

## **CONGREGATION OF CANBERRA CITY 2021 ANNUAL MEETING AND ANNUAL REPORT**

### **REPORT FROM UNITINGCARE CANBERRA CITY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

This has been another difficult year for the Early Morning Centre (EMC) as we continue to adapt our operations to meet the demands of COVID-19. Our Director, Nicole Wiggins, our staff and our wonderful volunteers have worked really hard to keep as much of the EMC open as possible and to support our guests through very difficult times. We are very proud of them and very grateful.

Changes have been made to the EMC service delivery during the year in accordance with ACT Government guidelines. We have managed to continue essential services such as take away food, showers, laundry and telephones with some restrictions relaxed and other services introduced as the year progressed.

#### **Meetings of *UnitingCare* Canberra City Management Committee**

The *UnitingCare* Canberra City Management Committee met eleven times during 2020/21. The annual general meeting was held on 17 September 2020 where members of the Committee were confirmed. A planning day was held on 18 March 2021 facilitated by one of our volunteers, Trish Brown. Most of this meeting was focussed on a review of our business plan (Review of expanded hours and services business plan 2018-2020). The December meeting was a special meeting to discuss options and costs for possible weekend opening. This proposal was listed in the Parliamentary Agreement between the Labor Party and the Greens for the new Assembly.

Rebecca Vassarotti resigned during the year with her election to the ACT Legislative Assembly and Richard Scott took leave because of his role as Chair of Church Council. We greatly appreciated the knowledge and experience of these two people. During the year we have had numerous discussions about trying to find new members for the committee, particularly younger members. We are in the process of approaching two people to test their interest and willingness to be involved.

At the end of June 2021 members of the Management Committee were Anne Butler (Chair), Campbell Macknight (Secretary), Graeme Lowe (Treasurer), Paul Chalson, Margaret Watt (Convenor of Friends of the EMC), Alice Ferguson and Katelyn Peek. Nicole Wiggins (EMC Director) also attends the meetings.

#### **Effectiveness of the Management Committee**

In July 2020, we conducted a survey among members on their views about the effectiveness of the Management Committee. While it was a self reflection, it provided useful perspectives and overall it appeared that the Management Committee considered that it was fulfilling its role and adding value. Key issues that members considered could be worked on included diversity of the Board, succession planning and training and development for the Board meeting. We have done some work on succession planning and diversity but COVID has held this back.

#### **EMC Service Delivery Changes due to COVID-19**

A number of EMC activities and visiting services have been postponed during COVID-19. All breakfasts were served as take-away starting Monday 23 March 2020 until 5 June 2021 when sit down breakfasts resumed with some changes to our previous practice. The community hub has been opened

9am to 2pm to provide coffee and tea from the door and limited access for one person at a time to use essential services such as the shower and access to lockers. Access to computers is being provided for essential use e.g. to contact Centrelink, job providers. Guests are able to use the cordless phone in a designated area of the dining room. Some alterations were made in June 2021 in line with ACT restrictions being eased. The community hub has been open for general entry with service from the counter starting on 16 June 2021. A limit of 15 people in the centre at any one time has been set in order to adhere to 1 person per 4 square metre regulations. Access to computers and tables is being provided with 30 minute bookings for each person. All other services such as showers, laundry phone, mail etc have continued.

The community hub is also being used to conduct interviews and assessments for housing assistance with Street to Home and Catholic Care.

Due to limited access to the community hub all weekly other activities such as cooking classes, bingo, choir and art were not possible for most of the year.

The following services did not attend from April 2020 due to COVID-19

- Feros Care – NDIS Information
- Naloxone-Overdose Response Workshop
- CAHMA Outreach
- Street Law
- Catholic Care – ASSIST Program
- Street to Home
- Centrelink
- Pets in the Park- (PITP)
- Dental Van
- Orange Sky

The Director contacted all services to discuss a timeline for their return. Outcomes were as follows:

- Orange Sky recommenced on 11 May 2020
- Street to Home recommenced on 16 June 2020.
- Street Law recommenced via Zoom bookings on 22 June 2020 and face to face outreach on 22 February 2021.
- CAHMA recommenced on 1 July 2020.
- Naloxone workshops commenced on 16 September 2020
- Pets in the Park recommenced on 2 August 2020.
- Feros Care
- Catholic Care – ASSIST Program – operated irregularly during the year

