



ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010



Our Services

- Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP)
- Indigenous Tenant Advocacy and Support Program (ITS)
- Consumer Advocacy for Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Consumers and Tenants (CAV)
- Community Development, Promotion of Community Facilities and Tenant Participation
- Emergency Relief and Financial Advocacy
- Research, Policy and Quality Improvement Consultancy

Our Mission

*To work and advocate for justice, safety and wellbeing
in our community*

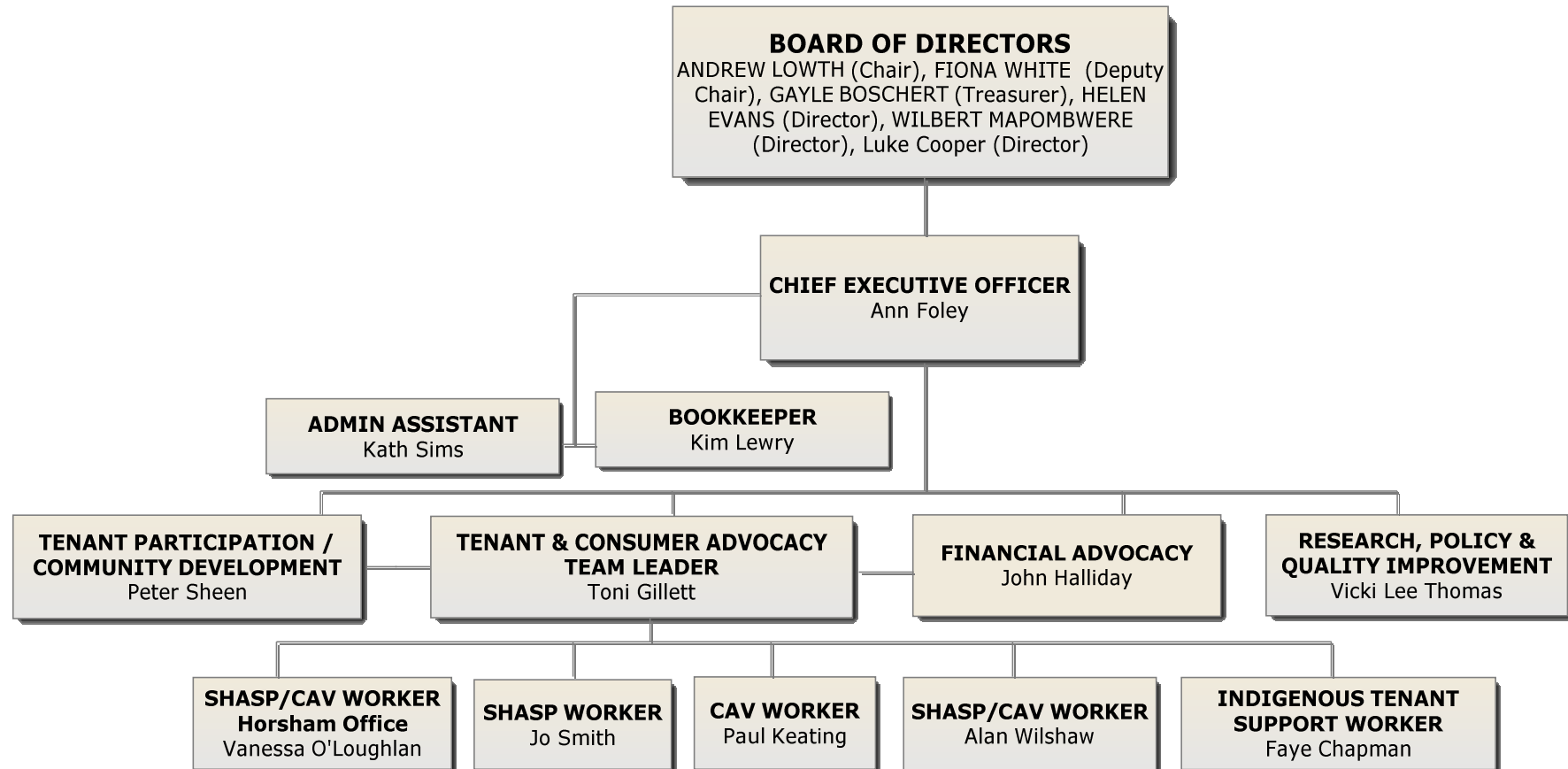
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Our Objectives

