CITY OF SYDNEY

HOMELESS PERSONS INFORMATION CENTRE (HPIC) ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Sister Anne Jordan

Date: 25 June 2009

Place: Redfern

Interviewer: Margo Beasley

Recorder: Marantz PMD 620

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **MB:** **This is an interview with Sister Anne Jordan. It's taking place at her home in Redfern. The project is the Homeless Persons Information Centre - that is HPIC - Oral History Project. It's being conducted on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Programme. I'm Margo Beasley and the date is the 25th of June, 2009. Anne, would you mind telling me where and when you were born?**

AJ: I was born in Bellingen in 1947.

MB: **We're here today to talk about HPIC and to talk about your connection with HPIC which comes through your role with Cana Communities – that is C-A-N-A. I wondered if you would mind telling us a bit about what Cana Communities is and how you come to be involved with it?**

AJ: Cana Communities is a group of people who come together to try and just create community with people who are marginalised in some

form or another through mental illness or addiction or homelessness or whatever. Our belief system is that anyone's welcome but our particular focus is the people who have least options. The goal within the community is to be relational but to make celebration and forgiveness part of our lives and part of our world because we just believe that they're values that aren't nurtured and nourished and that we all need them. So, birthdays are a particular, you know, thing for us so we celebrate birthdays in a big way – well, not in a big way but in a very frequent way because there are lots of people connected to the community and it's a simple ritual, really, of a card, a cake and a present.

2.05 But it's the day you can say something nice to people, have someone else say something nice to them, you'll hear nice things about yourself on your birthday and everyone has a birthday so it gives us a chance at least once a year to say, "You're really special for today". So, celebration and forgiveness are the things that we try and focus on and we run as a group with our own board and, you know, as an incorporated organisation and we do whatever it is that creates community. So, sometimes we'll have a number of different types of places; sometimes it's just a house with people living in it or people coming to it but at the minute we've got a café and a number of shelters and Teresa House. The shelters and Teresa House are where we interact with HPIC because they make the reservation for the people who come to those places overnight.

MB: How long has Cana Communities been in existence?

AJ: It started as Deporres House in 1975.

MB: That's Deporres – D-E -?

AJ: P-O-R-R-E-S, Deporres House, which was just simply a dream of Mark Brereton's who was a Dominican Brother to have a little house that had an open door and he started in Chippendale. And I came in 1986 and joined with him for the next two years and then he moved on from the community at that point and I took over the leadership and Brian Stoney came in 1990 and together we've sort of developed it to the present dream of what's happening right now. When I joined in '86 there was just one house where we all lived but now we've got the café and various other things as well, yes.

MB: So, you've been involved with Cana for twenty three years then?

AJ: Yes.

MB: And which order do you belong to?

AJ: Presentation, from the Lismore group.

4.01 **MB: And you did this in connection with your order or how does that work?**

AJ: Well, I guess we were mainly a teaching order at some point but as teaching became more universally accepted and we stopped having enough sisters to run schools and all sorts of things changed after Vatican Two, really, and people were able to explore other options for mission and this became where I was drawn to and wanted to be at. So, my order supports me to be here but it's not a work of our order in that no one will replace me when I go because it's not the dream of somebody else within the group.

MB: Right. So, this is very much an individual path for you with the support of your order?

AJ: That's right.

MB: Can I ask then how you survive personally financially?

AJ: My order supports me.

MB: Right, I see, that's what you mean by "support", O.K.

AJ: And they also make a regular contribution to the community, yes.

MB: So, when you came here what attracted you to it, why did you choose to come to be involved with Cana Communities?

AJ: It's almost like asking why you choose a partner. You never really know; on a different day you'll have a different explanation but something about the people that were at the house attracted me.

MB: You'd met them before?

AJ: Well, there was a Marist Brother that I used to see quite regularly and we'd just share life's journey and he became involved with people from the community and so in meeting him at the house I met the people there and somehow or another I just – you know how you know "I'm going to be here"? So, I started coming regularly and then moved in and here I am; it all happened.