### COVID-19 Rough Sleepers Working Group

The Director has continued to participate in the COVID-19 Rough Sleepers working group which commenced in March 2020 and includes members from Community Services Directorate Housing and Homelessness sections and a number of homelessness and community agencies. These meetings have progressed housing options for rough sleepers through the Catholic Care AXIAL program, Winter Lodge for single men and Mackillop House for single women with a separate section for women with children and other additional housing options that have been made available through increased funding specifically for housing and homelessness.

Catholic Care ASSIST Program is a housing and homelessness service supporting people to find and maintain accommodation. It continued on an irregular basis during the year with a small number of guests attending. EMC has continued to work with the staff at Catholic Care making referrals to the AXIAL program for long term rough sleepers.

Winter Lodge at Ainslie Village opened on 11 May 2020 and closed on 31 October 2020.

Unfortunately Safe Shelter, supported by three local churches, was unable to operate in 2020 or 2021 due to COVID-19 (see Attachment 2 for more details).

The Rough Sleepers Working Group held its last meeting in May 2021 as matters discussed are now being addressed at other sector meetings. It was agreed that if the need arose the group would reconvene.

### Rough Sleeper Data Collection Meeting

The Director has been participating in the rough sleeper data group via ZOOM meetings and email correspondence. Face to face meetings were held throughout the year with ACT Housing and Homelessness service, OneLink and St Vincent de Paul. The EMC is collecting monthly data that is sent to OneLink for comparison with data collected by other services.

### Continuity Plan during COVID-19

The Director prepared a COVID-19 operating plan as requested by the ACT government. This was updated in August 2020.

### Workplace Health and Safety Reports

The Director presents these to the Management Committee every three months. No issues arose during the year but the Management Committee agreed it was a useful exercise.

### Opening at weekends

There was much discussion during the year about the ACT Government's proposal to fund the EMC to open at weekends. The Management Committee decided that, if funding were guaranteed, we should go ahead with a 12 month trial of opening on both Saturday and Sunday but not including public holidays. Cherie Styles moved to a permanent position as assistant manager at the beginning of April and will manage the weekend openings. The first weekend opening was on 17-18 July 2021 with the weekends officially opened by Minister Vassarotti on Saturday 31 July.

### Finance

Trading result for the year was a surplus of \$48,277 due to COVID-19 cashflow payments and an initial grant from the ACT Government to prepare for seven day a week opening together with cost savings resulting from the restrictions on some aspects of our service delivery. We were able to add \$50,000 to our donation reserve to be used to support the resumption of full service delivery and new initiatives once the COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed.

### Staff and Volunteers

We have been fortunate to have Nicole Wiggins continue as our Director together with John McDonald as Client Services Officer, who has been on extended sick leave since January 2021 and due to return later in the year and Nic Watson who looks after the coffee cart. Advertisements were placed in September for a Client Services Officer to replace Jade whilst on maternity leave. Interviews were held in October and Daisy Chimweta was selected. Subsequently Jade resigned in August 2020 (after maternity leave) and Daisy resigned in April 2021. Cherie Styles, a long term volunteer, commenced as a temporary staff member in January and became permanent at the beginning of April 2021.

The position of Client Services Officer was advertised again on 10 March 2021. Because of the changed operating conditions resulting from COVID the filling of this position was delayed until June when Dinah Morrison was offered a permanent position and two casuals were employed in order to have enough staff to cover the upcoming weekend opening in July 2021.

A new student placement commenced on 21 April 2021. This has proved both helpful for us and for the student.

Regular staff meetings have been held during the year as well as informal briefings to share information on guests' needs and discuss progress on the business plan. Over the COVID period, informal staff briefings have been held regularly to discuss changing COVID regulations, ensuring a COVID safe environment including cleaning regimes, updates on services returning for outreach and updates on new crisis and short term accommodation options.

