – to also cover not-for-profit organisations and frontline workers who were dealing with our region's most vulnerable people.

Pay It Forward, as the name suggests, is a way for businesses and workplaces to give back to their community. Whenever a business books a mental health education workshop, it allows MIEACT to provide a course for free to a school or frontline organisation.

One organisation which has benefitted from the Pay It Forward campaign is YWCA Canberra.

In 2020, they experienced a 370% increase in the number of people utilising their services, particularly their housing and homelessness services, as well as people needing emergency financial and food assistance. MIEACT provided their Self-Care for Managers course for free to 15 of their staff.

YWCA Canberra's Executive Director of Community Services, Cara Jacobs, says the course was highly valuable to her team.

"The course was excellent. Staff with supervisory responsibilities were able to take some much-needed time out from their busy service delivery schedules to learn some tips and tricks for their own self-care and that of the staff that they supervise," she explained.

"Staff were able to learn what self-care is, why it is important, and learn some physical, emotional, psychological and sociological strategies for self-care."

Mrs Jacobs says the benefits of her staff's wellbeing continues to filter down to their clients.

As we began delivering more of our programs to local not-for-profits and community organisations last year, it became very apparent that there was an urgent need for mental health programs specifically tailored for Canberra's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and the community organisations who support them during COVID and beyond.

To do this we have partnered with local organisations like SiTara's Story, delivering programs to CALD audiences and then working together to build a pool of skilled volunteers to provide more mental health support to CALD community members.

Our first group of potential CALD volunteers have just completed their second training session and will soon start sharing their own stories of lived experience during MIEACT workshops to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking in CALD communities.

To further support this, MIEACT undertook a recent validation

review of our DoNOHarm Framework by the University of Canberra which confirmed how important the lived experience was: 97% of respondents said a key factor in the effectiveness of mental health promotion programs was the presenter as a person with lived experience. Therefore, we are keenly aware of the need for diversity within our volunteer base to reach as wide an audience as possible because it's an integral part of MIEACT and what we provide and bring to the community.

Mrs Prowse is extremely proud of what MIEACT has been able to achieve in such a short time and have the capacity to respond to the community needs. "Our programs are all about improving the lives of all Canberrans and giving them the skills they need to thrive," Mrs Prowse said. She looks forward to continuing and expanding the Pay It Forward campaign and hopes business right across the capital region will continue to get on board.

If you are a not-for-profit or community group, MIEACT can

offer the following programs for your staff at no charge:

- Mental Health 101
- Trauma Awareness
- Stress Better.

Book now via mieact.secure.force.com/booking

Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT)
mieact.org.au

mieact

A safe space for mental health education

SEE YOURSELF IN OUR STORIES

Using the power of story telling and lived experience, our educators provide a window into the lives of people living with mental illness and a mirror to help people identify similar experiences.

Mel, 46, nurse, knitter and equipped with an increased knowledge of mental illness after participating in a MIEACT session.

MIEACT offer mental health programs for local community organisations and NFPs at no cost, supported by the ACT Health Directorate:

Mental Health 101 builds positive workplace culture by supporting the mental health of your staff to reduce stigma and promote self-care

Stress Better prepares your staff with practical tools to manage and respond to stress more effectively in the workplace

Trauma Awareness equips your staff with the skills and strategies to support themselves and others impacted by trauma



Book now!

Contact Gabrielle Carlton
Head of Workplace Wellbeing & Education
e gabrielle.carlton@mieact.org.au t 02 6257 1195



www.mieact.org.au



Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Supporting our workforce and community through COVID

By Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation (Gugan Gulwan) is a premier, best practice Aboriginal youth organisation that has been operating across the ACT region for 29 years. Over these years Gugan Gulwan has developed and built extensive experience and knowledge across Aboriginal affairs and is committed to advocating and championing for positive long-term change for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Gugan Gulwan commitment and direction is on early intervention. We want to make positive change and outcomes before the challenges and/or difficulties for our youth and their families become barriers. We are not and never have been a crisis service.

As an organisation that supports, works and lives in the ACT, we have robust and embedded processes to ensure our service delivery can be maintained, improved and upheld.

