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Annual General Meeting 2025

The ACRATH President, Clare Condon sgs, chaired the ACRATH Annual General Meeting 2025 on Thursday 20 March. The Annual Report which was presented to the Members provides a wonderful insight into the work of ACRATH during 2024. [Read here.](#)

Clare expressed her gratitude to all the Members and employees for their on-going commitment to ACRATH and, for their many diverse ways to fulfill this mission to eliminate human trafficking and the harm it causes, bringing life and hope to our world.

ACRATH's work within the Talitha Kum Oceania Region, led by Annette Arnold rsj, was noted as being an important aspect of maintaining our active connection internationally.

At the AGM, Shane Wood cfc resigned as the Treasurer after competently filling this role since the 2012 AGM. Clare thanked Shane for his commitment, generosity and professionalism over these years. Michael Mooney was elected as the Treasurer.

The AGM included the election of Members to the National Committee who now are: Clare Condon sgs (President), Carmel Heagerty rsm (Secretary), Michael Mooney (Treasurer), Annette Arnold rsj, Julia Trimboli and Meredith Evans rsm.

At the April National Committee meeting Shane will be appointed as a committee member.

In June, Lisa McDonald will conclude her term as an appointed member of the National Committee. Significantly, this year ACRATH marks 20 years since its foundation. During the year reflections on our history will be available on ACRATH's website.

ACRATH's motto is taken from John's Gospel and Clare expressed sincere gratitude to everyone involved in ACRATH's mission as we respond so, *that all may have life and have it to the full.*

ACRATH ANNUAL REPORT



Mary calls time

Sr Mary Baulderstone ibvm has retired after almost 10 years at the ACRATH National Office in Melbourne. Mary kept 'the wheels turning' with grace and good humour and ACRATH is grateful for her service. She shared some of her reflections with us.

Q. Mary, when did your association with ACRATH begin?

A. In 2015 the Loreto Province leader asked me to consider working in the ACRATH National Office part time as a volunteer. ACRATH needed an assistant for the National Executive Officer (Christine Carolan) and so I commenced in 2016.

Q. Before working at ACRATH, did you know much about human trafficking and its existence in Australia?

A. I was aware of the organisation but did not know much about human trafficking or its existence in Australia.

Q. When you began working in the ACRATH office at Albert Park in Melbourne, it was a small team. You have witnessed significant growth.

A. When I began working in the national office we were a few days away from the annual conference and AGM, so I hit the ground running. Christine's time was taken up with meetings, round table discussions, funding applications and advocacy work in general. Over the past nine years, as the need has arisen, more people have been employed in the national office to support Christine. We now have a small team of dedicated people working in the national office.

Q. Your association with ACRATH has been very broad, but what has been your main role?

A. My main role has been 'to keep the wheels turning' by doing the secretarial tasks – telephone calls, emails, banking, petty cash, mailing, calendar distribution and more recently safeguarding. Since the COVID outbreak, I have worked mostly from home focusing on safeguarding and related issues. I also attended a parliamentary hearing in connection with the Labour Hire scheme in the building industry.

Q. How would you sum up your time at ACRATH?

A. It was eye-opening regarding human trafficking and enriching working with so many dedicated and generous people. It has been a privileged time for me. ACRATH is a small group taking small but important steps to educate people and ultimately to effect change in our society. The positive attitude of ACRATH members regarding tackling the problem of human trafficking is encouraging.

Mary remains an ACRATH Member.



Vale Sister Janine Bliss fmm

Many readers and ACRATH supporters will be saddened to hear of the recent death of Sr Janine Bliss fmm. Janine played a major role in many ACRATH projects and programs over more than a decade. If you ever looked at the ACRATH calendar or read about ACRATH's advocacy for seasonal workers in Queensland – then you encountered Janine.

Janine was a fearless advocate for the marginalised and put into action the words of Jesus, found in John's Gospel, and included as part of ACRATH's inspiration - "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full".