The EMC continues to be supported by a dedicated team of volunteers and inquiries about volunteering are received on a regular basis. The total number of volunteers supporting the EMC during the year was 75. New volunteers are welcomed on a regular basis and undertake initial one-on-one training with the Director. The majority of volunteers who suspended volunteering during COVID-19 have not yet returned. The modified take-away breakfast along with the need to have a smaller team in the kitchen and dining room to ensure social distancing meant that this reduction did not impact on our services.

### Guest numbers

Statistics of the number of guests using the EMC are in the tables at Attachment 1. COVID continued to reduce breakfast numbers (5593 in 20/21 compared with 9021 in 19/20).

Attendance at the community hub continued to popular although down slightly from last year (12139 in 20/21 compared with 14779 in 19/20). Phone use, crisis food packs, computers and showers continued to be popular with guests.

### Outreach

One of the EMC's aims is to work cooperatively as part of the social welfare community in Canberra. Our Director works very hard to keep informed of what other agencies are doing and regularly attends community meetings including:

- Community Sector update meeting (28 August 2020) organised by ACTCOSS bringing together homelessness and other community agencies to discuss issues that have arisen during COVID. Another community sector update meeting was organised by the Community Services Directorate on 12 September 2020 to provide a sector update on impacts of COVID, responses within the sector and any identified gaps or needs that became apparent due to COVID.
- Joint Pathways (which includes all the ACT homelessness services thus providing a networking and information sharing opportunity for agencies in the sector). This was suspended in February because of coronavirus.
- ACT Shelter
- Who's New on the Streets (the regular SVDP Street to Home meeting).

She has also:

- Met with members of the ACT Rotary Club on 15 February 2021 where she gave members an outline of services provided at the EMC. The Rotary Club awarded the EMC a Vocational Service Award and the Director a Paul Harris Fellowship. The EMC is very honoured to receive this recognition.

- Attended with Cherie an International Women's Day fundraising lunch on 14 March 2021 organised by Saara Holidays and Apna Indian bazaar. The two businesses donated almost \$1,000 raised at the event along with a large amount and variety of women's toiletries. The EMC is very grateful for the support provided by these businesses who have hosted fundraising events for the EMC in previous years.

### Visit from Tongan Princess

The EMC was privileged to have a visit from HRH Angelika Latufiipeka Halaevalu Mata'ah, the Princess of Tonga on 23 November. HRH Angelika brought along a large range of food items as donations and stayed to talk with and have photos taken with the guests, staff and other visitors. The EMC guests were very excited to have a visit from HRH with many taking the opportunity to have a chat and get a photo with her. The EMC very much appreciates the support provided from the Tongan community.

### EMC Business Plan

During the year, the Management Committee has continued to work with EMC staff to implement the business plan. The Management Committee meeting in March 2021 provided an opportunity to assess progress on the plan and modify certain proposed actions. The plan groups proposed activities for the EMC round five strategies:

- Better experience of homelessness with access to essential services
- Better physical and mental health
- Better life skills
- Better social connections
- The EMC is a sustainable organization.

Progress in relation to the five strategies identified in the business plan is outlined below.

### Better Experience of Homelessness with Access to Essential Services

The EMC provides a number of services that enable guests to mitigate the problems of being homeless. Despite COVID, we have continued to maintain the EMC as a community hub with services provided both by the EMC in its own right and through other service providers who visit the EMC on a regular basis. Services provided to guests by the EMC itself include:

- Free food much of which has been served at the door during COVID. On 29 July 2020 OZ Harvest began delivering 50 pre-made meals each Monday and Wednesday along with various fruits and vegetables to distribute to guests. The pre-made lunches ceased in early October 2020 but fresh food supplied by OZ Harvest has been used to cook lunches. The pre-made meals resumed in early November 2020.
- laundry
- showers
- telephone
- computers including internet
- scripts
- mailing address through the EMC PO Box
- lockers
- some clothes. EMC staff have been securing donations of clothing and bedding from a broad range of sources such as one off donations from members of the



public and from partner charities and community agencies.

Services provided by outside organisations who visit the EMC on a regular basis are listed in the COVID-19 section above. This section provides information on when these services closed and when they are resuming.