5.57 I guess in some ways when there's a challenge or something that draws you to something beyond what you know and I think being with people who's life's base is so different from my own. You know, I grew up in a fairly protected and secure little world so the idea of homelessness or being on the streets is just something very foreign to me. More recently, you know, most of our families have been touched with mental illness or with addiction or other things that are more part of today's world but growing up in Urunga or going to school in Lismore didn't quite offer those – back in those days it was

sort of all a bit more secure and stable and family life was more contained or something – I don't know. But now in meeting this group I think the challenge of people's lives being so different and being with someone like *****– I don't know whether you met *****at the café today; he's there every day – but his mother died and he hit the grog but he'd also had an accident earlier in his life and he's the most extraordinary man. You know, I thought I knew what hospitality was about but I thought it meant welcoming whoever got inside the door but ***** put the radio on in the front window and stood at the front door, saying, "Come in everyone, it's my birthday" and I thought, "Strike, that's what hospitality means". And I haven't learnt what it means yet or what other things mean that people can teach me from here because their whole being and whole world is really different. So, it's just a great time of learning and time of relating and understanding more about what makes a better world.

8.00 **MB: I know from having tried to tee up this interview with you over several weeks – you're looking a little bit sheepish now – but you're an extremely busy person, you have many demands on your time with the work that you do. Can you tell me a bit about what a day's work might entail for you?**

AJ: You caught me at a bad time in that I'd had all of May off so I was in catch-up mode in June.

MB: You were very busy then. I'm only very gently - - -

AJ: But I also do have very full days and that's true because my role at the moment as leader of Cana is to just try and keep the community being relational. See, our task (taps table) is to create community to try and deal with the isolation and loneliness that people have in their lives. I just really believe that if we want to change social structures that influence people's lives, letting them have somewhere to go that's safe or having someone who takes an interest in them or someone who'll share a meal with them or someone who'll do a project with them, that's the connection that creates community, that has a sense of belonging for someone. And most people with mental illness, severe, chronic mental illness or people who are on the streets really don't have that connection with someone.

MB: Would you say that's pretty well fundamental to those circumstances?

AJ: Absolutely, absolutely. And that's the biggest hurdle for people to get through or people who've come out of prison after a long time. They've got such a fear of trusting because the prison system is very debilitating in terms of its creation of fear because the power people get over you if you make a decision or have a project or even a desire.

10.02 It's a very scary place and the impact of what happens in there is often treated as institutionalisation but really the fear is by far the bigger factor. So, anyway, yes, I think that loneliness and isolation is why most housing commission places fail, why housing falls apart for so many people, because they're so isolated and so lonely and they take in people who take over from them or bring drugs in or somehow bring it undone or they can't handle being so alone and it comes apart.

MB: There is a bit of an idea that once in the good old days life wasn't like that and community was better and just these things happened, I suppose you might say, more naturally rather than having to actually in a certain sense construct them, which is how you're describing that. But would you say that's actually accurate?

AJ: I think there always were people who couldn't fit into the family structure or something like that or for whom their life was too chaotic to be managed at home but people were less mobile too, families were more in a contained area and there was more a space of belonging, I think, for people. I think our world is very fractured but also I think what happens in service organisations – and that's where HPIC also is (taps table) quite exceptional in its individualised care of people - you know, the number of people who volunteer with us, who come to serve a meal, not to share a meal and the difference is profound.

12.01 If you want to share your life with someone, as you do with your family, it's a very different feeling from what you have if someone comes to be good to you. And so the relational dimension is missing: if someone's looking after you it's not actually that you feel connected. You might know them again next week and you might come back for the meal that they're handing out but if they sit down and eat with you and you share a story, even if you can't work out how to talk to each other it's still different because you've shared it or if someone sleeps in the same house with you there's a sense of we've got something in common.

MB: And that you're equals?

AJ: Maximising what you have in common is really critical for our community because, I mean, I'm never going to be like ***** in that ***** if he's got ten dollars will ride in a cab because he'll feel good and I'll never spend my last dollar 'cause I might need it more tomorrow. We won't be equal in education but I'll never know as much American history as he knows.

MB: But I mean equal as human beings is what I meant.

AJ: Yes, that's right, that same sense of "Are we the same?" I was talking about this at a group I was talking to lately: you know, "Does homelessness make someone a different type of being?" Because if you walk down the street with someone who looks quite different or who is not clean or, you know, sort of has that homeless look about them you'd be surprised at how different the spacing is when people walk - - -

MB: The space between the people?