A vital and critical component of any quality organisation is the ability to effectively plan, develop and respond to community (and funding requirements) that support the delivery of current programs and forecast future needs. Gugan Gulwan undertakes this process by holding strategic planning days annually with management and staff.



Gugan Gulwan team painting together at a strategic planning day, 2021.

The strategic planning days are a necessary and welcomed opportunity by management and staff to celebrate and recognise the achievements of the organisation in the previous 12 months.

At the commencement of our strategic planning days in 2021, the Executive Director opened and spoke to the strength of the Gugan Gulwan team to meet the needs of children, young people and families through the ACT's health emergency as we continued to operate as an essential service throughout. This has been an exceptionally difficult and challenging period for our organisation, our clients, our community.

Our face-to-face case management, group programs and events were suspended for a short period – April through to May 2020 – and we adapted our service delivery to meet the increased demand for support. We successfully achieved this by doing telephone and online case management, welfare calls, Zoom meetings with group programs, online school holiday program and activities, cultural art videos and storytelling, and distribution of kids' activity packs. Throughout the health alert and with people self-isolating, Gugan Gulwan actively delivered an online resource and information hub for the community. We developed COVID-19 resources that were disseminated across social media and published regular updates from external stakeholder and government agencies.

The Executive Director thanked the team for their ongoing commitment and work. The Executive Director acknowledged and shared the advocacy of the people that supported Gugan Gulwan to where it is today and the honour that it has been to be a part of this, but that our ongoing advocacy needs to increase to continue our work, especially in the current climate.

The planning days review the challenges, expectations and opportunities of the organisation going forward and identify our core business – what Gugan Gulwan is actually funded to deliver but also the unfunded work we do.



Gugan Gulwan team at a strategic planning day, 2021.

Gugan Gulwan is funded for case management, group programs, therapeutic support, cultural services, events and information and referral. Our continued focus is on early intervention. Gugan Gulwan case management teams include: Child, Youth and Family Support Team; Drug and Alcohol/ Mental Health; and Reconnect, a small team of 10 staff working on the ground.

Gugan Gulwan also delivers several events throughout the year as we are passionate about celebrating, recognising, and inspiring our youth, our families and wider community through positive messaging and engagement.

Gugan Gulwan recognises we need to consolidate and filter external demands for service by looking at our capacity, demand and/or value-add to the organisation and wider community. We cannot be a service to all people and/or agencies for all things. Yet this is a demand that is placed on us daily.

Our planning days recognise the strengths, skills and experience of the organisation, the individual, staff and overall teamwork. It is an opportunity to revitalise and renew our individual, team and organisational commitment for the year ahead with a definitive service delivery pathway moving forward.

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation
gugan-gulwan.com.au



Gugan Gulwan
Youth Aboriginal
Corporation



Celebrating the contributions of queer Canberran volunteers to the community sector

By Megan Watts, President, Diversity ACT Community Services

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer (LGBTIAQ+) community has a strong tradition of citizen activism and volunteer/peer health programs. This tradition of volunteering from LGBTIAQ+ people is clear across the community sector in Canberra.

In Graham Willet's 2020 queer history of Canberra, variations of the word "volunteer" occur 30 times. Graham details the work of Canberra lesbians in the early and mid-1970s in services around rape counselling, abortion, childcare, counselling, half-way houses/refuges, trade union collectives and caucuses, legal networks and arts collectives. In the 1980s the LGBTIAQ+

volunteers were pivotal to the success of the AIDS Action Council, supporting advocacy, counselling, providing policy advice, managing people and budgets, producing newsletters and condom packs, supporting public events, directly supporting HIV-positive people, and cooking for and staffing the soup kitchen. In one year alone, these volunteers completed almost 5,000 hours of work.