- to ensure that all families and individuals in the Grampians Region, irrespective of age, gender, income level, disability, racial/cultural background, religion or other potential grounds for discrimination, have access to housing which adequately meets their specific needs for shelter, security and participation within the wider community as set out in the United Nations Charter of Human Rights,
- to alleviate the suffering of families and individuals in the Grampians Region, which is associated with inadequate standards of housing, homelessness and housing related poverty,
- to provide a range of services within the Grampian Region to assist families and individuals to gain access to and maintain themselves in housing which is appropriate in design and location, adequately maintained, affordable and secure,
- to provide assistance and support to families and individuals in the Grampians Region who are in urgent housing need,
- to provide information to all levels of government and the wider community on the housing needs of families and individuals within the Grampians Region and the impact of government policy on housing needs,
- to participate actively in regional and state-wide networks and to be accountable and responsive to service users, local communities and funding bodies.

PACT COMMUNITY SUPPORT ORGANISATIONAL CHART October 2010



Chairperson's Report

PACT Community Support as an organisation is committed to working directly with clients to prevent homelessness and to alleviate financial and other hardship. We believe the real wealth and health of our community is measured by how we realise justice and well being for families and individuals, particularly the most disadvantaged.

I feel proud to serve as PACT's Chairperson. This is a unique organisation in our region and in the sector. As a small well coordinated service it offers an effective and focussed team committed to clients.

PACT's advocacy and support services are offered to people across the Grampians who are in danger of losing their public or private rental housing, disadvantaged tenants requiring support intervention to maintain their housing, consumers who need advocacy assistance to deal with traders or financial hardship and community groups who are seeking to improve their participation in community life.

PACT's work to sustain tenancies and to resolve disputes sees our Staff often working in pressured and complex situations. Staff at PACT work alongside and in collaboration with other workers in the homelessness services sector, mental health sector and disability services. We recognise their achievements for families and individuals are remarkable and that this work is seriously undervalued under the current Social and Community Services Award.

I thank each Board member for providing their energy and time and expertise in guiding and governing the organisation. On behalf of the Board I thank each Staff member for your dedicated service in improving the lives of people in our community and enhancing our whole community through that effort.

Andrew Lowth

Executive Officer's Report

PACT has always set itself a standard of strong advocacy and professional service to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community. Team work and mutual support ensure that our clients can walk into a welcoming office and benefit from the skill of their allocated worker as well as the professional collaboration and team practice that support that worker.

Now, as a QICSA Accredited Homelessness Service provider we have also successfully committed to the external service standards that apply to our sector. The Staff team and our Board governance working groups collaborate with our quality improvement worker to ensure that our management and our services are planned and accountable to our clients, our funding partners and our community.

In 2009/10 PACT's achievements and highlights have included:

- Accreditation against all Homelessness Assistance Service Standards (HASS)
- Significant service improvement in referral, assessment and case-review practices
- Formalisation of our working partnerships through MOU's with Office of Housing and Aboriginal Housing Victoria
- Proactive participation in the review of the SHASP Program, VCAT, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the Victorian 2020 Homelessness Strategy
- Successful transition from PACT auspice to independence for Ballarat Community Garden

In looking to the future our priorities are:

- Optimising the advantages of our flexible, responsive small team service
- Excellence in our client-support practice and practice frameworks
- Diversification of our client-support practice including development of case coordination frameworks
- Greater capacity to provide external services to the sector in quality improvement and monitoring and alternative dispute resolution services

I thank each Staff member and Director for your contribution this year to PACT and applaud your insistence on respect, inclusiveness and professional service for all people in our community.

