



2023-2024



# Annual Report

# Acknowledgement of Country

Lou's Place acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and deliver services. We recognise their continuing connection to the land, waters and culture, and we thank them for protecting it since time immemorial.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are part of the Lou's Place community.

**Australia always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.**



## Disclaimer

The women featured in this report are members of our community who have accessed our services. However, their images are used with consent for storytelling purposes and do not directly correspond to the data or individual stories shared in this report. Their presence reflects the strength, resilience and diversity of the women we support.

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At Lou's Place, we prioritise transparency and ongoing enhancement in our communications. We are shifting our reporting from a calendar year to a financial year. This annual report pertains to the 2023–2024 financial year, aligning with our financial planning and strategic processes. This transition will improve clarity and consistency in our operations and future communications.

Please note that some information in this report may overlap with our previous report for 2023. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate your understanding as we refine our reporting practices. Thank you for your continued support.



# A Message from our Chair



## *In Good Hands*

Another year has flown by at Lou's, and I am particularly proud of the quality and progress of our service over these past 12 months. We continue to improve our internal administration and train our team members to make Lou's an even better service. This year, we focused on our information systems, allowing us to track the uptake and services we offer and see more clearly what is working and making a difference. As our client numbers continue to grow, we are pushing to be better and do more every year.

This year also marked a significant transition in leadership. After eight fantastic years leading the Marmalade Foundation, on 1 July 2024, I handed over the reins to Rebecca Fitzpatrick. Bec needs no introduction—she is a passionate volunteer, dedicated board member and the creator of our NO MORE EMPTY SHOES activation. Lou's continues to be in very good hands.

As we look out at our community, we know we will continue to need your support. Housing, mental health, family and domestic violence and addiction continue to challenge so many women. Please continue to help us to help them.

*Alexa Haslingden*

*Chair*

*The Marmalade Foundation*

# Letter from the CEO



I am honoured to share our annual report, showcasing a year of profound growth and unwavering commitment at Lou's Place. This year, we reached record numbers of women seeking support – women from diverse backgrounds, many facing homelessness, financial hardship, or deep loneliness. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority have experienced domestic or family violence or other traumatic events throughout their lives. Their experiences remind us daily why our work is so essential.

At Lou's Place, we understand that the women who walk through our doors often come with complex needs, including significant mental health challenges. Many have faced repeated judgement elsewhere. When women's emotions run high, we know that they are a reflection of the tremendous struggles these women endure. We remain a low-barrier, non-judgemental space dedicated to offering genuine compassion and understanding.

This year, we also focused on strengthening our infrastructure—enhancing data collection, refining our processes, and expanding our team and programs. These improvements enable us to respond more effectively to the urgent needs we encounter each day.

Looking forward, we are excited about the future of Lou's Place. We are committed to listening closely to the women we serve because it is they who will drive our future service delivery. Every day that we see our team working with passion and dedication, we are inspired by the resilience of the women in our community and the endless possibilities that lie ahead.

Our success is a collective achievement. From our devoted staff and volunteers to our board, the Marmalade Foundation, our donors, partner organisations and the courageous women who trust us with their care, we thank you for making this journey possible.

Together, we will continue to provide a safe place where ALL women can access support and shape a future of hope.

*Amanda Greaney*

**Chief Executive Officer**

*Lou's Place*



# Our Mission

is to provide a safe space for all women through holistic care in a non-judgemental community.

Lou's Place aims to build trusting relationships with women, providing person-centred and innovative program support to enhance each individual's well-being.



## Our Vision

is to contribute to a world where all women experience safety, support and are empowered to live their life and realise their inherent worth.

# Our

## CORE VALUES

### Non-Judgemental

1

At Lou's, we welcome all women. We accept and respect women whatever their circumstances. We believe in diversity and inclusivity, and we see the value inherent in each woman. We work to ensure that everyone feels valued and included.

### Caring

2

We show genuine compassion and empathy in our interactions and services. We cultivate a home-like atmosphere that fosters trust and safety. We prioritize creating an environment where women feel safe.

### Women-Led

3

We are driven by the needs of the women we support. We act as their advocates aiming to amplify their voices for the growth and healing of each woman, and for the sector at large.

### Independent

4

Lou's Place is guided by its values. We are flexible and responsive to the unique and changing needs of each woman. We pride ourselves on ensuring the priorities of the women come first. We seek innovative solutions to better support and empower women.



