



Lou's News

Winter 2011

A Safe Place for Women



From left: Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney, Clover Moore, presents the cheque for \$20,000 to Deborah Banks, Sally Gibbons and Jo Boney from Lou's Place. Photo: Melvyn Knipe

Lord Mayor supports our new project

Lou's Place Executive Manager, Deborah Banks, was recently awarded \$20,000 from the Lord Mayor Clover Moore's MP Salary Trust to develop a new community project called **RESPECT: A WOMAN'S RIGHT**.

The project aim is to help reduce the discrimination our clients often experience when dealing with police and hospital staff. This is generally based on their appearance and issues of substance abuse, mental illness and choice of employment

such as prostitution.

Clover Moore's support will allow us to research and develop a series of presentations to be given to new recruits at Kings Cross Police and staff working in the general emergency departments and psychiatric emergency care units of St Vincent's Hospital, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Sydney Hospital.

Helping people to understand the issues involved should make life easier for all concerned.

Lou's Place Partnership Programme

Our clients and staff need to know that the doors of Lou's Place will stay open in the coming years. In order for us to do this, we need to secure long term funding.

To achieve this, we are launching a new funding initiative: the Lou's Place Partnership Programme. We are seeking 200 individuals and/or families to support Lou's Place by pledging \$1000 per year over a five year period. We need more than \$400,000 each year to maintain the building, the staff, the food, the support services and activities.

At Lou's Place we aim to make a real difference for the women. This may be as simple as receiving a hot meal or new clothes - or something more demanding such as gaining critical support through the efforts of our caseworkers to get them through the day or to help them build a new future.

We ask you to pledge if you can, share our story with others and help us increase our network of partners.

Pledge forms for our Partnership Programme are available from Pam Bartlett at jasawi@bigpond.net.au For other donations, visit our website at lousplace.com.au and click on Donations.

Spring at Lou's Closet – 9 September

Our popular fashion sale, Spring at Lou's Closet, is on again! The date is Friday 9 September, 9.30am - 2pm, at a private home in Hunter's Hill. Don't miss this great opportunity to buy pre-loved upmarket designer and vintage women's fashion. Beautifully maintained local and international items will be on offer for a fraction of their original prices.

You can participate by either by donating clothes, shoes, hats

and other accessories that are in pristine condition or by coming as a buyer. Or you could do both! This is our third fashion sale; last year's Spring at Lou's Closet raised more than \$20,000.

For more information and location details please contact Jane Whiston at jane@whiston.com.au or Kate Armati at karmati@bigpond.com. We hope to see you there.

A Safe Place for Women

Lou's Place is a daytime drop-in centre for women in the heart of Kings Cross. A part of the community since 1999, Lou's is a Sydney charity that provides respite and support for women in need. Our mission is to provide a safe and welcoming place for women, meeting them at their point of need and supporting them in rebuilding their lives.

M&C Saatchi creates DVD

Our thanks to advertising agency M&C Saatchi for giving their time and talent to create a new promotional DVD for us. After spending a day at Lou's filming and interviewing clients, staff and volunteers, they made a candid and moving DVD in which some of our clients tell their stories and talk about the ways that Lou's Place has made a difference to their lives. All the work was done pro bono for which we are extremely grateful.



Lou's volunteers

We rely on our volunteers for our day to day operations - without them we could not continue. We currently have around 55 volunteers on our books who cook lunches, help with administrative work and run most of our activities. Their presence provides a secure environment which the women enjoy and appreciate. The smell of home cooking is something many of the women have not experienced in years; they often say it reminds them of their childhood, and the meals are healthy and delicious.

Lunchtime help: We are in need of more volunteers who could cook lunches during school holidays, as many of our current volunteers are not available then. If you think you could help please email our Volunteer Coordinator Theresa Stobbs at theresa.stobbs@gmail.com



The Law and Justice Foundation of NSW 2010 awards presentation.

Pro Bono Partnership Award

Law firm Blake Dawson and Lou's Place are the proud recipients of the 2010 Pro Bono Partnership Award. The award was presented by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW at its annual Justice Awards dinner at Parliament House.