AJ: - - - the space people give you when you're approaching and it's a very alienating sense. And it's just another insight into what it's like for people when you walk down the street and you look different.

13.59 All of that is very isolating and I think it's just trying to break those barriers so that we have a sense of "We are the same; we're all people together" and we all want our birthday celebrated, we all want to eat, we all want to have fun, we all want to be able to come back if we've stuffed it.

MB: And I'll just mention here briefly there is a bit of noise on the background to this interview for anybody who's listening at some future date, partly because there are roadworks and construction works going on.

AJ: They're constructing a community health centre across the road.

MB: And so that's very noisy but there's also some noise in this house which is Sister Anne has a very beautiful little fourteen week old puppy called Ebony who is doing a lot of chewing.

AJ: Do you want me to take her outside?

MB: No, no, she's fine. Just so if there are some strange noises here blame it on Ebony. O.K, so let's talk then very directly about how you work with HPIC. How might HPIC contact you and why?

AJ: We run Teresa House which is an overnight shelter with ten people and two volunteers for six nights of the week and we also have two church shelters. One of them would take eighteen people and the other would take ten just one night a week each and HPIC make the referrals to each of those places. We didn't always start with that: started out we were just doing it ourselves but what we found for people - - -

MB: We're just revising that and removing Ebony. Right, we'll continue on from there.

15.51 AJ: So, what happens at Teresa House and at the shelters, people will ring up and make a referral through Homeless Persons [HPIC] to

come to stay there. We found that with HPIC they were better able to help people work out how to meet their accommodation needs rather than us just helping people to get a night tonight when there was actually a bed somewhere else that they could use and have the night with us later, particularly for women because resources for women aren't as numerous as for men. And so by working through HPIC we could make sure that the women could accommodate the week rather than just a couple of nights with us, so that's been going - - -

MB: So, before you used HPIC in that way people would just present directly to you?

AJ: Mm.

MB: But now what might happen is they may contact HPIC or you may put them onto HPIC – is that how it works?

AJ: Oh, mostly they would know to ring HPIC from each other or, you know, that sort of network. Very rarely – oh, I s'pose occasionally people do contact us directly but mostly it's through HPIC people book in and the volunteers who come at night will ring HPIC and get the list of who are the people coming tonight and they go from there.

MB: I know the people at HPIC regard you and your organisation very highly and you've got a good working relationship, I think, between their organisation and yours. How do you do that, how do you build a good relationship between two organisations that need each other?

AJ: Mainly we talk to each other. Often, it's really a very simple matter of communication. You know, there've been times when it's been, you know, misunderstandings between us but that's always been cleared by having a meeting and getting to meet and talk about what's going on.

17.59 Or if, you know - the most recent meeting we had was about, oh, one of the guys that we were unsure about his status in the group.

MB: In your group?

AJ: And there'd been an incident that happened at the house and we were unsure about the reporting of it. You know, it seemed like the information was not right and we needed to check with HPIC but in that meeting we also found out that the Garden Shelter was not having people get there. You know, people would book in but they wouldn't make it to there because they actually couldn't walk from Central to Waterloo and Missionbeat used to pick them up but they'd often be waiting too long and then they couldn't get there. So, by setting up that we used our little van to pick up people from Central

and get them there it resolved the issue. You know, like, things like that can get worked out if you talk about it and you know what the problem is and work out what the resources are for getting together. So, you know, particularly with ******or with *****: they're the two that I've probably had most contact with over the years and they've come here for meetings, I've gone there for meetings; yes, we get on the phone or on the email if something sort of comes up that we're not sure of and I think that's what keeps it – you know, if I'm anxious about something or I think something's not working well or I think they're not doing it the way I'd like it to be I can learn that they need it to be another way or they can learn that I need it to be another way if we just talk about it - that's how it happens, really. But it's really a very good relationship and it does work and has worked for many years through many leaders at Teresa House in particular because that's six nights a week whereas the others are just one night a week and it's not quite so intense.