*A Year at the*

# Lou's Drop-In Centre

The drop-in centre at Lou's Place is a safe, welcoming space where all women can find connection, support and community—whether they are facing hardship or simply seeking a place to belong. We provide essentials such as meals, clothing, toiletries, showers and laundry facilities.

More than a place for practical support, Lou's Place fosters a strong and inclusive community. At least 85% of the women who attend have experienced domestic or family violence or other abuse throughout their lives. Many are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Many arrive feeling isolated, believing they have no one who cares. But after just a few visits, they have friends, a support system and a renewed sense of belonging. They know they matter.

Loneliness and social isolation cost Australia an estimated \$2.7 billion annually (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2023). By providing connection and belonging, Lou's Place is a vital lifeline, ensuring no woman faces life alone.





# Strength in Numbers:

Our impact, one woman at a time

From July 2023–June 2024

Our drop-in centre saw record-high demand, with more women than ever seeking solace and support. As needs surged, we remained committed to meeting each woman where she was, ensuring her dignity, respect and autonomy, while providing a safe space for respite and connection.

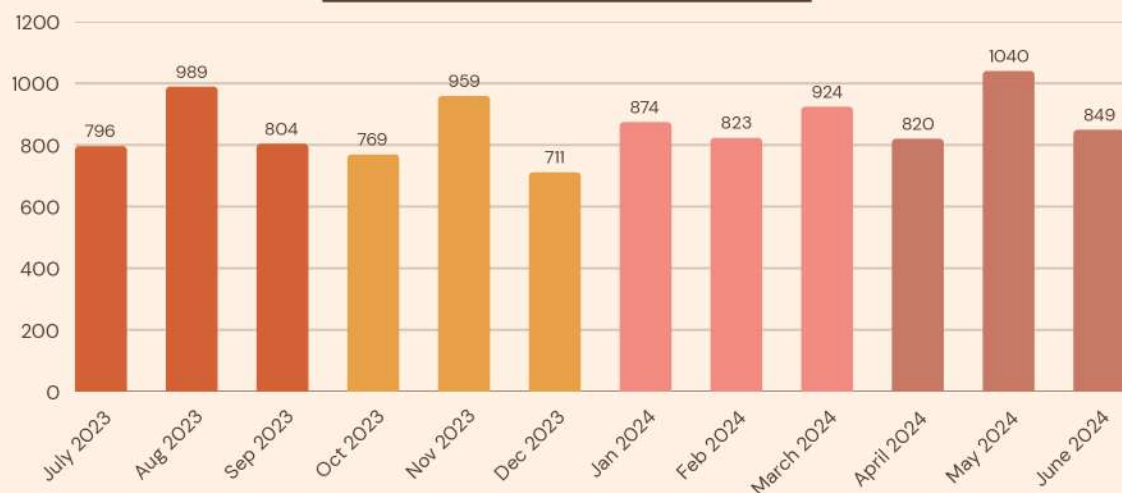
10,358

client visits to our drop-in centre

41

average number of women supported through our drop-in centre each day

2023–2024 monthly visits



2,534

breakfasts served

2,045

takeaway meals distributed

7,988

hot lunches shared



2711

toiletries supplied

1602

loads of laundry completed

532

hot showers provided

# Volunteers:

## the force behind our mission

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Lou's Place. They make our work possible every single day. From cooking and serving nutritious lunches, to facilitating activities that help women find community and grow their skills, our volunteers play a vital role in creating a welcoming space.

We are also incredibly grateful for those working behind the scenes – helping at fundraisers, managing our social media and delivering frozen meals from partner services. Without our dedicated volunteers, Lou's Place simply would not be able to operate.



**106**

active Lou's Place  
volunteers

**30**

new volunteers  
joined us



## 2023 Volunteer of the Year Awards

The activity volunteers at Lou's Place were nominated for the 2023 Volunteer of the Year Award in recognition of their generous contribution. Their skills, dedication, and compassion have been instrumental in creating fun, safe spaces where women can build skills, connect with others and foster a sense of community. Over the past year, Lou's volunteers ran 477 activity sessions, a demonstration of their unwavering commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable women.



## Creative Writing

43 sessions  
164 attendances

## Massage

38 sessions  
148 attendances

## Art

42 sessions  
274 attendances

# Activities & Clinics

# 1,915

recorded attendances

# 477

activity sessions

# 53

specialist clinics

## Yoga

37 sessions  
111 attendances

## Sewing

45 sessions  
331 attendances

## Meditation & Breathwork

38 sessions  
94 attendances

## Jewellery Making

52 sessions  
473 attendances



# Outreach Clinics at Lou's

During this period, we strengthened key partnerships. We expanded our legal and health clinics to provide more support. These collaborations help women access expert advice in a safe and familiar environment. This is especially important for women experiencing the impact of trauma or homelessness.