LGBTIAQ+ volunteers today continue the tradition of community service and support set down in by the trailblazers of the 1970s and 1980s. If we look at community sector and volunteer awards over the last five years, the LGBTIAQ+ community are well represented. Let us consider

a few examples. Yenn Purkiss was the ACT Volunteer of the Year in 2016 and won the Achievement in Inclusion Award at the ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards in 2019 (not to mention a ream of honourable mentions and selections as a finalist in wide range of other awards). Delia Quigley (then president of Diversity ACT Community Services) was recognised as the ACT Senior Volunteer of the Year Award in 2018. Also in 2018, Shay-Leigh Willis received the Personal Achievement Award at the 2018 ACT Youth Awards – her volunteer work was highlighted as a significant component of her contribution. Shay-Leigh also received a commendation award in the 2019 Chief Minister's



2021 ACT Senior Woman of the Year Liz Stephens

Inclusion Awards, recognising her volunteer work with Queer Youth Together and the ACT Youth Advisory Council. Shay-Leigh and Megan Watts were also recognised in the ACT Children's Weeks Awards in 2019.

Already in 2021, Liz Stephens has been recognised as the 2021 ACT Senior Woman of the Year. Minister Yvette Berry described Liz as "a positive, tireless volunteer". Liz has volunteered for Diversity ACT and SEE-Change over many years, building community and fighting for the environment.

On behalf of Diversity ACT Community Services, I want

to acknowledge the many thousands of hours of volunteer work completed by LGBTIAQ+ Canberrans. Whatever community organisation they are supporting, LGBTIAQ+ volunteers are passionate, determined and absolutely fabulous! I encourage all community organisations to work to ensure that LGBTIAQ+ volunteers feel safe and welcome. Imagine how many more people like Delia, Shay-Leigh and Liz are out there in the community, but unsure of whether their support is wanted. What a waste of people that are desperately needed!

See page 20 for footnotes.

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DiversityACT

Reflections on working in the community sector Getting more people involved with the right skills

By Lee-Ann Akau'ola, Associate Member of ACTCOSS

In this article, ACTCOSS Associate Member Lee-Ann Akau'ola shares her thoughts on her time as a worker in the community sector.

Definitions and examples

The "community sector" is broad. Definitions and examples of services vary depending on the context the words are used.

The ACT Government's paraphrased definition of community service's primary purpose is to empower people to meet their full potential.¹ It then explains how this can be done by providing early support to people in need through targeted services backed by evidence-based research. The services need to be inclusive, be successful long term and have a collaborative approach with the community. I believe that this is the goal of most organisations and individuals in the sector even though it may not be as simple as it sounds.

The community sector covers a range of specialities. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare breaks down the community service industries into three main groups: Residential Care Services; Preschool Education and Child Care Services; and Other Social Assistance Services² while the Australian Industry and Skills Committee states that community services can be divided into Children's Education and Care, Client Services, Community Sector and Development, and Direct Client Care and Support.³

The ACT Long Service Leave Authority has a much longer list of services including as childcare, residential care services for disadvantaged people, residential corrective services for young offenders, non-residential welfare services, employ placement services and community service advocacy services.⁴

The point here is that the community sector covers a range of disciplines and needs. As a result it needs diverse people and skills to deliver its services.

Who gets involved?

Not everyone can perform the client-facing work within this vast array of services. Each service has its own unique skillset that supports and enhances the different lives of clients within our community.

In the ACT Long Service Leave Authority's *Industry Workforce Analysis: Community Sector*⁶ report, the largest industry registered in the ACT community services are Childcare Services with 36%, followed by Non-residential Care Welfare Services with 23%.