Janine, served as the Queensland Regional Coordinator for many years and, consequently, she was a member of the National Committee. She developed the first ACRATH calendar in 2015, calling on many organisations, including Anti-Slavery Australia, Red Cross, and Baptist World Aid, to showcase their work. She said in 2016, "The groups featured in the 2016 calendar are working together in the belief that we can make things better, but we need more people to join the fight but doing what they can in their own families, community or workplace." The calendar is still produced today.

Through the years Janine became very involved in the plight of seasonal workers in her State, particularly around Bundaberg and worked with community groups for better outcomes for these workers. Christine Carolan, who recently retired as ACRATH's National Executive Officer said, her strong memory was of Janine's compassion.

"There was a fire at night at a migrant worker hostel (in Queensland). When she heard, Janine jumped in her car for the five hour drive, supported the workers as they faced their loss, then managed to get financial assistance for each worker to cover their immediate needs," Christine said. Bishop of Rockhampton Rev Michael McCarthy, in sharing news of Janine's death, reminded people that Janine "had reached out to workers helping them to understand their rights as workers in Australia".

Janine also worked closely with the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba and former ACRATH forced marriage worker Liz Payne to run a series of events at schools and community organisations in Toowoomba to create awareness of the risk of forced marriage and provide support for people in how best to respond.

Rest in peace Janine.



Meeting the needs

Shane Wood cfc has spent the past 13 years juggling budgets and competing demands. As ACRATH's Treasurer he understands better than most the tension between income and funding important projects that respond to the needs of victim/survivors of human trafficking. This month he hands the job over to someone else at the ACRATH annual meeting.



**"Donors
get bang
for their
buck with
ACRATH"**

Shane Wood cfc
ACRATH Treasurer (outgoing)



Melbourne-based Shane joined ACRATH in 2011 after returning from Broome where he was co-ordinator of the Bishop's Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace. While he had limited understanding of human trafficking at that time, he soon discovered that many of the issues he had dealt with intersect with modern slavery.

"It was a quick learning curve," Shane said. His next learning curve was in 2012 when he agreed to be Treasurer, before ACRATH was incorporated. Since then, he has guided the organisation through many changes, expansions, shifting income patterns and more recently the cost of living crisis that has hit all charities and NGOs.

One thing that has not changed during his time as Treasurer is his focus on sustainability. In the first six years as Treasurer ACRATH received funding from the Commonwealth Government, donations from the public and generous support from many religious congregations. Once federal funding ended, the community and religious congregations stepped up.

He has had oversight of large annual donations as well as small 'faithful' donations from people around Australia, some of whom have given the same amount each month for more than a decade. ACRATH is grateful to them all.

The past decade has been one of change for ACRATH as the organisation grew, fundraised to make up for the loss of large federal grants, developed partnerships and collaborations with universities and health care providers including St John of God Health Care and St Vincent's Health Australia. For Shane, the growth has also meant 'juggling' competing and important demands.

"There's a real tension between taking on something that looks good and will attract the imagination of the public and knowing how we can pay for it. The other tension is our people. In the social services sector, there is a danger that people will burn out because they know funds are limited and they do extra work," Shane said. "Even if you obtain the funding, you need more staff to carry out the work, and this demands more oversight from the person in charge whose time might already be fully committed."

He doesn't hesitate recommending ACRATH to potential donors, big or small, and says donors get 'bang for their buck' with ACRATH because:

- Volunteers are trained to carry out work in regions around Australia.
- ACRATH has credibility in the sector because its work is informed through direct contact with victim/survivors of human trafficking in the Companionship and Migrant Worker programs.
- ACRATH has access to a network of faith-based organisations working in the modern slavery space around the world and can call on these organisations to assist Australians caught up overseas or to provide information about how people are being sent to Australia.

"There has been a lot of change not just in income, but in the organisation itself. ACRATH's engine room has been mostly volunteers and Religious Sisters and they tend to work 9 to 9. But we can't expect that of others, and we must change. To sustain the work, we need to find different ways of operating. It is a challenge; but exciting at the same time."

He may well be part of that change. Shane is retiring as Treasurer but is available to remain on the National Committee to assist with the transition.

Thanks, Shane, for 13 years of service as Treasurer.

