

ACT Retirement Village Residents Association Inc.

To: provide independent information, advice, advocacy and representation

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2023-2024

The aim of the ACT Retirement Village Residents Association (ACT RVRA) is to be a reliable resource on a wide range of matters related to retirement village living. In this last year, the Association further established its presence as the peak body in Canberra representing, informing and advising ACT retirement village (RV) residents. In large part, this was due to Past President John Beagle whose foresight and extensive networks assisted the Association to make an early impact with little finance, and helped guide our future direction. As I previously wrote to you, John resigned in March 2024 and I became President in April 2024. So, it is with great pleasure that I present my report on the key events and activities of the ACT RVRA in financial year 2023-2024.

To strengthen our contact with RVs, we commenced a series of visits to RVs in August 2023; in all, 9 RVs were visited throughout the year. We spoke about our role and achievements, our plans, and encouraged residents to join the Association. Since establishing our website actrvra.org.au we steadily received more questions and requests for advice through our enquiries line, not only from residents, but also from prospective residents and occasionally village managers. A list of Association representatives in RVs was also compiled which provided an indication of the number of RVs without a residents' committee.

In response to John Beagle's petition and our support for an ACT RV Ombudsman, ACT Attorney General Shane Rattenbury advised in September that an Ombudsman would not be established. Instead, the Minister extended the legal remit of Discrimination, Health Services, Disability and Community Services Commissioner, Ms Karen Toohey, to enable her to support and assist RV residents, and to more widely promote her role to ACT RVs. Since that time, the Committee has developed excellent relations with Ms Toohey's office, and we regularly refer residents who need assistance to her.

Also in September 2023, the Association attended the COTA ACT Expo at EPIC and spoke to many people, mostly prospective residents. Through John's contacts, we were able to offer a draw of 8 prizes to those who attended our stand.

The 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held at the Southern Cross Club in November. A notable item of business was the approval of a modest increase in membership fees, the first such increase in more than ten years. I wish to extend my thanks to the Southern Cross Club, Woden for generously hosting both the 2023 and the 2024 AGMs (and our first Forum in June 2023).

Turning to our representation and advocacy role, the Association was able to further develop relationships with many key leaders and service providers and this helped us become more well known among the sector. I particularly acknowledge the ACT Council on the Ageing (COTA ACT) as a great source of advice and support in guiding our efforts to become more firmly established.

In July 2023, Secretary Anne Caine and I appeared before the Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on Estimates public hearing to advocate for, among other things, a public register of ACT RVs and for a standard form RV contract. In the following month, we and COTA ACT met with Minister Rattenbury to advocate for review of the ACT Retirement Village legislation and to seek seed funding in support of our Association activities.

In response, the ACT Government offered the Association \$25 000 – for which we are very grateful. The Government also established a Working Group in November 2023 to consider amendments to the RV legislation. The ACT RVRA is a member of this Working Group and the only representatives who can bring lived RV experience to the table. We continued to advocate for a public register of RVs, call for a standard form RV contract, and for changes to resident committee procedures to enable these to operate more effectively. For instance, to extend an office bearer's term beyond 3 years if required to enable the effective operation of a residents' committee to continue (e.g. to retain a person with financial expertise).

We held regular meetings with the ACT Retirement Living Council (RLC) to discuss matters of common concern. The two organisations collaborated to develop and distribute to every RV resident in November 2023 an advisory brochure setting out Dispute Resolution Options for RV residents who are in dispute with their RV operator.

In March 2024 the Association signed a Program Funding Deed with the ACT Government which set the conditions for expenditure of the funding in line with our forecast costings. We were also successful in persuading the ACT Government to compile accurate data on the number of, and contact details for, ACT RVs. Access Canberra included this information in their on-line register in June 2024.

Valuable connections were made with fellow NSW and Queensland RV Resident Associations as well as the national RLC – all of which helped us gain a better understanding of the issues surrounding RVs and what can be achieved with sufficient resources. As President, I accepted an invitation in June to attend the 2024 Property Council conference in Queensland which discussed issues and developments in the national RV sector; I also learned of the Property Council's Code of Conduct that its members, including some RVs in Canberra, pledge to uphold.

The Committee is particularly grateful for the help, guidance and advice received over the last 12 months. In addition to COTA, I would like to thank the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, the Human Rights Commission, the RLC, and especially the residents' committees and management of ACT RVs.

In relation to the Association's future sustainability, the Committee undertook a SWOT assessment of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. As we go forward, this assessment will help us identify and put in place measures to capitalise on strengths/opportunities and to ameliorate weaknesses/threats. In relation to our Constitution, the By-Laws currently show the membership fee amounts. Rather than simply update the By-Law with last year's fee increase, the Committee began a broader review of the Constitution, which is put forward for approval at this meeting.

Your 2023-2024 Committee was an enthusiastic and committed group who met monthly. Both the Executive and ordinary members worked hard to progress the developments and achievements I have outlined. Although some turnover occurred, about 6 vacancies remained on the Committee all year. While the work was rewarding and challenging, this level of activity cannot be sustained by so few unless more residents are willing to fill vacant positions. Our membership is slowly growing – but still represents less than 5% of an increasing RV population. We would be grateful if you could assist your Association to become the recognised champion it needs to be – by encouraging others in your RV to become members, and giving consideration to joining the ACT RVRA Committee.

Janine Lewis
President
November 2024