During the presentation ceremony, the Director of the National Pro Bono Resource Centre, John Corker, described the partnership as a long-standing one that provides legal assistance to women in the heart of Kings Cross, many of whom are homeless, live in local refuges

and are often at crisis points in their lives.

"The 2010 Pro Bono Partnership Award goes to a partnership that, for the past 11 years, has been making an impact on the lives of severely disadvantaged women as they experience a time of crisis in their lives. This partnership, employing a surround model of care, reaches women who may otherwise never access legal assistance, and who are able to trust the lawyer because they trust the organisation," he said.

New Directions – Skills for Life

The generous support of the ANZ Staff Foundation which gave \$5000 and a grant of \$5000 from the City of Sydney have enabled us to launch a programme called **New Directions – Skills for Life**.

The programme's vision is to provide the clients of Lou's Place with the tools required to increase their self-care capacity and reach their potential as individuals and as members of our community. It builds on and complements the existing activities available at Lou's Place.

The programme provides a balance of personal development, practical living skills and creative expression activities. The courses and activities include:

Personal Development: discussions on interpersonal communication, empathy and compassion, dealing with difficult people, human rights, setting goals and priorities.

Creative Expression: creative writing, art, music, sewing, jewellery, collage, treasure box creation.

Practical Skills: Financial – banks and budgeting. Literacy – completing forms, CVs and letter writing. Law – personal rights, victims' compensation. Presentation – dress for success, personal image. Health – harm minimisation around drug use, detox, rehab and treatment, prescription medicines, safe sex, sex workers' rights, safety and support services, stop smoking program. Computer skills. Setting up house – moving in, utility connections, healthy cooking, shopping on a budget.

Making gifts, giving back

Late last year, during a session on Giving Back, the women in our Personal Development group decided they would like to make Christmas gifts for children living in an African orphanage. Their goal was to make gifts in some of the creative group activities at Lou's without having to spend money.

The women made internet contact with the Salem Orphanage Homes in Kisumu, Kenya and began to create the gifts in our art, collage, sewing and jewellery groups. The toys and jewellery that they made were wrapped and decorated with a hand-made card then sent to Kenya. After Christmas the women were thrilled to receive an email and photo from the orphanage.

One commented: "Having the opportunity to gift-wrap these presents for these lovely people, children, teenagers was a delightful exercise in focusing on those that are less privileged. I felt blessed and enjoyed just sitting around with the girls enjoying and laughing while connecting and broadening our minds to other cultures."



Children from Salem Orphanage with their gifts.

The Personal Development sessions are part of our New Directions - Skills for Life programme. They include a weekly facilitated group discussion which focuses on interpersonal communication, empathy, compassion and conflict management.



Granny Gray's healing garden

We were saddened to learn of the recent death of Granny Gray, one of our regular clients. Granny was homeless and would pop into Lou's Place for a shower, some new clothes and to enjoy home-cooked meals. She also loved what she called her 'horticultural therapy'. Granny was a wonder in the garden and even purchased plants and potting mix for Lou's Place. Thanks to her efforts the garden is looking great. It will be a reminder that healing takes place in many ways.

"I have the rest of my life ahead"

We were delighted to receive an email from a former client in March.

She wrote: "I took the cards that I made in your Friday Collage group to a local craft shop. I am now doing Certificate IV in Business Admin at TAFE and making progress looking for work. For over 20 years my life was severely affected by mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Now I realize, I can put this behind me and move on. I have the rest of my life ahead of me and more opportunities to move forward. I am more accepting and not as affected by fear, guilt and shame, I am taking care of myself. Healing is good for everyone in life- not just me."

Breathing space for Client C

Twenty two year old Client C and her three year old son arrived at Lou's recently. She had become homeless after her father's recent death and had been forced by circumstances to put her Certificate IV studies in Accounting on hold. Although Client C had no mental health problems and was a caring, competent mother, she was unable to access public housing.