20.01 **MB:** **So, what's your impression of the way HPIC runs internally amongst themselves. I mean, I have the impression that it's very stable; they have people who've been working there for a very long time.**

AJ: Well, ***** and ***** have been there a long time; I've known both of those for quite some time; ****** who was a volunteer with us worked there for a while. I think they've got a great culture of care of people. They certainly have a great resource for knowing people's story within it and they have a real interest in the individuals and I think that's just – you know, if you've got someone who's working with you who's got that interest then the people are really so well-off because it doesn't matter whether their lives are chaotic: if they ring and are known, even if it's just at a phone end there's still a sense of that they can be heard. I don't know, I just think they do a remarkable job. And, see, if we go and ask - we don't keep those sorts of records because our goal is different: we're not here to solve homelessness, we're here to create community and so when people come and what happens while they're there and when they return if they can be known – sometimes they're known and sometimes they're not because our volunteers will change – but people will come back. But we don't need records and it's important for us, actually, not to keep records because one of the things that happens when people come to volunteer or particularly if they come on a full time basis as volunteers if you've got files people look at files to see who I'm dealing with.

21.59 But if they haven't got any files they you actually have to speak to the person to find out what you're going to know.

MB: **And develop your own relationship from scratch?**

AJ: That keeps it relational because you come with a different mindset if you know this person has this type of illness or this type of history but if you've got to ask them then you start differently.

MB: Yes. So, I think what you're saying is having a file is institutional.

AJ: And it's useful in some circumstances and I don't want HPIC to be without their files because we need to go ask them sometimes because that's their goal, is also to be able to make sure that people have got some sort of way of progressing because their issues is about dealing with homelessness. Our issue is dealing with creating community and if we mix them up we get files, they get files – they've got files, we don't need them.

MB: So, you're saying homelessness in your sense is something which might lead to a need for creating community, that's how homelessness feeds into your goal?

AJ: Yes, or people who are homeless are often very isolated and need to have somewhere to go that they feel safe. And homelessness is often linked with another type of, you know, disability or an illness or a breakdown of relationships somewhere or whatever happens.

MB: Where do your volunteers come from?

AJ: Word of mouth, friends, the internet, the website: people look up the website and will turn up. People stay because it's attractive to them or they move on if it's not. Most volunteers would stay two or three years and probably about ten per cent would stay longer but for lots of people, particularly the younger people, they'll find a partner and marry or, you know, whatever it is or move away with their job or go to England for their scholarship or whatever it is.

24.10 So, those sorts of things happen but most of our volunteers would – the older people – see ****** runs Deporres and she's been there four years now. ****** just been twelve months; she runs the café and ***** has run Teresa House for probably four or five years but he was volunteering there for a couple of years before that. He'll be finishing up this year, yes.

MB: But he is a volunteer even as he runs it?

AJ: Yes, yes.

MB: So, this means, I guess, that people are doing these jobs effectively full time, are they, as volunteers?

AJ: No. No, no.

MB: No. So they may have a paying job somewhere else?

AJ: Oh, yes, yes. The two women don't have a paying job somewhere else because they're older women and they've got enough money to manage to do this but ***** works full time. I think all the Teresa House volunteers work full time at something else so Teresa House is only open from six thirty at night until seven thirty in the morning because the volunteers need to go to work. So, it's not open during the day, it's an overnight shelter, specifically overnight. Its first shift will cook a meal and hopefully, you know, depending who's there and what sort of willingness is around the aim is that people will help them cook dinner and then whoever's there will have dinner together. ***** yesterday was complaining that the volunteers eat all the food and I should be knowing and I should stop them from eating all the food.

MB: Because presumably she was somebody who's thinking food is not for them, it's just for - - -

AJ: Her.

MB: - - - the beneficiaries of Cana's work?

25.49 AJ: Well, I'm not sure – I think she was just looking for something to complain about really, but you'd be hard put to get ***** to help you to cook dinner. So, you might invite her but one night when I was down there and somebody was so thrilled because she was able to choose the radio station. You know, it's the little things that make people feel at home that helps them to just feel good about themselves. It never even occurred to me that anyone would want to choose the radio station let alone that it was such a big deal but it was a really important thing for her because she'd not been able to choose the radio station for years.

MB: In whatever circumstances she'd come from?

AJ: Wherever she'd been, wherever she'd been. And that's the sort of stuff that makes you know that something good is happening, she'll feel better about herself for this night. And I just believe that when you feel good about yourself you can make the best choices for your life and that's what we base our – lots of people move into a much better life situation - sometimes it takes years but sometimes in a short space of time - because they feel that someone cares and they start to feel good about themselves so they'll make the better choice for what they need to do. And we try and encourage our volunteers not to be making choices for people but also to set boundaries. You know, like nobody feels safe if there's no boundaries and I will often say to the volunteers, "If you haven't said no you can't be sure you've got a relationship. Your relationship with someone's as strong as how much boundary you've set or when you've said no as well as when you've said yes. It's not been tested if you haven't had to say no"'.

