

MEDIA RELEASE

CO.AS.IT and the Italian Services Institute issue joint statement

CO.AS.IT, the Victorian Italian welfare body and the Italian Services Institute today issued a detailed joint statement which proves how recent allegations and innuendos made against the two organisations are utterly false and mischievous.

CO.AS.IT and the Italian Services Institute categorically reject all allegations of secrecy and assertions that money has gone missing.

The statement explains the current operations of the organisations and the long term strategy to build up funds in a transparent way for the future welfare needs of the Italian community in Victoria.

CO.AS.IT and the Italian Services Institute are deeply disappointed that a small number of disgruntled individuals have spread untrue and malicious allegations about the two organisations.

These individuals have chosen to turn their backs on any democratic process to become part of the leadership of CO.AS.IT.

Instead, they have resorted to a regrettable smear campaign to undermine the good work of CO.AS.IT and the Institute.

Unfortunately, their tactics have ended up tarnishing the reputation of all Italians as old negative stereotypes have been dredged up in the press and wider community.

This is inexcusable and the individuals should be held to account for their actions.

The joint statement issued today explains in detail the relationship between CO.AS.IT and the Institute for anyone interested in the facts.

With supporting evidence, it shows that:

- All financial accounts of each organisation have always been audited and published as required by Law;
- There is no money whatsoever in either body that is unaccounted for - in other words, there is no money missing;
- Each organisation has fully abided by the law - neither organisation has acted illegally in any way, and;

- CO.AS.IT's CEO has acted appropriately and has never benefited from his position other than as a salaried officer. His salary package is entirely appropriate having regard to his responsibilities in respect of CO.AS.IT.

CO.AS.IT, founded in 1968, is a very well run, disciplined and highly respected charitable organisation within the Italian community and with the wider Victorian community.

By 1992, it had grown to become the largest welfare organisation of its kind in Australia, providing services to well over 100,000 people.

Around this time, the Italian Services Institute was created as a separate organisation from CO.AS.IT, but with complementary purposes, to help build up funds for the delivery of future welfare services for people of Italian background and descent.

This type of planning is common practice amongst many Australian charities to help them achieve their longer term welfare goals such as the provision of expensive aged care services.

CO.AS.IT and the Institute are registered as Public Benevolent Institutions, entirely accountable for all of their funds and audited on an annual basis.

The Institute purchased a number of properties which it then leased to CO.AS.IT to enable it to deliver its charitable services. These properties were funded by bank loans which were paid off over 15 years using the rents paid by CO.AS.IT and other tenants.

The Institute only started to accumulate a cash reserve during the last 4 years. This reserve is there to finance its expanding services and to guarantee continuity of services in the future.

With the reserves accumulated, the Institute has been able to open 3 day care centres and will be opening more. These cost around \$60,000 a year to run. It will also deliver on its plan to directly fund support services in the home for the Italian aged. This will cost the Institute approximately \$450,000 per year.

CO.AS.IT and the Italian Services Institute are co-operating fully with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission and have advised Victoria Police that in the event of an investigation, they will also fully co-operate.

The joint statement has been provided to the authorities, members of the organisations and other key stakeholders. A copy of the statement can be obtained from the CO.AS.IT website at www.coasit.com.au

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