## Inner City Legal Centre

The Inner City Legal Centre (ICLC) offers free legal advice to low-income individuals living in the City of Sydney, Woollahra and Waverley LGAs. At Lou's Place, ICLC set up a clinic every second Thursday. They provided free legal advice on general law issues including criminal matters, traffic matters, fines, credit and debt, AVOs, consumer complaints, motor vehicle accidents, personal injury, victims compensation and DFV.

**ICLC ran 23 clinics at Lou's, supporting 68 women.**

## Homeless Persons Legal Service

The Homeless Persons' Legal Service (HPLS) offers free legal assistance to individuals in Sydney who are experiencing, or are at risk of homelessness. At Lou's Place, HPLS set up a clinic every second Monday. They met with women to provide legal advice relating to issues such as housing, money problems, consumer or contract issues, Centrelink, violence and criminal matters.

**HPLS ran 8 clinics at Lou's, supporting 23 women.**



“—  
ICLC is delighted to continue its partnership with Lou's Place in supporting women to navigate issues in family law, debt and criminal matters within existing legal frameworks. Our team feel privileged to work within a deeply caring and non-judgemental environment to deliver a range of practical legal solutions to the more vulnerable members of our community.

—”  
Partner Impact Statement



## Immigration Advice & Rights Centre

The Immigration Advice & Rights Centre (IARC) is a not-for-profit community legal centre specialising in migration law and policy. At Lou's Place, IARC set up a clinic every second Wednesday and offered women free immigration legal advice regarding family and humanitarian visas, visa cancellations and citizenship.

**IARC ran 22 clinics at Lou's, supporting 52 women.**

## Sydney Local Health District

Sydney Local Health District (SLHD) supports the health and well-being of over 740,000 local residents, as well as those from rural and remote areas. Committed to accessible healthcare, SLHD has established hepatitis C, flu-vax, and women's health clinics at Lou's Place. They offer safe, tailored care for women experiencing homelessness, financial hardship and trauma.

**SLHD ran 4 clinics at Lou's, supporting 41 women.**

“ IARC proudly continues to partner with Lou's Place to support women on temporary visas or with precarious visa status who have experienced family and domestic violence. The team at Lou's Place have provided a safe, accessible space for women to meet with IARC solicitors every fortnight for confidential migration and citizenship advice and assistance. The drop-in caseworkers and DFV caseworkers at Lou's Place have also supported IARC's clients and prepared support letters for visa applications. The team at IARC has truly valued its collaboration with Lou's Place and we look forward to continuing to work with Lou's Place in the coming years.

Partner Impact Statement





“This place is a  
**lifesaver.**”

– Lou’s Place Client

“Having a shower & washing my clothes was much more than I imagined. When I got home, I felt **energetic and happy**, which inspired me to clean my place which is **BIG.**”

– Lou’s Place Client



# Case Study

## Mary's Story: a safe place to begin again

When Mary\* first came to Lou's Place in 2022, she was in crisis; she faced severe mental health challenges, substance use and behaviours that had led to her exclusion from multiple services. She had been sleeping rough for a while which made it even harder to access support and maintain stability.

At Lou's Place, Mary was met with compassion and flexibility. Through our drop-in centre, she found a safe, welcoming space where she could access hot meals, showers, emergency clothing and a place to rest and recharge. She used our phones and laptops to reconnect with family, including her estranged daughter.

Gradually, Mary built trust with staff and other women, engaging in small but meaningful ways—seeking support, taking time to herself and exploring the available services. She experienced distressing thoughts that made daily life difficult, yet she agreed to see a mental health worker. However, without a stable location, maintaining consistent contact and accessing treatment was challenging. Lou's Place worked closely with Mary and her mental health team to ensure she could meet them in a familiar and safe environment. This continuity helped her with her treatment and her overall well-being.

With growing stability, Mary took another courageous step; she started a methadone program to help manage her substance use. Lou's Place also provided advocacy to help her navigate the complex housing application process, accompanied her to appointments and supported her to regulate her emotions in high-stress situations. For the first time in years, Mary has an active housing application and a real chance at stability.

Mary is rebuilding her life. With the support of Lou's Place, she is taking small but powerful steps towards independence.