Ann Foley

Governance

PACT's Board of Directors meet quarterly and also undertake specific responsibilities through governance working groups that take responsibility for strategic governance direction and monitoring. They include:

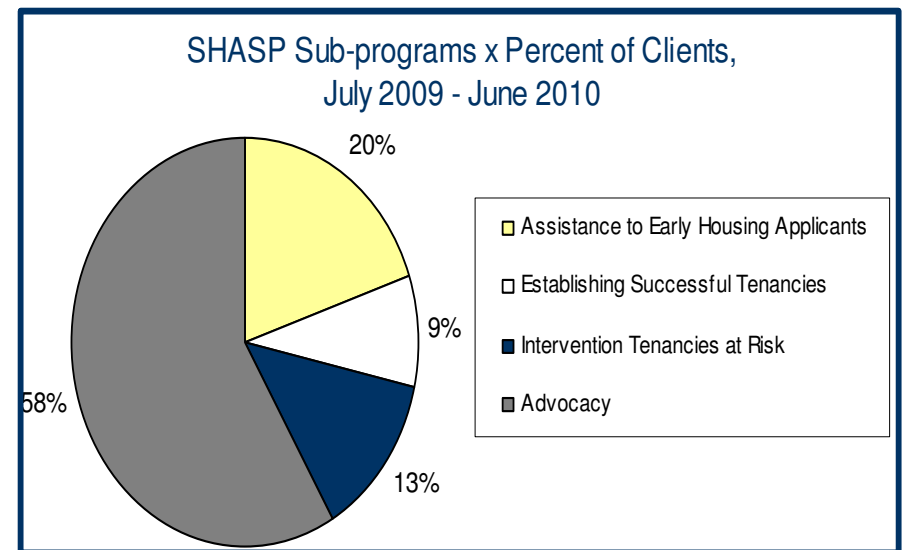
- Leadership and Governance - to ensure a culture of good governance and positive organisational strategy in PACT
- Financial Planning and Management - to ensure systematic financial planning, management, communication and review by PACT
- Quality Improvement and Risk Management - To optimise safe and systematic governance and operations by PACT through an effective framework to identify, manage and monitor strategic, governance and operational risks.
- Human Resources – to ensure a culture of effective and responsible human resource management and promote a supportive and secure environment for people working and volunteering for PACT

Programs

Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP)

This program funded by Department of Human Services covers the following areas of client support:

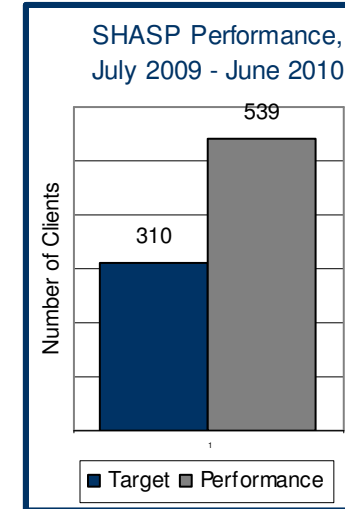
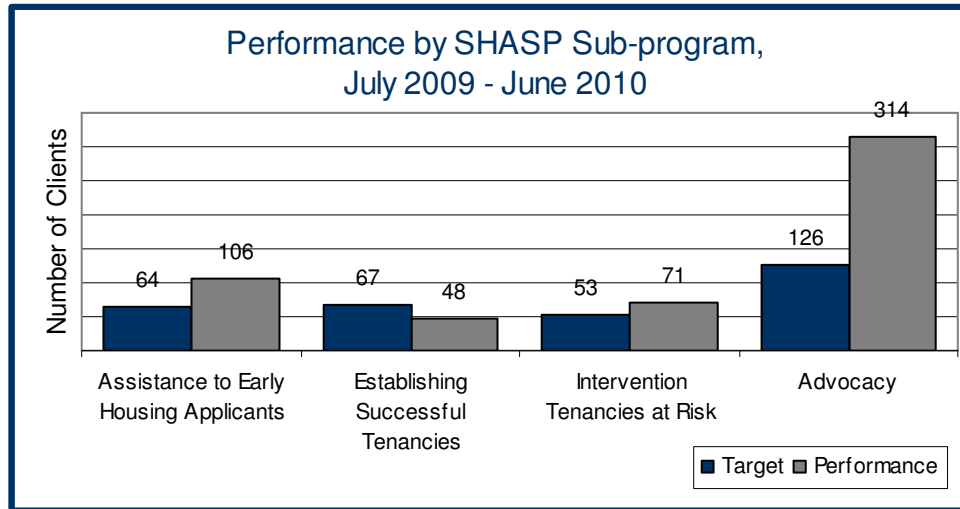
- Establishing successful tenancies by providing new tenants, who have a high risk of tenancy failure, with case support
- Intervention, where a tenancy is breaking down, to resolve factors placing the tenancy at risk
- The provision of advocacy for tenants experiencing major difficulties and who are unable to advocate on their own behalf in their dealings with the Office of Housing (OOH) or their social housing provider
- Assistance to early housing applicants, who are not homeless, or receiving support from another program, in establishing eligibility when this requires advocacy and support
- Providing support to tenants to participate in consultative forums on issues relating to their housing, and supporting existing public tenant groups and emerging tenant groups in their development as representative bodies of public housing tenants
- Providing support to community facilities