ADCAS and Meridian commenced outreach sessions on 1 March 2021 to provide information about My Aged Care to EMC guests. The age care limit for My Aged Care is reduced if the person is rough sleeping or has co-morbidity health conditions. The younger age limit means that many guests may be eligible for assistance and support that they were not aware of.

Mobilise, a new student charity that provides free clothes, attended EMC on 6 April 2021 to provide clothes and other items. They attended twice in June

A hairdresser attended the EMC on 15 April 2021 and provided haircuts to 10 people. She plans to come on a regular basis.

### Better Physical and Mental Health

There were a number of issues with the Medical Clinic during the year with Capital Health Network having problems organising contracts with medical staff. These problems now appear to have been resolved. The Clinic did not operate from July to November 2020 but opened on 9 and 16 December 2020 and then started the New Year on 3 February 2021. Feros Care (NDIS information) attended 3-4 times a month from July 2019-March 2020, attending to 51 guests over this period.

Naloxone-overdose response workshops were held on a regular basis during the year COVID restrictions permitting.

Unfortunately the optometrist was unable to attend this year due to illness.

CAHMA recommenced on 1 July 2020 for outreach sessions to provide alcohol and other drug information and case management, including quit smoking courses and nicotine replacement therapy sessions.

A flu vaccine clinic was held on 21 April 2021 with 22 people being vaccinated and 5 May with 5 people attending.

The Director met with Diabetes Australia on 7 May 2021 to discuss programs offered by the service. It was decided that a couple of information sessions would be held on nutrition and diabetes risks and based on popularity these may be repeated or a regular outreach session conducted.

The Director has been discussing with ACT Health the provision of COVID vaccines. These have been organised to commence at the EMC in August 2021.

### Better Life Skills

Computers: Guests have been using the computers regularly with nearly all the computers in use for most of the day. The six tablets are also used regularly by guests.

Cooking Classes: There have been no classes since March 2020 due to COVID.

*Soldier On: Soldier On*, a charity that supports returned soldiers, has donated several guitars to the EMC and a regular fortnightly jam session commenced in May 2021, with Colin from *Soldier On* facilitating the group. The group played at the launch of the EMC weekend opening.

## Better Social Connections

Although restricted in its activities this year, the community hub provides strong social connections for our guests. Many just like to come in, have a hot drink and chat to the staff and other guests.

There were also a number of other activities during the year which enhanced social connections. These included:

- Pets in the Park has resumed on the first Sunday of the month with Rainbow Paws and the pet grooming service also attending. A total of 212 pets were attended to over this period. The Director met with representatives of the service on 19 June to discuss reopening with strategies to manage COVID considerations including social distancing and the service reopened on Sunday 2 August 2020.
- The guest library which is regularly re-stocked with books and continues to be popular with guests.
- Weekly bingo resumed in May 2021. This has been very popular particularly as the student placement ran the first session and didn't understand the rules so was giving everyone a prize. The prizes consist of very small lollies or chocolates received from OZ Harvest so it was decided to continue with this adapted version of bingo.
- A traditional Sri Lankan lunch provided on 25 November 2020 by a local family. The ingredients and cooking were all supplied by this family who had provided a similar lunch in 2019. The lunch was delicious and very much appreciated by the guests.
- The guest Xmas party held on 16 December 2020 with food provided by Green Hills. Approximately 60 guests attended the party. Christmas hampers were donated by the Egyptian Coptic Church and HelpingACT, a local Islamic group. Gift vouchers were donated by members of the City Uniting Congregation and other Uniting Church congregations along with numerous individuals who also generously donated. The event was enjoyed by the guests who appreciated the food and hampers. A number of the volunteers helped out on the day, making it a special occasion for the EMC guests.
- A start of footy season barbecue on 4 March 2021 with Sia Soliola attending along with three other Raiders players to cook and serve the meal. Approximately 40 guests attended.
- Harmony Week lunch on 15 March 2021. The lunch was provided by Saara Holidays and consisted of traditional Indian food. 23 guests very much enjoyed the lunch.
- Easter lunch on 31 March 2021 hosted by the Egyptian Coptic Church. The Church also provided Easter hampers for the guests.
- A Sorry Day BBQ on 26 May 2021 sponsored by Canberra Consulting. Approximately 33 guests attended.