*\*Names and identifying details have been changed to maintain privacy. The Woman depicted in this image is not related to this case study.*





# Case Study

## Anne's Story: a path to safety & stability



Anne\* was referred to Lou's Place after experiencing abuse for two years. Unsure of what to do or how to escape the violence, she sought support to understand her options. After comprehensive assessment, case managers identified her as extremely high risk. They worked with her to explore pathways to safety. She was supported to obtain an apprehended violence order (AVO) and to apply for a housing transfer as a matter of urgency.

Although Anne's transfer was approved, escalating violence made it unsafe for her to remain in her home for the final four nights before she could move. She was ineligible for temporary accommodation support from other services because she was still technically housed. Lou's Place recognised the urgency of the situation and brokered four nights' accommodation in a motel for her safety.

Once in a motel, Anne was supported to access a crisis payment through Centrelink, which provided some immediate financial relief. With this support, she chose to buy new clothes. She said that this helped her reconnect with her sense of self before the abuse. Lou's Place also linked her with more services to help her re-establish herself. This included assistance with a victims of crime application and access to counselling support.

Anne now regularly visits Lou's Place. She finds comfort in creative activities such as art and jewellery making. It's helped to ease her anxiety and to connect with others as she rebuilds her life. She's now moved into her new home in the city, and looks forward to a safer, more secure future.

Anne's personal journey is not an uncommon one for many women who access Lou's Place, and who feel that they don't know where to go or how to get help.

*\*Names and identifying details have been changed to maintain privacy. The woman depicted in this image is not related to this case study.*





“ If you are a woman and are in need of anything... anything at all, **Lou's Place is a safe place** for women or those who identify as. ”

– Lou's Place Client

“ Lou's is a supportive, welcoming women's place to meet, create and share experiences. **I feel so much better.** *P.S. The food is the best.* ”

– Lou's Place Client

# Drop-In Casework

The demand for the drop-in case work program at Lou's Place has increased significantly with more women than ever seeking urgent assistance. This reflects the broader socio-economic challenges faced by women, particularly those experiencing homelessness, domestic and family violence, financial distress and health-related crises. In response, we expanded staffing late last year to provide additional support.

Many of the women who come to Lou's Place face complex, intersecting challenges that require a **flexible and responsive service model**. Our team works to ensure that every woman receives the support she needs to stabilise her situation and move toward a more secure future.

## About the Program

The drop-in case work program is designed to provide one-off or short-term case management support to women accessing our drop-in centre. Unlike traditional support models, there is no restriction on the number of times a woman can seek assistance. This ensures that women can return for support whenever they face new or ongoing challenges.

Key focuses of the program include:

- crisis stabilization
- addressing immediate needs
- homelessness support
- reducing systemic barriers

1,653

total incidents of  
casework support

169

new women  
supported

41%

identified as Aboriginal  
and/or Torres Strait  
Islander

30%

were from culturally and  
linguistically diverse  
backgrounds





# Key Impacts

612



## instances of support with housing & homelessness

This includes linkage to crisis accommodation, support with housing applications and tenancy transfers, maintaining current tenancy and supporting women to communicate and self-advocate with housing providers. We aim to support women to find safe short-term solutions while working toward long-term housing stability.

1,080

## instances of support with bills, debt & finances

Caseworkers assist women in accessing government benefits, navigating financial assistance programs and developing sustainable budgeting strategies. Support includes referrals to financial counselling, help with work and development orders, as well as brokerage to prevent utility disconnections, rental arrears and debt relief.



439



## instances of support with health & well-being

This includes brokerage for medical procedures and medications, referrals to public and community health services, support to access counselling and therapeutic services, systemic advocacy and information on accessing low-cost, bulk-billed GPs.

520

## instances of brokerage assistance

Practical and direct financial aid to address urgent needs, including food vouchers and grocery support, transport assistance, crisis motel costs and help with rent and medical costs. This vital assistance offers a safety net, helping women regain stability and dignity in times of crisis.



# Always Mum

Always Mum is a program designed to support mothers navigating the child protection system, providing a safe and empowering space through case management, group-work and one-on-one support. This initiative fosters confidence, reduces stigma and helps women advocate for themselves in a challenging system. Through tailored case management, mothers receive practical guidance, while group sessions offer community, shared experiences and knowledge.

Always Mum ensures they feel supported and empowered in their parenting journey, reinforcing that no matter their circumstances, they will always be a mum.

“ I have absolutely enjoyed this program. I have grown so much, and I am inspired and looking forward to the future with my children.