Catherine's looking ahead

Catherine Edwards will long remember her recent meeting with an ailing Pope Francis. "I still can't believe I met him. It was a surreal moment for me," she said. The meeting happened just two days before he was hospitalised.

While meeting Pope Francis was an unforgettable highlight, it happened during a week of great moments when a handful of young people from around the world gathered to share ideas and strategies to combat human trafficking. One of the key issues was making the anti-trafficking movement sustainable into the future. Catherine, an ACRATH member, went to Rome as a Talitha Kum Youth Ambassador.

"It's incredible to meet people from such different backgrounds, yet who all share the same commitment to eradicating human trafficking," Catherine said. "Some are working directly with survivors, others focus on awareness-raising and community engagement, but all of us are helping to strengthen the movement in different ways."

One important way of reaching young people is through social media including the recently-launched Talitha Kum app, [Walking In Dignity](#)

Talitha Kum says the app, **Walking in Dignity**, "invites you to rise up and walk with us on this journey toward awareness on human trafficking and its prevention." The app gives users the chance to learn, engage, show that you care about people facing human trafficking, heal, empower survivors, and support projects against human trafficking.

The Youth Ambassadors also performed a flash mob event in Rome to create awareness of human trafficking. You can watch the event [here](#)

Catherine, a lawyer now working in Canberra, said Youth Ambassadors were committed to mobilising their networks wherever they are.

"I think we must create new ways of bringing groups together because younger people who are working full time, or with young families, can't contribute to ACRATH's work in the same way. Much of ACRATH's wonderful work has been carried out by older people and members of religious congregations, and the challenge now is to find new systems to sustain the work," Catherine said.

One challenge, she noted, is keeping young people engaged beyond school and university. "At secondary schools, there are social justice groups. At uni, there are networks like Young Mercy Links. But once people enter the workforce, it can be harder to find ways to sustain their involvement." One way Catherine 'sustains' the movement is by supporting, Young Mercy Links, the *Near to Peer* school program, and developing new opportunities to create awareness of human trafficking.

She supports ACRATH and Young Mercy Links in the *Near to Peer* program, which connects Young Mercy Links and ACRATH volunteers with schools to educate students about human trafficking. "The idea is that students may find it easier to relate to someone closer to their own age," she explained. "At the same time, it gives Young Mercy Links members the opportunity to develop their confidence in public speaking and advocacy."



Catherine was one of the young women who helped establish Young Mercy Links several years ago in her home state of South Australia after being inspired by an ACRATH presentation from Sr Therese Power rsm. That talk led her to connect with Sr Meredith Evans rsm, and she has been involved in the anti-trafficking movement ever since.

She remains in close contact with the Talitha Kum Youth Ambassadors worldwide and is eager to see the network grow, particularly in the Pacific region. "I'd love for more young people from the Pacific to have the opportunities I've had through Talitha Kum," she said. "And I want to see more young people engaging with ACRATH and Young Mercy Links—so that others can step into these spaces too, and I can make myself redundant!"

Caption: Catherine meeting the Pope in Rome in 2025. Photo used with permission © Vatican Media

Educating for Change goes live in April

ACRATH's new university Educating for Change modules go live in April 2025. Already, universities in every state and territory in Australia are set to roll out the modules. This marks the end of a two-year development phase and the start of a major education campaign in universities around Australia.

ACRATH, Flinders University and the University of South Australia have created Educating for Change, 6 micro-credentialed courses that will equip the next generation of professionals to recognise and respond to modern slavery. The courses are free and have been developed for students studying social work, law, criminology, education, and health care as well as for staff working with international students. [Register](#) your interest today.

ACRATH's Melissa Halliday said she was "delighted that 14 universities had committed to working with them to roll out the Educating for Change course at their university with another 29 academics exploring how they can implement it in their course. We anticipate a lot more universities to register through the year."

Educating for Change, which was trialled in some tertiary settings in 2024, has been endorsed by Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus as well as key advocates and educators. Educating for Change was developed with funding from the Attorney-General's Department.