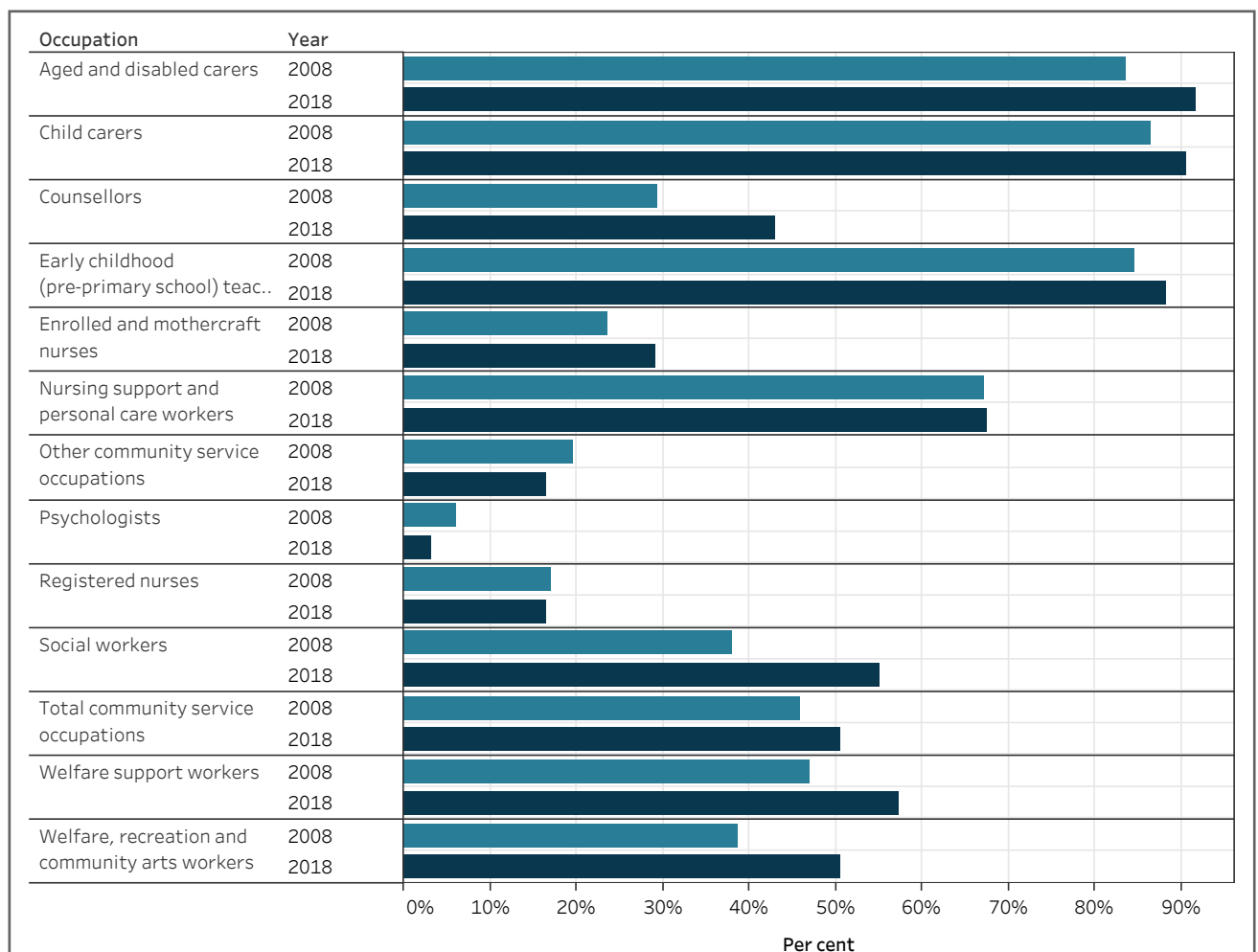
The median age of workers in Childcare Services is 34.9 years and 39.2 years for the Non-residential Care Welfare Services.⁷

Below is an extract from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website.⁸ It shows how important the community sector is as an employer. Among aged care and disability care, child care, nursing support and care work, welfare support work and social work, the community sector is the largest employer – larger than the government and private sector.

Within these organisations, for these professionals to concentrate on changing people's lives, they need to focus on what they do best. However, the majority of community sector organisations employ less than 10 employees,⁹ so in practice they generally perform other duties outside of their professional training.

That means that staff need the support of others to ensure that the services are targeted to the right areas, are communicated effectively with community, have the necessary technical and admin support, and the management and governance skills to lead a successful and viable service into the future.