Always Mum Group Participant

## Seeds of Wisdom

At the end of each session, mums are given a seed to record their “ah hah” moment or something that they understand differently after the session.



## Groupwork

Our groups provide a supportive space for mothers navigating the child protection system. They offer connection, shared experiences, and confidence-building.

Over the past year, the program ran **four terms** with **40 women** completing the group and **127 children** at the heart of their journey.

Participants brought diverse perspectives—42% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 23% came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The impact of Always Mum is clear. Upon completion, participants reported feeling better heard and supported. Many shared that the program helped reduce the stigma and shame surrounding child removal. Thanks to education sessions in partnership with Women's Legal Service NSW, mothers also experienced significantly improved confidence when navigating the system. Most importantly, the program fostered lasting change—mothers left with hope for their future and an improved sense of connection with others who shared their journey.

Always Mum creates a space for healing, learning and growth.

It equips mothers with the confidence and skills to advocate for themselves, to ensure they feel heard, supported, and empowered. The impact extends far beyond the sessions; it helps women move forward with hope, belonging and knowing that they are not alone.



## Case Management

Over the past year, the Always Mum case management program has supported 43 mothers, providing the tailored case management and casework support they need to navigate parenting in complex circumstances. This year, seven mothers in the program had their children restored to their care or were able to keep their newborns with them—bringing nine children safely home to their mums.

Our case management model is designed with the unique needs of our participants in mind. It requires ongoing reflection and adaptation to ensure we are delivering the best possible support. In response to this, we introduced mid-point strategy meetings, where mothers have the opportunity to sit down with both facilitators for an extended session. These meetings offer a space for deep and honest conversations—an opportunity to understand their journey, clarify their goals and receive direct and constructive feedback about the steps ahead.

At the heart of our approach is the idea that **every mother deserves a support pathway built around her own aspirations and needs**. Each participant identifies a primary case plan goal, which becomes the foundation for their journey. Some mothers are working towards restoration with active children's court proceedings. Others are preparing to submit a Section 90 application or are seeking to strengthen their relationships with children in care. Whatever the goal, our team provides wraparound support such as one-on-one parenting education, brokerage support, specialist services such as drug and alcohol support or counselling and guidance in securing safe, stable and child-appropriate housing.

For many mothers, navigating the child protection and legal systems can feel overwhelming. Our case managers help them understand court documents in an accessible and culturally appropriate manner, accompany them to court or mediation and ensure that they feel confident when engaging with other services. Through this process, we aim to create a space where mothers feel empowered, informed and supported in their parenting journey.



### We asked Always Mum participants:

What do you think your kids would say if they knew you were doing Always Mum?

**"They are proud of me and never give up."**

**"Although you lost your way, you found your way again and never give up."**

**"Keep working hard, proud of you mum."**

**"That they are proud of me, to keep up the good work and never give up mummy."**



# Connecting Through Change

At Lou's Place, we strive to provide a safe and supportive environment where women can heal, rebuild and reclaim their independence. The Connecting Through Change program and domestic and family violence case management service have both played an important role in supporting women as they navigate life after experiencing domestic and family violence. By offering group programs and individualised case management, we're able to offer tools and resources to help them take the next steps toward their future.



## Groupwork

Our groups provide a structured, therapeutic space for women to learn, share and grow together. This past year, we facilitated eight separate groups—four of our core seven-week programs and four tailored five-week outreach programs. Through these sessions, **78 women completed the program**, with 32% identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 28% coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The impact of the groups is clear from participant feedback. **Women reported significant increases in their awareness of rights, confidence in setting boundaries and feelings of connection to others with similar experiences.**

### Awareness of Rights:

Before the course, participants rated their awareness at an average of 6/10. Upon completion, this rose to 9/10. This demonstrates the program's effectiveness in educating women about their legal rights and support systems, fostering independence and self-advocacy.

### Confidence in Setting Boundaries:

Before attending the program, participants rated their ability to set boundaries at an average of 6.5/10. By the end, this increased to 9/10. Boundary-setting is critical in breaking cycles of abuse and fostering healthy relationships.

### Connection with Others:

The sense of community built within the program was profound, with participants reporting feelings of connection increasing from 6/10 to 10/10. Isolation is a significant barrier to healing; the program therefore aims to support women to establish lasting support networks.



## Case Management

Domestic and family violence affects women in complex and devastating ways. At Lou's Place, we provide a safe haven where women can seek refuge, rebuild their lives and regain control. We know that leaving violence is not a single moment, but a journey filled with barriers, risks and uncertainty. That's why our approach is built on trust, empowerment and unwavering support.