MB: I guess this is part of the idea of people being equal in their humanity; it's not about endlessly giving.

27.51 AJ: No. It's about receiving as well as a volunteer, it's about making sure that, you know, if you need to help someone clean their room they you don't just do it but you work together with it. Or if it's about getting a meal that you can try and do it together, washing up together, it's not "I'm doing this for you". Or if it's about going out. Sometimes, see, if you get to know people you know whether they actually can make a contribution or whether they can't. Sometimes we've set up relationships, you know, one to one: we just foster that one to one with people that have got a connection in some way through just meeting at the house or wherever and so they'll set up going up but it'll be going out to places that we'll take lunch together and we'll buy a drink each there, you know, but set it up so that there's a friendship that's equal. You know, we'll go on pension day so we've still got money or whatever it is that it takes to make it equal.

MB: To not have a relationship of charity?

AJ: Yes. Or even we all pay our own bus fares and we go to something free. But that only works – you've got to know people because some people really would never go if that was the criteria. You know, some people you've got to take.

MB: We got sidetracked, I think, but I did ask you a little while ago just about your daily work.

AJ: Right, yes.

MB: I mean, perhaps you could just tell me what you did yesterday.

AJ: Yesterday, I had a meeting with a lady who was reviewing – my first meeting in the morning was with a lady who was reviewing a project which had some involvement through the Arts Council but it didn't quite make it, you know, it didn't have a director so I spent the first hour and a half with her, going through what happened for us and what happened in that project. Then I talked for probably three quarters of an hour to *****, to listen to her complain about Teresa House and our volunteers and everything that we've done.

29.59 And eventually she went away, laughing, and enjoying the fact that, you know, she wasn't going to be able to go back for three weeks but she might go to New Zealand in the meantime. Then I think went to Deporres for lunch yesterday. I can't think what I did in the afternoon.

MB: You move around the sites?

AJ: Yes. I would have, you know, sort of some connection with each of the leaders. At least once a month I will have a formal interview with the leaders to make a report for our board – not that we have a meeting - board meeting's about every two months but that sort of role of just checking that the people have got a sense of connection to the community and that they've got what they need to help make it work and here's some good stories. I also spend a bit of time at the café or at Deporres because of my own need to keep connected with people; I don't just want to be in the office or doing things that, you know, keep the organisation happening. On Tuesday we had a day here with a group of people just - - -

MB: Here in your house?

AJ: Here in the house, just looking at what gives nurture to us in the community through the way we use laughter to achieve, you know, sort of feeling better and achieving what we want to through the community. So, that was with some of the volunteers and some of the people from the community – that was good.

MB: And so you let people know that this is happening, this is Eucharist?

AJ: Yes. Sometimes it's Eucharist and sometimes it's just a gathering. It depends because Eucharist is what works for some people, some people think it's going to be church and they don't want to come.

31.55 So, sometimes it's just a gathering time and we'll have some sharing on something that nurtures the spirit but that developing of a reflective way of being so that we just have something to know more about ourselves and what makes us work and what makes us connect to other people. For some people that's about a God and some people talk about the higher power because a lot of them have been to AA or things like that; it's something bigger than ourselves that makes the world somewhat bigger than just our little, "I'm the poorest and I'm the most needy" or whatever it is. We also do things that set us up for contributing somewhere else. You know, recently we had a day where we shared with the Medical Centre and the 'Sharing a Meal' group; you know, we had a market day outside the café to raise money for those two projects as well as Cana; we divided it in three way.

MB: So, by the "Medical Centre" you mean the Aboriginal Medical Centre?

AJ: Mm.

MB: And the 'Sharing a Meal' group, can you tell me what that is?

AJ: They're 'round at St Vincent's Church and on Tuesdays and Fridays they organise a meal for whoever comes and often it's a hundred people, sometimes a bit more. They just provide a meal 'round there and it's just a sharing time for people. Technically, it's lunchtime but it's all over by eleven thirty, so I don't know when you have lunch, they might have a very early breakfast or maybe it's breakfast as well.