The Attorney-General encouraged law students to engage in the relevant Educating for Change module and said: "Because modern slavery can occur in any sector, industry or domestic setting, I encourage you to learn and understand the indicators of modern slavery so that you can help us identify those who are experiencing modern slavery and support them."

Melissa said Educating for Change's successful early uptake was due in part to the networking by ACRATH's online working group set up to support the push into universities.

"This is a really exciting time for ACRATH because there has been so much hard work from so many people and we know this program is keenly anticipated by many educators who are passionate about responding to modern slavery in various settings," Melissa said.

"We know that some tertiary institutions are keen to roll out Educating for Change because they have followed the development of the modules. Others can register and seek more information or discussion with us.

"Once you register your interest, our team will reach out to you, answer any questions and support implementation at your university."

The modules have already undergone extensive testing and review and input from an Advisory Committee that includes Australian Red Cross, Anti-Slavery Australia, and the Attorney-General's Department.

[Listen](#) to Attorney-General Hon. Mark Dreyfus discussing the importance of Educating for Change.

Join ACRATH in helping future frontline professionals prevent and address modern slavery in Australia, from universities to the workforce. Together, we can educate for change.

[Register](#) for Educating for Change today.

EDUCATING FOR CHANGE
A MODERN SLAVERY AWARENESS INITIATIVE

COMING SOON

EDUCATING FOR CHANGE
LAUNCH APRIL, 2025

STAY TUNED

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Flinders University

University of South Australia

Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

Call to action March 2025

ACRATH supports the work of many like-minded organisations both in Australia and globally. Many produce resources that can be used in a variety of settings and some have campaigns underway. Our newsletter regularly includes this page, encouraging people to find out more and consider becoming involved in actions and advocacy.

Fake job ads leading to scam compounds and sexual slavery

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-26/fake-job-ads-leading-to-scam-compounds-and-sexual-slavery/104953504>

Survivor's story sheds light on modern slavery - Parliament of Victoria

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/news/society/modern-slavery/>

What people face in Myanmar after release from forced labour

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-10/what-people-face-in-myanmar-after-release-from-forced-labour/105033040>

People trafficking probes surge by 4000%, no prosecutions in five years

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/545409/people-trafficking-probes-surge-by-4000-percent-no-prosecutions-in-five-years>

African Catholics Join Forces Against Human Trafficking in Unprecedented

<https://www.osvnews.com/african-catholics-join-forces-against-human-trafficking-in-unprecedented-campaign/>

Talitha Kum youth in Quebec raise awareness about human trafficking

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/trafficking/talitha-kum-youth-quebec-raise-awareness-about-human-trafficking>

Electric bus deals under review by NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-12/electric-bus-deals-under-review-by-nsw-anti-slavery-commissioner/105022128>

Pope: Defend human dignity, eliminate human trafficking

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-02/pope-francis-message-day-prayer-against-human-trafficking.html>

Trafficking and crime will rise after US foreign aid freeze, experts say

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-11/trafficking-and-crime-will-rise-after-us-aid-freeze-experts-say/104904274>

Launch of New Call to Action from and to Young Ambassadors of Hope Against Human Trafficking

<https://www.talithakum.info/en/news/launch-of-new-call-to-action-against-human-trafficking-on-the-international-womens-day-march-8-2025/>

Blue Dragon

<https://www.bluedragon.org/our-work/what-is-trafficking/ending-slavery/>

How vulnerable people are trafficked to fuel a global cyber scam industry

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-02/human-trafficking-vietnam-fuelling-cyber-slave-romance-scams/104542548>

Colombia's child marriage ban comes into effect

<https://plan-international.org/news/2025/02/07/colombias-child-marriage-ban-comes-into-effect/>

Be Slavery Free

<https://www.beslaveryfree.com/>

How sweet is my chocolate?

Resources are available at: <https://acrath.org.au/take-action/chocolate/>



ACRATH needs core business funding and additional funding for special projects.

Please consider a regular donation to ACRATH so that we can plan ahead. Thanks.

<https://www.trybooking.com/au/donate/acrath>
or <https://acrath.org.au/donate>

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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