My involvement in the community sector has been in management and governance, specifically in finance. I felt that my role was to support the client-facing staff to stay focused on their core duties, trial more efficient technological changes, streamline and reduce administrative burdens and push the envelope outside the usual people-focus world of community sector. Trying to maintain fiscal viability without compromising service delivery is sometimes



Proportion of people employed in community service occupations employed within community service industries, by occupation, 2008 and 2018. Source: ABS 2019a, <http://www.aihw.gov.au>

not a thankful task. There will also be greater demand than resources to provide.

My role was to ensure that staff had good facilities to work in, social opportunities to come together as a team to support each other in daily activities, and ensuring finances were available to provide the services, not just in the next 12 months but also for the next 12 years. My goal was to alleviate some stress from those who are needed to change other people's lives.

I was not always successful, but being the person with a different point of view and challenging the mindset of those whose jobs are generally thinking of others before themselves was and will always be a very rewarding.

Get involved

The community sector needs all sorts of left- and right-brain thinkers to ensure that the sector stays focused not only on the tasks at hand but also to be sustainable and viable into the future. The sector needs people to be curious about why things have been done a particular way and why different paths should be explored.

The sector needs people who are good with words, people who are good with numbers, people who are good with technology and of course people who are good with people. If you know of someone who doesn't necessarily think the same way as you, ask them to get involved. If you are someone who

thought you didn't have anything to offer, have a go. If you have a different skillset to those professions mentioned above, reach out and ask if there is a way you can support them in their important work.

There are many opportunities to volunteer, work part time or full time in numerous roles. Sometimes, the best way to assist a small organisation is to attend meetings so that there is at least a quorum to pass decisions. These days attendance can be through technology without even leaving home!

If you are after a career change or something to do that is different, don't miss the opportunity to be part of services which are changing people's lives not only in this generation but making changes for generations to come.

For those already in the sector, don't feel intimidated when people who think differently challenge the work or mindset. Think of it as an opportunity to either teach them, explore different ideas, or just an opportunity to reinforce your own ideas and practices. Encourage others to be involved and learn something new. And most importantly, be patient with the newbies! (I remember it wasn't easy trying to find money under the couch cushions!!!)

The community sector needs all sorts to make a holistic change in our diverse community.

See page 20 for footnotes.

Looking for a job in the ACT community sector?

Check out the job notices listed on the ACTCOSS website: actcoss.org.au/jobs

Want to advertise a job at your ACT community organisation?

For a small fee, your job ad will appear on our website and in our regular enews. [Find out more](#)



Learning & development calendar

| Training / Forum | Date / Time | Cost: Member / Non-member / Corp. or Govt. |
|--|--|--|
| Reconciliation Peer Network Meeting Facilitated by ACTCOSS | 23 Jun 2021 2pm-3.30pm | Free |
| ACT CASP Peer Network Meetings Facilitated by ACTCOSS | 24 Jun, 26 Aug, 28 Oct, 9 Dec 2021 10am-11.30am | Free |
| ACT Integrity Commission: Info Session for Community Sector | 1 July 2021 9.30am-10.30am | Free |
| Equality in the ACT: The New Discrimination Grounds & Beyond Presented by the ACT Human Rights Commission | 13 July 2021 10am-11am | Free |
| ATSIComSec Network Meeting Facilitated by the ACTCOSS Gulanga Program | 21 Jul, 17 Sep, 3 Dec 2021 10.30am-1.30pm | Free |
| Community Development Community of Practice Meeting Facilitated by ACTCOSS | 22 Jul 2021 9.30am-11.30am | Free |
| Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Education Program Facilitated by Koorimunication | 27 Aug 2021 9.30am-4.30pm | \$330 / \$360 / \$390 (incl. GST) |

Find out more about our learning and development opportunities and how to register at the ACTCOSS website: www.actcoss.org.au

Article footnotes

Professionalisation is the path to sustainability for the sector, p.4

1. Equal Remuneration Case Decision FWAFB1000, Fair Work Commission, February 2012.
2. Australian Government submission in the matter of C2010/3131 – Equal Remuneration case for social and community service workers, 14 November 2010, p.78.
3. Productivity Commission 2010, *The Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector*, Research Report, Canberra, p.261.
4. *Job Ready Graduates – Higher Education Reform Package 2020*, Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020, p.18.