MB: Or it's brunch, perhaps.

AJ: But those groups are, you know, just local groups but the idea is really not so much about just - we're not going to make enough money to make a real difference to any of those groups but it's about helping people to keep a generous heart because it's very easy if you haven't got a lot of money and you see a lot of people who have to think you're really hardly done by rather than see that, you know, you feel better in yourself if you share. And that reaching out makes a connection; that's relational.

34.05 **MB: Just back to homelessness. If you do assist or work something out with HPIC to provide accommodation for somebody who is homeless or potentially homeless, if they come to you for a while then what happens?**

AJ: Some people who come there to Teresa House or to the shelters would – just a few will come sometimes to living-in with us.

MB: And living more or less permanently, you mean?

AJ: Yes, or while it works.

MB: In one of the other houses?

AJ: In the residential houses, yes, but mostly that's not what happens because quite often the people who are coming to Teresa House or to the shelters are more capable in some way of independent living than the people who actually make it to the house to live in. So, you know, like to watch these guys bringing down a bunch of flowers – you know, these tough guys who've been on the streets for years - and they're walking down to the shelter with flowers to give to ***** because they've finally got their own place and they're recognising that she was a big part of helping them believe they could do it. You know, it's that sort of stuff that makes you know that there's something really good going on here.

MB: It's working and that those people then, I think you're saying, may be more resourceful than others who've had to have more or less permanent accommodation with you.

AJ: Well, some people really can't, are never going to be able to work independently or would need a lot of support to live in their own housing.

MB: So, these might people, I imagine, with chronic mental illness or something like that?

35.52 AJ: Yes. People who come from prison – like, there's a big group of people who come out of prison now who really are set up to get back there because they don't even have enough money to get a place to start with or relationally haven't got skills or support or they'll go back to the place that they've left because that's the only place they know which sets them up again for reoffending because they're in the same environment. And we can't deal with that whole problem any more than we deal with homelessness but we have a number of people who come to us now from that situation and they will stay varying lengths: some stay a few months and some have stayed a few years; it just depends on who they are, really and when it's right for them to move on. But we've got a few people at the house at the minute who've been there for a number of years, some who've lived for a while and then have tried being independent but when the case worker that's set them up in the new place has moved on and they haven't got someone who's relational and connected they end up back on the streets and so have come back – things happen like that.

MB: Are you seeing different reasons for – I know this is not your main focus but it's what we're talking about, homelessness – in the more than twenty years that you've been with Cana has the picture changed for why people are homeless or threatened with homelessness?

37.37 AJ: I think there's been a big change in the type of accommodation the institutions offer. In the early days when I first was involved in this community, Matthew Talbot and Foster House and Campbell House and all those big institutions were about crisis accommodation but now they're much more focused on that 'exiting' homelessness, and they take about a third of the number of people that they used to take in those days and there's no elasticity around it. So, on a winter night in the rain, Talbot would put mattresses down on the floor in the dining room so you'd have a couple of hundred people there. Now you don't have anything like that number and you would never put a mattress down on the floor.

MB: Why is that?

AJ: OH&S or something – I'm not sure what. We put mattresses down on the church floors, on the floors in the church hall because it's temporary and it's clean sheets and it's doonas and it's about sitting 'round the table, getting to know each other and then having somewhere safe and warm to sleep. And people feel very safe there

and they will ask to come back there so it's actually not about the privacy and the bed. Certainly, there needs to be some privacy if it's longer term but the crisis accommodation has moved out of its own orbit really and it's become focused on – I think many people will shy away from those organisational places because of the implications of dealing with social workers, all the interviews 'round having to work out how to get out of homelessness or how to meet the compliance for whatever the expectation is or being counter meals or whatever it takes. Those things often are quite a deterrent for people wanting to get something which was once more welcoming; might have been more chaotic but it was more welcoming.

MB: Is HPIC, even though it's a Local Government agency or it's an agency funded by Local Government and Federal Government, I think, is it different to other kinds of government agencies?

40.06 AJ: I think every group, including Cana, has its strengths and its weaknesses. You know, I think that we're who we are and when people argue against duplication, as they call it, I don't know anything that duplicates another. And while I think that HPIC has a particularly good way of connecting with people across the phone, the ICHOs group who actually go out on the streets and who meet people and who work very closely with them, they're an extraordinary group.