In 2009/10, the SHASP team has assisted 537 Office of Housing tenants; including representing tenants at 96 VCAT hearings in relation to rent arrears and/or maintenance debts.

Many SHASP clients experience complex problems such as financial, health, mental health, family breakdown and other stresses. Our service therefore includes effective networking, coordination and referrals to ensure effective tenancy support. Client services are provided across the Grampians, with regular outreach to Bacchus Marsh, and other outreach and home visits provided from both the Horsham and Ballarat offices. In addition to contracted SHASP services, SHASP Staff have provided case support for tenants subject to the Anti Social Behaviour Policy Pilot. This has required intensive and flexible case support and referral practice.

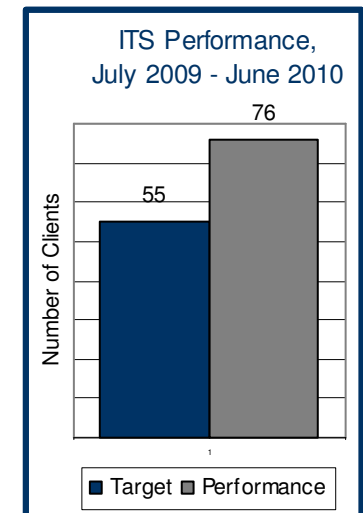
SHASP Performance Against Targets



Indigenous Tenant Advocacy and Support Program (ITS)

The ITS Program, also funded by the Department of Human Services, provides assistance to Indigenous tenants whose tenancies with Office of Housing, Aboriginal Housing Victoria and other social housing providers are at risk, and provides advocacy, support and brokerage services. As a PACT team member PACT's ITS worker has established a culturally appropriate practice in her case support that includes regular outreach visits across the Grampians, a collaborative and respectful working relationship with stakeholder Aboriginal organisations, and a regional reference group. The Grampians services are informed and enhanced by participation in a statewide Indigenous Homelessness Network.

Our ITS services address entrenched disadvantage in the Aboriginal community. Support for tenants at risk and their families includes case coordination, family support, and strong and flexible networking. Client situations may encompass many support needs: a typical example is that of a single parent father in debt, suffering family breakdown and depression, while struggling to raise a teenager daughter and younger siblings in an isolated rural area. Extensive support by PACT has linked them with counselling, an educational scholarship and material aid, contributing to a better situation for the family, with stabilized housing and income, and the father coping well.