Celebrating the contributions of queer Canberran volunteers to the community sector, p.16

1. G Willett, *Acting Out: Canberra's very queer history*, ACT Government, Canberra, 2020.
2. G Willett, 2020.

3. B Smith, '[Sonam Choden named 2021 ACT Woman of the Year](#)', *Her Canberra*, 19 March 2021.

Reflections on working in the community sector, p.17

1. ACT Government 2021, *Australian Capital Territory Budget 2020-21 Budget Statements G*, Community Services Directorate, p.1.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Welfare workforce](#), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 11 September 2019, accessed 27 March 2021.
3. Australian Industry and Skills Committee, [Community Services](#), Australian Industry and Skills Committee, 11 December 2020, accessed 27 March 2021.
4. Insight Consulting Australia, [Industry Workforce Analysis: Community Sector \[PDF\]](#), ACT Long Service Leave Authority, 2019, accessed 27 March 2021.
5. Insight Consulting Australia, 2019.
6. Insight Consulting Australia, 2019.
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019.
8. Insight Consulting Australia, 2019.

ACTCOSS staff welcome & farewell

Farewell...



Holly Zhang
Information & Events
Support Officer

Holly joined the ACTCOSS team in 2018 as the Information and Events Support Officer and has been integral to the success of

ACTCOSS trainings, communications and events. Holly has also been responsible for eNotices, a valued resource provided by ACTCOSS each week.

Holly is a passionate advocate for women-identifying and women-aligned Canberrans. She has made important contributions to our advocacy and policy development on gender, migration and broader social justice issues. While working at ACTCOSS, Holly was studying moral philosophy at the Australian National University. We are delighted that Holly is returning to full time study and wish her well, though we suspect, in the near future, our paths will cross in social justice advocacy!



Eliza Moloney
Policy Officer

Eliza joined ACTCOSS in 2017 as a Policy Officer focused on issues including women and children, justice, housing and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

self-determination. Eliza's passion and intelligence were evident in her work, not least in her leadership of the Justice Reform Group which focuses on ways to reduce incarceration. While working with ACTCOSS, Eliza also completed postgraduate studies in responses to domestic and family violence, a testament to her commitment to the sector. Eliza's energy and humour are already missed in the office, as are tales of Boo, Eliza's cat. While we are sad to lose Eliza, we are excited that her commitment to advocate for people who face disadvantage will move with her to her new role as Adviser to Minister Emma Davidson MLA.

Welcome...



Gemma Killen
Senior Policy Officer

Gemma joined ACTCOSS in February 2021 as a Senior Policy Officer. Her policy responsibilities include justice, drugs and alcohol, gender, families and young people, and education.

Gemma recently completed a PhD in Sociology at the Australian National University, specialising in gender, sexuality and community making, and has extensive experience in social advocacy in Canberra. She is also a freelance writer, educator and engagement consultant on issues relating to gender and sexuality.



Tashi Choden
Administration Support Officer

Tashi Choden joined ACTCOSS in February 2021 as the Administration Support Officer. She is responsible for supporting the smooth operation of the office, events, administration and management of the membership database, and finance and payroll.

Tashi's previous experience has been in the media and her interest has been in covering social issues, highlighting the plight of socially disadvantaged people. Through her reports, she has provided a voice to those who were socially disadvantaged and helped to bring the attention of policy makers on the issues.

Next issue:

Update Issue 94

Practical ways of learning about First Nations peoples

Members are welcome to contribute articles on the theme.

Copy deadline: 19 July 2021

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

Email: ada.fitzgerald-cherry@actcoss.org.au

Ph: 02 6202 7200

Issue 94 will be distributed in Aug/Sep 2021.

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The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) advocates for social justice in the Australian Capital Territory and represents not-for-profit community organisations.

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

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(Head of Policy)

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Ryan Joseph

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(Operations Manager)

Stephanie Crosby
(Operations Manager,
maternity leave)

Suzanne Richardson

Holly Zhang

Tashi Choden

Gulanga Program Team

Julie Butler

Kim Peters

The ACTCOSS *Update* journal is released three times per year. It 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.