MB: What is ICHOs themselves?

AJ: The Inner City Homeless Outreach Support Service or something like that but there's a team there. They're now funded through Mission Australia but before that were set up as its own little structure from the City Council.

MB: They're very face to face?

AJ: They're face to face on the streets for the people who can't actually get to a social worker or by the Missionbeat.

MB: Or like a phone call, perhaps?

AJ: And they work with Missionbeat too. You know, I laughed that Missionbeat have got pushbikes to ride 'round on now. I wonder who they're going to put on the back of their bike, you know. I mean, I think in some ways it could be a really good thing and the ICHOs group would probably benefit more from having bikes because I know they were lobbying for it for years. It's interesting how things change but I think one of the things, you know, like people do what they can do.

41.46 You know, like for example I would wish that Missionbeat would continue through the night – they used to and then, you know, just as services get rationalised and funding gets cut it becomes more useful

for them to stay working during the day and they finish at ten thirty at night whereas the people who are on the streets and have the Missionbeat people call for them – and there would only be a few of them - but that was the only person who came to that group, you know, who knew they were still alive for the night, you know but because it doesn't rationalise for good use of funds that's where it gets cut. You know, stuff like that I would, you know, just wish that it was different but I also make choices that I'm sure they wish were different. So, I just think people have to do what they do but I think with HPIC I wouldn't really know to compare it with other government agencies.

MB: Yes.

AJ: I know that, you know, with ***** I was quite critical at one stage of the homelessness policy, about counting the homeless and all that and I still would be. You know, I would say the advantage of counting the homeless over dealing with the ones you know in front of you, you know, the money that goes into the accountant who's setting all that up, why not deal with the three hundred and fifty you know that are out there and then see how many are left? But funding and all that sort of thing works on having the data and, you know, all of those things and you can't push that out of the way; that's how it's going to work. It might be a bit of a silly way to do it or an expensive way to do it, really, but it's the way it's going to work so we were out there counting too. And we had a little party at the café after, a champagne breakfast at three in the morning at the café and had the neighbours complain but fortunately they complained to the Council who were on our side so it worked.

MB: You're referring to the homelessness count which I think has happened over the last couple of years.

AJ: Twice, yes. It's only happened twice so far, in summer and winter.

44.04 **MB: I think what you're saying, it's a way of getting statistical base to frame policy which from your end might not be the best thing?**

AJ: Well, I just – a bit more on the ground where the people are, which is not to say I don't appreciate that research is important but I'm just at the coalface.

MB: Can I ask you who is on the board of your organisation or what kinds of people? You don't have to name them if you don't want to.

AJ: Business people. We've got an accountant: he works professionally as an accountant, there's a retired valuer. The other two, I'm not sure what business they work in. One of them was in construction and real estate, one was in clothing, the rag trade, there's a lady who is

now at home as a mum but she was working with Macquarie Bank; just people who believe in what we do and who are prepared to be committed to that level of organisation for it.

MB: So, they have, I suppose, business skills and what else would they bring to the board, what is their function there?

AJ: Oh, a belief in the direction that Cana takes. You know, they've been volunteers with the community and have an appreciation of what's at the heart of what we do because the direction you take is always dependent on who's in front of you; that's how we work, is who's in front of us is what directs what we do.

45.57 So, I guess it's people who've got an appreciation of that sort of thing and who can tolerate the level of fluidity that there's around or even the limitations of communication or of the way things work, the unpredictability. But the people who are on the board, three of them have been there for quite some time, you know, probably five or six years now so there's a real stability about that group. And I s'pose I've got a lot of confidence too in their ability to keep it happening out of – you know, it's a bit below the radar of things and it's always very tempting to try and do something that makes you famous or that looks good on paper or something.

MB: Attracts attention, I guess.

AJ: Cana's never going to be like that if we're true to what we're about. It's always going to be that you can celebrate that the café has got photos on the walls – so, a woman's walking past and she comes in and says, "How do I get my photo on the wall?" but she really means, "Will someone help me write to my daughter because I can't write and I can't read?" It's those sort of little moments or that, you know, someone can come along and say, you know, "My children have just been (bangs table) taken from me. Can I have lunch?" And then today while we were there there was a girl who came in to get some hamburgers – it might have been just before you came because when I was there earlier a girl came in. Now, her mum, I mean she had an almighty argument with one of the other customers yesterday and they were swearing at each other and carrying on and she came back to apologise to Julie and say, you know, she knew that she shouldn't have been speaking like that but could we get some hamburgers for today? You know, sort of there were three of them at home needed a hamburger.