## The EMC as a sustainable organisation

### Friends of the EMC

The ongoing support of the Friends of the EMC is very important. Friends are encouraged to make regular financial or food donations and to raise awareness of the issues of people who are homeless or vulnerable. Friends continue to receive four updates on EMC activities every year - Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring. Thanks to our volunteer, Sarah Kentwell, this is a well presented and interesting e-newsletter that always receives favourable comments. Sarah also administers our Facebook page with its growing number of followers, and she designed and updates our website. These activities give us greater visibility in the Canberra community and have led to an increase in contacts and donations. The increase has been

particularly noticeable in the last few months as we had a strong response to our End of Financial Year appeal and have received a steady stream of donations such as knitted beanies and scarves, warm clothing, food and now masks to assist with our guests' response to winter and to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The list of business sponsors on our website continues to grow and this demonstrates the respect for the EMC and its work that there is in the Canberra community.

The Friends of the EMC started 2020 with an ambitious program of fundraising events for the year but they were all put on hold. Unfortunately Covid-19 has continued to constrain our activities in 2021. A “by invitation only” version of Jazz in the Garden was held on Sunday 18 October 2020. It was a very happy occasion and those who attended really enjoyed the music of the Geoff Page and Friends charity band, the beauty of Donna Stewart's lovely Spring garden and the opportunity to support the EMC.

The Canberra Quilters kindly donated a beautiful hand-made quilt in June and we have used the prospect of winning it or a basket of winter goodies as incentives for donors, primarily for our EOFY Appeal.

Our Patron Tim Gavel continues to work assiduously on our behalf, using every opportunity he can to raise awareness of the EMC and its approach to addressing the issues of homelessness and the challenges faced by those in our community who are vulnerable and socially isolated. He is joined in this work by our three Ambassadors: Paul Powderly, Debbie Rolfe and Peter Barclay. We are grateful to all of them for their ongoing support.

**Other contributions:** We were also fortunate to receive contributions and donations this year from:

- Brumby's (18 loaves of sliced bread per week picked up from Lyneham by our patron Tim Gavel)
- Capitol Chilled Foods (32 three litre bottles of milk per week)
- Rotary
- St Ninian's and St Columba's congregations.
- The ANU Students Association who provided a 'Winter Coats for the Homeless' coat rack
- Price Waterhouse Cooper
- Community Housing Canberra
- Country Women's Association
- North Belconnen Baptist Church
- OzHarvest <https://www.ozharvest.org/canberra/> .
- Hands Across Canberra
- Andrew Leigh MP
- Nicole Lawder MLA
- Elizabeth Lee MLA
- Mercy Association who came to EMC on 4 March to present a cheque for \$5,000.

**Hands Across Canberra (HAC) Christmas Appeal:** HAC conducted a Christmas appeal to fund gift vouchers for community agencies to distribute at Christmas. The ABC radio came to the EMC to conduct an interview with the Director on 11 December 2020 as part of the promotion for the appeal. Tim Gavel as the EMC patron was also interviewed at the EMC.



The Director attended an event on 18 December 2020 where all agencies were presented with their vouchers. The EMC was provided with approximately \$5000 worth of vouchers from Superbarn and Kmart. The \$20 gift vouchers were provided to guests before Christmas and the larger denominations vouchers were used to provide food and other items for the EMC.

#### Hands Across Canberra (HAC) Giving Day & Non- Event Fundraiser

HAC held a giving day where donations up to \$5,000 were matched by HAC. The EMC organised a fundraising “non-event” to coincide with this day in order to increase donations. The non-event gave people the choice to purchase differently priced tickets which allowed supporters to do whatever they wanted with the time. Some people said they would spend time with their grandchildren, others spoke of having a quiet evening at home with no pressure to dress up and go out.

#### Conclusions

As the report shows, we are slowly coming out of a very difficult time with our community hub opening up to some extent and a lot of our support services returning. We have been very fortunate to have the continued support of our staff and volunteers through this period as well as our ongoing community support. Thank you also to the members of the Management Committee for their encouragement and ongoing commitment during this period.