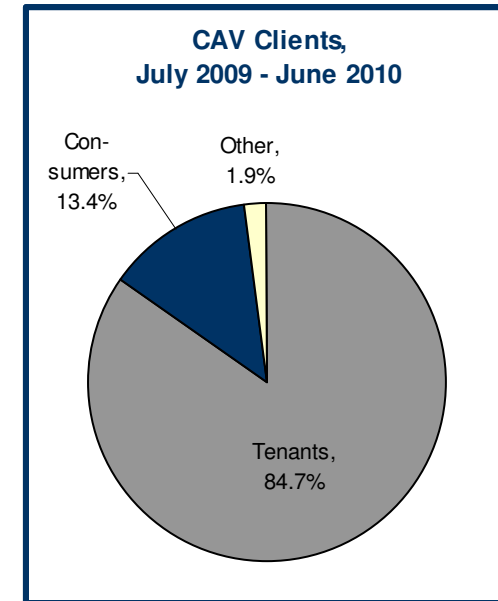
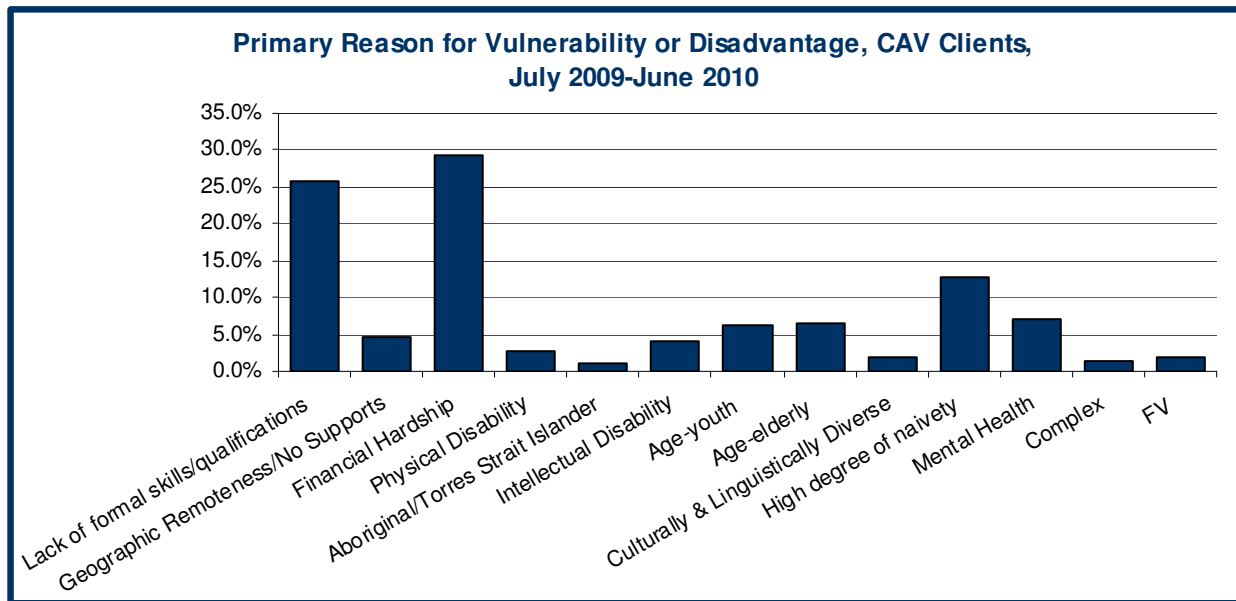
Consumer Advocacy Victoria Program (CAV)

Through a funding and service agreement with Department of Justice, PACT provides advocacy services for private tenants and consumers who are vulnerable and disadvantaged in the market place. These clients are unable to deal with their issues independently and require telephone or face-to-face assistance.

Private tenants may seek advocacy in relation to tenancy issues in rental premises, boarding houses and caravan parks. Consumers seek assistance with disputes with traders, written contracts, door to door sales, VCAT hearings and alternative dispute resolution. Our advocacy services complement and extend services provided by Consumer Affairs Victoria's Consumer Help Line, Dispute Resolution Service and Regional Offices.

PACT provides professional advocacy based on a model of alternative dispute resolution and negotiation, and through this strength-based approach we seek to both assist and empower our clients. As well as referrals from Consumer Affairs Victoria, real estate agents, VCAT members, Members of Parliament and community sector agencies provide unsolicited referrals to PACT. As in other programs, clients may suffer financial, health, mental health, isolation and other disadvantages.

PACT's CAV Advocates have assisted 296 tenants and consumers in 2009/10, including representing tenants and consumers at 92 VCAT hearings.



Community Facilities and Tenant Participation

Through Funding and Service Agreement with Department of Human Services PACT engages in Tenant Participation. PACT's annual Tenant Participation Framework and associated work plan provide a structured approach to provision of support to Public Tenant Associations and Groups, and Community Facilities located on public housing estates. The Framework also outlines the processes for engaging with the broader public housing sector, including the Victorian Public Tenants Association.

PACT is committed to Community Development principles in our engagement with social housing tenants. The Framework and work plan are based on a community development model of practice, and are premised on a philosophy of working with groups who are marginalised socially, economically and culturally, to assist them to work collaboratively to create positive change and improve their capacity to influence the decisions which affect their lives.