For women needing personalised assistance, our DFV case management service provides practical, emotional and long-term support tailored to each woman's needs.

**This year, we walked alongside 111 women, offering urgent crisis intervention, advocacy, and pathways to long-term stability.**

Our case managers work to remove the obstacles that keep women trapped in unsafe situations. We help secure emergency accommodation, enhance safety through risk assessments and safety planning. We also provide support to navigate legal and immigration systems. We provide access to financial relief, court and police support, housing advocacy, as well as referrals to trauma-informed counselling. This ensures that no woman is left to face these battles alone.

Most importantly, we believe that every woman deserves to be heard, believed and supported without judgement. Our work is more than just crisis response; it's about restoring dignity, rebuilding confidence and helping women take back control of their future.

Together, we are breaking cycles of violence, one woman at a time.

**"My biggest takeaway was learning that I'm not alone."**

Program Participant

**"I felt heard and understood. I felt compassionate connections with the group."**

Program Participant

**"My biggest takeaway was hope – reclaiming of myself. I saw a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel."**

Program Participant



# Events & Community



## NAIDOC Week 2023

NAIDOC Week 2023 was a vibrant celebration of First Nations culture, connection and resilience at Lou's Place. The week featured the unveiling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, a traditional basket weaving workshop and a Welcome to Country by Auntie Rhonda Dixon Grovenor. Women joined cultural activities, including storytelling and discussions on the significance of The Voice referendum. The celebrations concluded with a community BBQ, fostering a strong sense of belonging and pride. Lou's Place remains committed to honouring and supporting First Nations women through cultural recognition and advocacy.



## Lou's Christmas Party 2023

The Lou's Place Christmas celebration brought together staff, board members, and volunteers to create a memorable day for women and children. Activities included card making, bauble decorating, caroling, gingerbread decoration, and Santa photos, alongside a spread of delicious food and festive music. All women and children received a small gift, spreading joy throughout the day. With 86 women in attendance, the event was a heartwarming success. Everyone left with a smile on their face, filled with the spirit of the season and carrying cherished memories made in the warmth of the Lou's Place community.



## International Women's Day 2024

International Women's Day is a significant occasion at Lou's Place, providing an opportunity to celebrate the resilience, strength and achievements of the women in our community. This year, we marked the day with activities that fostered connection, empowerment and reflection. Women gathered to share their stories, highlighting the challenges they've overcome and the hopes they have for the future. The day also included creative workshops, discussions on gender equality and a shared meal, reinforcing the importance of sisterhood and support. At Lou's Place, every day is about uplifting women, but on International Women's Day, we take a moment to pause and honour their collective power.



## Summer on the Green 2024

Lou's Place participated in Summer on the Green, a vibrant community event in Redfern hosted by Counterpoint Community Services. 150 women visited our stall. We provided information about our services and support available for those experiencing homelessness, domestic violence or financial hardship. The event was an excellent opportunity to strengthen community connections, raise awareness and ensure women knew where to turn for help. It reinforced our commitment to being a safe, welcoming space for all women.

# Lou's Closet 2024

## A Milestone Year of Community & Giving

Lou's Closet was held for the 14th consecutive year at the new venue of The Tramsheds in Forest Lodge (near Glebe). The event showcased a gorgeous array of mainly second-hand and some brand-new designer clothing.

As a community we came together to donate clothing, volunteer our time and attend the sale, making **Lou's Closet 2024** our most successful year to date, raising \$141,000.

Lou's Closet is not only a sale to raise much needed funding for Lou's Place, but also a wonderful opportunity to bring women together in a fun shopping experience.

This year we introduced a vintage section which proved to be very popular, highlighting the importance of making sustainable fashion choices by buying second-hand clothing with the added benefit of potentially owning timeless vintage pieces. Our motto is **Women helping Women** and this was truly exemplified during the sale with customers walking away with big smiles and bags full of clothing at extremely reasonable prices, feeling a sense of pride and excitement that by shopping at Lou's Closet they have made a difference to the community in the process.

A very big thank you to the unwavering generosity of designers such as Carla Zampatti, Bianca Spender, Moss and Spy, Camilla and Baz, to our Closet volunteers and to all the women who are always so supportive of Lou's place and Lou's Closet who make this event possible.