48.03 And I was interested to just, you know, be an observer and ***** said, "Have you got any money today?" because I know the last couple of times they've been they hadn't had money and it was court day and, you know, there were a number of things and they had lunch but she had money today to pay for lunch. But it wasn't assumed that you will always get free lunch here.

MB: But it functions as a conventional café in a way, doesn't it?

AJ: Yes, yes, oh, it does.

MB: But people will come in, I s'pose, with needs and will be fed?

AJ: But normally (taps table) we would not feed people free during the daytime at the café. If there's an exceptional circumstance where we knew about this child being taken - and there were a lot of reasons why that was probably an unfair decision, you know - and we've just known this woman a long time so it got to be that we knew the story there but normally we would say on Friday and Saturday night there's a free meal but during the daytime it's a commercial café so it's not to come to for free meals.

MB: And I noticed while I was there that some of the people who are there are obviously part of the community or volunteers who all knew each other but there were other people there, having coffee just like they would anywhere else.

AJ: Yes.

MB: So, it functions very much on that level, I suppose, as a commercial enterprise?

AJ: But it's run by volunteers.

MB: But it's run by volunteers.

AJ: Everyone who works there is a volunteer. Cana's based on volunteers. We actually do pay part time to people to do the books and that only happened after the GST came in. Before that we could manage but GST made it much more complex.

MB: You've got to do it right, I suppose, haven't you?

49.52 AJ: And in order to reclaim the GST it's got to be very accurate and you've got to get it in within the three months and all those things. We've always had our books audited but it's been done by volunteers until the GST and now we pay someone for the number of hours she works to do the accounts. So, there's two people who get paid part time for some work in the office and they're the only people that are paid.

MB: Now, are there any other things you'd like to say today about HPIC or homelessness or anything to do with Cana that you think should be part of this chat?

AJ: No, I think it's a great partnership with HPIC, I think that works really well for the way we can make a contribution to the homeless people in Sydney and make it work for them and that we're also working with someone who's working at a more professional level. It also gives us other links with the – I mean, I s'pose separately as well we have a connection with the ICHOs group and, you know, the mental health services and the various other groups. But probably equal to HPIC for us would be the ICHOs group because that group are on the streets, are people who come to lunch at our place or who, you know - we've got a community house where we have lunch, you know, four meals a week that just people can come and be there. So, we've got a strong relationship with that group; they'd be the two groups that we'd work more closely with than most of the professional groups. There was a time when we worked more closely with [Matthew] Talbot or with Campbell House but their focus has sort of shifted a little bit now and it's not quite so easy to – our crowd don't fit there so easily.

52.01 I can't think of anything else I'd want to say about Cana that would be – I don't know, it's just something that's really nice to be able to dream with and live with and there's just lovely, lovely moments of sharing stories with people who can value the simple things of life, really, because, you know, like walking down the street, asking someone for a light. I know that smoking's very politically incorrect but I also would rather see people settle by having a smoke than become so agitated they become violent and that's what happens for a lot of the people I know if they haven't got smokes. Albeit if they'd never learnt to smoke but that's a long way down the track for a lot of these people and they become very agitated and quite violent if they don't have a smoke. But watching the way they use smokes to be relational is a really interesting dynamic. And I'll say "But you've got a lighter in your pocket". "You don't understand" and that's exactly it.

MB: They can start up a conversation?

AJ: No, it's just bridging that distance in the space people give you when you're walking down the streets: it bridges it to get a light and it's a socially safe thing to do; you don't have to have a conversation, you just get a light and then they walk on. You don't talk, just get a light. "Got a light, mate?" and it's a really interesting thing to watch, the ways that people work out how to connect with a stranger because nobody speaks to them.

MB: That's a very interesting observation. Thank you very much, it's a great pleasure - finish off.

AJ: Thank you.

MB: I know we can let Ebony back in who is crying outside in a very melodramatic way.

Interview ends