

Statement from ACCESS ministries CEO, Rev Canon Dr Evonne Paddison 28 November 2012

---

### **ACCESS ministries' response to Stephen Downes' *Sunday Age* magazine opinion article**

ACCESS ministries supports ongoing debate regarding the delivery of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Victoria's primary schools. However, it is imperative that this debate is factually accurate.

To this end, ACCESS ministries would like to address some of the points raised by Stephen Downes in the opinion piece published on 25 November 2012 in the *Sunday Age* magazine.

Firstly, in relation to Mr Downes' claim that: "*Between March 2010 and June 2011, the state government granted \$675,000 to ACCESS to run CRE*", I note that, as clearly stated in the 2010–11 Annual Report, income from state government funding of CRE was \$150,000 for that period. This is in addition to federal government funding of ACCESS ministries chaplaincies.

Additionally, Mr Downes also repeatedly questioned the credibility and value of the ACCESS ministries' CRE curriculum materials.

However, an independent review by Emeritus Professor Brian V. Hill (Murdoch University) found these materials to be well developed and strongly supportive of appropriate values education. In his commentary, Emer. Prof. Hill noted:

*"I have been impressed by the skills displayed in the production of the new CRE curriculum. Its layout, and responsiveness to developmental stages, are exciting and exemplary."*

Finally, I would like to express my disappointment regarding Mr Downes labelling of ACCESS ministries' volunteers as "*unprofessional*" and delivering an education that is "*tantamount to indoctrination*". By his own admission, these claims are based on the thoughts of a single unnamed school principal.

ACCESS ministries consistently receives resoundingly positive feedback regarding the conduct of our volunteers and the contribution they make to both the school and broader community. Further, we maintain close, productive working relationships with the heads of most schools in which our volunteers are currently engaged.

Respect and understanding underpin both ACCESS ministries teachings and conduct. We continue to welcome and encourage ongoing and informed discussion about the place for the belief and values in the education of our children.

ENDS