**Thank you to all who attended this year, we look forward to seeing you at Lou's Closet 2025.**





# No More Empty Shoes

## A Powerful Tribute to Lives Lost



In November 2023, during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, Lou's Place and the NSW Vigil Collective held the annual No More Empty Shoes event, **honouring the 52 women who lost their lives to domestic and family violence in the past year.** Each woman was represented by a pair of empty shoes—symbolising both their presence and absence, and the urgent need for change.

This powerful tribute brought together survivors, advocates and community members in grief, solidarity and action. Acclaimed journalist and domestic violence advocate Jess Hill, award-winning artist Amber Lawrence, and the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs generously donated their time and talent, deepening the emotional impact of the event.

Pairs of shoes were sponsored by Allens, BGC, Royal Bank Canada, Parc Capital, Gresham, and Wonton & Kearney, with their contributions helping to support Lou's Place in providing critical services to women impacted by domestic and family violence. We are also grateful to the City of Sydney, whose support helped make this event possible.

**No More Empty Shoes is more than a vigil – it is a call to action.**

These women were mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. Their stories will not be forgotten, and neither will our commitment to fighting for a future where no more shoes need to be placed in remembrance.

**A heartfelt thank you to all who contributed their time, talent and support to make this event possible.**



# Celebrating 25 Years of Lou's Place

In April 1999, four visionary women, Lisa O'Brien, Ilse O'Reilly, Pam Barlett and Susie Manfred, partnered with Mission Australia to create something unprecedented in Sydney's Kings Cross: a safe daytime haven for women and children in crisis. As Lou's Place celebrates its 25th birthday, the impact of this groundbreaking centre, named after a dedicated Mission Australia social worker, continues to transform lives.



From its humble beginnings in a Kings Cross terrace house, officially opened by then-Prime Minister John Howard, to its current larger space in Redfern, Lou's Place has evolved through several chapters. After establishing independence from Mission Australia in 2007 under Julie Claridge's guidance, Carol Berg expanded services in 2010 to include the Plunkett Street Playgroup. Alexa Haslingden's appointment as Chair in 2016 ushered in greater community visibility, even amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant 2021 relocation to Redfern.



## Celebrating with our Community

The anniversary celebration embodied the spirit of Lou's Place: cake and BBQ lunch with clients during the day, complete with rowdy games of Bingo, followed by an evening reception welcoming supporters and friends. For many, it was their first glimpse of the new, expanded space that now serves more women than ever before.



After eight years of dedicated leadership, Alexa Haslingden formally passed the chair to Rebecca Fitzpatrick, marking yet another transition in the organization's rich history. But it was Maureen's \* (name changed for privacy) story that captured the true essence of Lou's Place's mission.

The room fell silent as Maureen spoke about her journey: pregnant with her fourth child after having her first three removed, trapped in an abusive relationship, and spiralling into alcoholism and homelessness after her newborn was removed at birth. Finding Lou's Place changed everything. Through their support with rehabilitation, housing, clothing, the "Always Mum" parenting program, and employment training, Maureen rebuilt her life. Today, she has her own home, steady employment and healthy relationships with her children and grandchildren.



**"I know where I was, I know where I could have been, but look where I am today, and I have Lou's Place to thank for that."**

For 25 years, Lou's Place has remained true to its founding principles based on Maslow's hierarchy of fundamental needs: a safe space where women can access food, clothing, toiletries, support, community and the tools to rebuild their lives.

Lou's Place continues to fill a critical gap in services. It is the only drop-in centre exclusively for women which requires no referral.

From its humble beginnings in Kings Cross to its current Redfern location, Lou's Place remains a testament to what can be achieved when compassionate vision meets dedicated action.

As Lou's Place celebrates this significant anniversary, it honours not only its founders and leaders, but also the thousands of women who have walked through its doors, each with their own story, each finding the support they needed to write their next chapter.



# Treasurer's Report



The 2023-2024 financial year demonstrated our supporters' dedication and understanding of our mission of providing a safe space for all women and a tailored and individualised approach to our clients.

Income from donations, grants, and fundraising events totalled \$2,039,860, an increase of 28% from the previous year. Only 2% of total income came from government grants. Thus, we are heavily reliant on the generosity of individuals, supporting businesses and philanthropic foundations. A significant one-off donation from the sale of our previous premises in Kings Cross further strengthened our financial position.

With increased demand for our service, we restructured our staffing. We introduced two team leader roles to create career progression opportunities, and we hired an additional caseworker specialising in domestic violence support. We also anticipated a greater demand for emergency brokerage support (urgent practical funding for accommodation, food and well-being) due to the increasing client numbers and the cost of living pressures.