She was one of the many women caught out by the severe shortage of public housing in NSW. Even those on the Housing NSW priority list often have to wait for accommodation to become available.

Client C had been given temporary accommodation in a motel for two weeks

and she came to us in a distressed state as this was about to expire. DOCS had advised that her son would be removed from her care when the two weeks were up as she would then be homeless.

It was all hands on deck by the staff at Lou's to try and find accommodation for mother and son. We were able to secure three months' accommodation at a boarding house, allowing her some breathing space and to keep her son. Client C found new friends and support and her son brought new energy to the women at Lou's Place. During her stay at the boarding house Client C was moved onto the priority list at Housing NSW and subsequently obtained housing.



Our changing client profile

Female, older, single and homeless

We are concerned to see a recent increase in the number of older, homeless women coming to Lou's. When we opened in 1999 the average age of our clients was 35; it's now 45. Although our client base ranges from 18 to 86, it is women over the age of 45 who are the demographic being hardest hit by homelessness.

Single women over 45 are particularly vulnerable with many just a few pay packets away from homelessness. It could easily happen to women who lose their job or who can't work due to illness or an accident and who don't have a safety net of family and friends.

Last year we conducted a six month review of new clients. We found:

- Almost 50% of our new clients are over the age of 45.
- 50% are homeless.
- 50% of those women are homeless for the first time.
- 8% are sleeping rough with the balance staying in refuges, hostels, with family and friends.

Although domestic violence and relationship breakdown are the key catalysts for this trend, many clients also cited mental illness, physical illness, financial issues and unemployment as contributors.

Researcher Ludo McFerran, who recently published a report called *It could be you: Female, single, older and homeless*, reviewed our statistics and interviewed some of our clients.

"We are very concerned that we are now seeing the beginning of a real wave of single women in their fifties and sixties who, for largely economic reasons, can no longer afford the roof over their heads," she said.

"We can directly link this to the impact of divorce with clear evidence that women will be financially disadvantaged, age discrimination forcing women out of the workforce, and wage inequality and part-time work resulting in women ageing poorer than men.

"Lou's Place is on the frontline of this looming disaster and is uniquely placed to lobby for housing and employment policies to respond to this crisis."

Funding Lou's Place

We, the Marmalade Foundation Ltd, operate Lou's Place and raise funds to keep the doors open. Our organisational structure has two main components: the Board of Lou's Place which oversees strategy and monitors fundraising and spending, and the Operations Committee which, along with our Executive Manager, is responsible for day to day operations.

Our operations are totally funded through donations as we do not receive ongoing government support. Our paid staff comprise an onsite manager and two caseworkers and our costs are kept to a minimum with the help of volunteers and professionals who provide pro bono legal and medical services.

It costs more than \$400,000 a year or about \$1500 each day to operate Lou's Place - and costs are rising. We use our funds to meet our costs - the building, well-qualified staff, food, supplies, electricity, rates, insurances, equipment, cleaning and water. We also rely on networking

and support services such as OZ Harvest who regularly provide food items.

We are proud that we can operate within such tight budget given that Lou's has over 5000 client visits each year. Since becoming independent from our establishment partner Mission Australia in 2009 we have reduced our operating costs by 30%.

Lou's Place has been open for 12 years and is well-regarded by both clients and professionals. The women feel welcome at Lou's in a way that does not occur for them elsewhere; we make sure the atmosphere is kept as 'homelike' as possible.

We now have a Fundraising Committee to look at long term funding and funding through trusts and foundations. The committee members are Sally Gibbons (Chair), Pam Bartlett, Carol Berg (Chair of Lou's Board), Julie Claridge, Susie Manfred and Jo Boney. Please contact us if you have any queries or suggestions.

Who's on Lou's Board

Most of the members of the Board have had a long term involvement with Lou's Place; all share a commitment to continuing our operations. They are:

Carol Berg
Chair

Sally Gibbons
Deputy Chair and Chair, Fundraising Committee

Julie Claridge
Fundraising (Foundations),
Risk Management

Jaye Gardner
Treasurer

Jo Boney
Chair, Operations Committee



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