Anne Butler  
Chair  
17 August 2021

**ATTACHMENT 1**

**Statistical Reports  
Early Morning Centre**

**Breakfasts (including takeaway): 2016/17 – 2020/21**

<b>Month</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Per cent male 2020/21</b>
July	n/a	729	769	918	497	78.5
August	829	957	919	875	401	76.7
September	844	860	737	905	527	82.2
October	768	899	741	866	463	79.0
November	894	918	733	903	528	82.0
December	774	750	671	744	434	83.6
January	794	930	841	865	374	85.0
February	698	854	772	727	449	80.0
March	981	796	735	796	463	76.7
April	848	840	863	461	502	80.3
May	949	888	1060	476	483	76.4
June	837	659	803	485	472	79.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,216</b>	<b>10,080</b>	<b>9,644</b>	<b>9,021</b>	<b>5,593</b>	

**Attendance at hub: 2016/17 – 2020/21**

<b>Month</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
July	n/a	730	1481	1584	1256
August	625	753	1540	2241	1101
September	654	703	1422	1454	1145
October	652	807	1450	1383	1165
November	785	948	1382	1238	1047
December	593	708	848	829	820
January	571	908	1198	992	609
February	631	1074	1303	1497	990
March	706	1102	1323	1108	1146
April	624	1121	1125	526	965
May	835	1395	1531	857	940
June	698	1295	1376	1070	955
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,374</b>	<b>11,544</b>	<b>15,979</b>	<b>14,779</b>	<b>12,139</b>

NB The community hub was open for an additional 3 hours from October 2017.

### Other services/activities -2020/21

Month	Hub	Shower	Laundry	Centrelink	Computer	Phone usage	Crisis Food Packs	Doctor	Prescription	Legal	Lunches	Choir
July	1256	94	10	-	110	61	169	-	-	-	25	-
August	1101	90	8	-	110	83	171	-	-	2	149	-
Sept	1145	77	19	1	168	108	210	-	-	3	238	-
October	1165	58	15	-	127	86	213	-	-	1	188	-
Nov	1047	57	1	-	100	130	258	-	-	1	287	7
Dec	820	55	3	-	118	62	112	4	-	-	207	-
January	609	49	2	1	82	54	140	-	-	-	167	-
Feb	990	73	3	-	139	219	180	14	1	-	211	-
March	1146	111	5	-	174	211	216	18	1	4	305	-
April	965	82	11	-	171	234	185	22	-	1	189	-
May	940	68	6	-	114	220	182	21	-	8	218	-
June	955	71	9	-	151	211	266	19	2	2	252	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>12139</b>	885	92	2	1564	1679	2302	98	4	22	2436	7
<b>Total 19/20</b>	<b>14779</b>	1283	241	36	2383	1352	2366	231	2	32	4862	237

In August 2021, 97 guests were registered to receive mail through the EMC post box compared with 93 in 2019/20.

**Safe Shelter 2021**

Safe Shelter provided a safe, emergency shelter for homeless men during the winter months for six years from 2013. Covid -19 safety requirements prevented Safe Shelter from opening in 2020. Opening in 2021 was dependent on the completion of the national vaccination program which did not eventuate. As a result, Safe Shelter had to rethink its role in the homelessness sector. Until it can ascertain how else its funds can be used to support Canberra's rough sleepers, the Safe Shelter Coordinating Committee made the decision in March this year to focus on three areas:

- Support the newly created Winter Lodge in Ainslie village, to accommodate up to 18 homeless men at a time for the Winters of 2021 and 2022
- Advocate to expand the Winter Lodge from a COVID-19 response strategy to a permanent facility operating 365 days per year
- Continue to provide practical support to rough sleepers who use the Red Cross Roadhouse and the Early Morning Centre, in the form of swags and sleeping bags.

Safe Shelter volunteers have been encouraged to volunteer at Winter Lodge and Orange Sky Laundry.

St Columba's Uniting Church in Braddon continues to provide a storage facility for Safe Shelter swags, sleeping bags, warm jackets etc. prior to distribution.

Alice Ferguson  
Chair, Safe Shelter Coordinating Committee  
16/08/2021