These initiatives contributed to a 27% increase in expenditure, but we are pleased to have ended the year with a surplus. We plan to put this towards several exciting initiatives for 2024-2025.

A special thank you to PricewaterhouseCoopers for their pro bono independent auditing of our financial statements. We are deeply grateful for our community's ongoing generosity, which allows us to continue supporting women in crisis.

*Karen Martin*

*Treasurer*

*The Marmalade Foundation*

**Income:**  
\$2,039,860

**Expenditure:**  
\$1,252,076

**Positive Variance:**  
\$787,784

*This positive variance comes from generous, unexpected donations that will provide vital support for our work now and into the future.*



# We'd like to thank our community for their generous support

Every contribution made to Lou's Place plays a crucial role in helping us realise our vision to support women to live a life beyond survival.

The collective effort and impact of our community has been astounding – you are instrumental in saving and changing the lives of women who turn to Lou's for support. Whether you have donated your time, invested in our programs, raised funds or contributed materials or goods, we thank you for standing alongside us.

We are deeply grateful for everyone's support. We would also like to acknowledge some of our longstanding major donors, supporters, community and corporate partners.

- Allens Pty Ltd
- Australian Stockbrokers Foundation Limited
- Pamela and Douglas Bartlett
- The Beeren Foundation
- Berg Family Foundation
- Campbell Edwards Trust
- City of Sydney Grants and Sponsorship Programs
- CommBank Staff Foundation Community Grant
- Dr Jo Boney & Mr Ross Grant
- Gresham Partners Limited
- The North Carolina Community Foundation
- ITSM Pty Ltd
- James N. Kirby Foundation
- Margaret Kirby
- Ottomin Foundation
- The Palghat Family
- Parc Capital
- RBC Capital Markets
- Roger Tallboys
- Wotton Kearney





# Stronger Together

## Our Corporate & Community Partners

We deeply value our corporate and community partners, whose contributions from material donations, additional meals and community initiatives all increase the support we are able to provide. These partnerships are more than just assistance; they foster connection, dignity and hope. Together, we are strengthening our impact and building a more supportive community for women in need.



**OzHarvest** collects surplus food from supermarkets, restaurants and cafes, then redistributes it to charities. Every Monday and Wednesday, they deliver around 10 crates of produce that form the backbone of our fresh breakfasts and lunches. These help us serve an average of 37 meals per day.

**The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia** contributes 40 home-cooked meals every Monday, which strengthens our community support network.

**Canva** is an online graphic design platform with a strong focus on social impact. Every Thursday, they supply Lou's Place with 50 takeaway meals, ensuring vulnerable women have access to nutritious, ready-to-eat food.

**Two Good Co.** provides 50 high-quality takeaway meals every Wednesday. Their efforts help us deliver nourishing food that restores dignity and fosters lasting change.





**Wotton & Kearney** cook a delicious hot breakfast for the women at Lou's Place at our drop-in centre every month. They play a vital role in supporting the women at Lou's Place by offering nutritious meals, comfort and a sense of community. They also run regular donation drives for much-needed items, including toiletries and activity supplies.



**RBC Capital Markets** supports our community by organising regular donation drives. Their contributions include everyday essentials such as toiletries, umbrellas, sleeping bags and portable chargers, ensuring our women have access to crucial supplies.



**Thread Together** collects brand-new, excess clothing from fashion retailers and redistributes it to those in need. With a mobile wardrobe at Lou's Place and free clothing orders available twice a year, they ensure women have access to appropriate outfits for daily life, job interviews and special occasions.

**SleepSafe** is a social impact initiative by Sheridan in partnership with StreetSmart Australia. SleepSafe supplies new sheets and towels to Lou's Place, ensuring that women transitioning to safe housing have access to clean, high-quality bedding.



# Looking Ahead: Our Commitment to the Future

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As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded that the heart of Lou's Place lies in the strength of the women we support, the dedication of our team and the generosity of our community. Together, we have created a space where women can find safety, connection and hope.

As we look ahead, we remain steadfast in our mission to provide a safe place for all women, evolving to meet the growing and complex needs of those who seek our support. Our commitment to inclusivity, advocacy and innovation will continue to guide us in the year ahead.

To our donors, volunteers, partners and supporters—**thank you**. Your belief in our work makes everything we do possible. We invite you to continue this journey with us as we build a future where every woman has the opportunity to thrive.

With gratitude,

*The Lou's Place Team*







A SAFE PLACE FOR WOMEN



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