This year, PACT moved to consolidate and enhance our Tenant Participation activities by shifting from a model of practice which delegated these activities to individual workers, to a model that merged all the associated activities into one part-time position. This has promoted a more focused and consistent approach.

The following have been achieved:

- Development and partial implementation of Community Facility Guidelines for each of our community facilities at Creswick, Wray Park, Vale St , Ararat and Horsham. These guidelines provide clear procedures for the use of the facilities including key access, booking processes, conduct, maintenance and insurance requirements.
- Development of a new Tenant Participation Framework that includes a revised work plan for 2010-2011.
- Preliminary development of new guidelines for Tenant Participation Brokerage Funds.
- Preliminary development of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Victorian Public Tenants Association.

More generally, the agency has been involved in supporting a new public tenant organization in Mt Clear, and has attended 20 Community Facility meetings, and regular Regional Tenant Council Forums and meetings. The agency was actively involved in promoting Vic in Bloom, the celebration and recognition of tenants' gardens. PACT also promoted and participated in Housing week. By sourcing funding from the Office of Housing and utilizing PACT resources, PACT took a group of 40 public housing residents on a day trip to the Werribee Zoo and visits to community gardens.

Projects and Partners

PACT – OoH Service Improvement Project

The overall objective of this project was to develop and implement a partnership model of best practice that was designed to improve the outcomes of public housing tenants. This was achieved through the implementation of a MOU, new referral procedures, client progress monitoring, and cross agency training processes. In a demonstration of the commitment to collaboration, both Grampians OoH and PACT committed staff resources to the project, and through this were able to have equal input to the development and outcomes. The implementation of the new procedures has improved early-intervention methods and created clearer referral pathways.

United Way Emergency Fund and Financial Advocacy Project

The Financial Advocacy Project has been developed as an innovation at PACT to address the need for urgent budgeting statements and advice for tenants before they go to VCAT. United Way Ballarat and Grampians Regional Office of Housing partnered with PACT to resource the project. The program provides advocacy for individual clients and a package of brokerage to assist negotiations to save tenancies. The program is linked with client support through the SHASP, CAV or ITS program via a referral for specialized financial advocacy. The project also liaises closely with Office of Housing's High Risk Tenancy Officer. Where possible, there also is engagement with clients in budgeting education. Budgeting information has been provided to individuals and in a group setting. This program, funded for 20 weeks for a Specialized Tenancy Advice Worker one day per week, has assisted 24 clients and contributed directly to saving tenancies in most of those cases.

Research Projects

In 2009/10, PACT's Senior Research and Policy Worker represented PACT as follows:

- Central Grampians and Central Highlands Local Area Service networks (LASN);
- State-wide reference group for Family Violence in the News; and
- HASS Accreditation Sector Reference Group;

and completed a significant research consultancy: *Barwon South West Homelessness Data and Research Project*, December 2009.

Current PACT research and project areas include:

- Mapping and a feasibility assessment of community gardens in the Ballarat region;
- Participation in the Harvest Community Garden Network working group; and
- Evaluation of the Central Highlands Opening Doors model for homelessness service provision.

Partnerships

PACT works extensively with other community and human services, homelessness services, health education and counselling services. PACT increasingly works with explicit partnership agreements and has developed and maintained memoranda of understanding and / or protocol agreements with the following:

- Office of Housing, Grampians Region
- Aboriginal Housing Victoria
- University of Ballarat Psychological Counselling Clinic
- Central Highlands, Homelessness Local Area Service Network
- Grampians and Wimmera Local Area Service Network
- Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative

Summary of Financial Performance

Acknowledgements

PACT Community Support thanks the following organisations for their assistance and support, with program and service delivery over the past year.

- Victorian Department of Human Services,
- The Department of Justice
- Consumer Affairs Victoria
- Aboriginal Housing, Victoria
- United Way Ballarat
- Office of Housing, Grampians Region
- Community Axis, Horsham
- City of Ballarat
- Child and Family Services
- VCOSS (CAFS)
- Central Highland Local Area Service Network (LASN)
- Central Grampians / Wimmera LASN
- BIS Computers
- QICSA
- VCAT
- University of Ballarat Psychological Counselling Clinic
- Grampians Regional Tenant Council