

# Catherine House CONNECTIONS

*Real Women, Real Lives, Real Stories*



Catherine House Inc.

ISSUE #3

March 2020

## It's never too late to start over!

It's February 2020 and a significant day for Catherine House client Robyn. Today Robyn commenced her Certificate II and III in Women's Advocacy at TAFE SA. She is absolutely beaming with happiness and it's easy to see how proud she is of herself. Robyn is 40 years old.

However, two years earlier life was very different for Robyn. At 38 years of age, she found herself homeless. After a relationship breakdown and the loss of her community housing tenancy, life took a very unexpected turn. Within two days she went from having a place she was able to call home to contacting friends to see if she could stay on their couches and googling "homeless" on the internet.

Robyn recalls searching the internet and finding out about Catherine House. "I called and spoke to the intake worker and told her about my situation. She explained that there would be a wait but she would contact me as soon as a place became available". Robyn was in luck, as within a few days she received a call from the intake worker, Di, to say she could come to Catherine House. "I was scared, but I felt happy and relieved", Robyn recalls.

Sadly, Robyn was not unfamiliar with how communal accommodation works. At the age of 12, Robyn was appointed a ward of the state and at 16 her mother unexpectedly died. Robyn spent much of her childhood in and out of foster care. Her childhood was far from "normal", with very little structure, no family to rely on and the ups and down of trying to understand and navigate the public health system and many services along the way.

The trauma and instability Robyn experienced as a child and teenager left her suffering from depression and she struggled daily with her mental health. Throughout her adult life, maintaining a job was difficult and relationships were always a challenge. She also tried to study a few times but was never able to see it through; it was too much for her. However, one of the things Robyn was able to sustain was her volunteer work at the Grenville Community HUB. Despite having people around her she still found it difficult to not only ask for help but to trust people. "From the outside, people always thought I was happy but really, I was hiding a lot on the inside".

Robyn entered the Catherine House Emergency Accommodation (EP) program and resided there for just over two months.

"When I first came to EP I couldn't believe how much support was on offer to me, I hadn't felt that supported in a very long time. My EP case worker, Mel, spent so much time with me finding out about what I needed, what I wanted, it's hard for me to explain just how much that meant to me". Robyn

was able to utilise many of the support services on offer to her - housing support, psychologist, legal assistance as well as medical support through Health Partners. Taking care of her health was never a priority as it was something she simply could not afford. For the first time in years she was able to visit the dentist (consequently having 9 teeth removed) and received a new pair of glasses - hers were being held together by sticky tape!

With Robyn's history of mental health and in need of further support, she was able to transfer to the Catherine House Recovery Program (RP). It was during the first few months of this program that Robyn really noticed a change in herself. "My confidence grew and I started saying YES to things I previously never would have. I decided to do the "Live your best Life" and the "My Time" courses with Sharon in the Catherine House Women's Centre. "I loved it. They were the first courses I had really ever completed in their entirety". I attended one of the Catherine House celebrations and saw the music group perform, I thought "I can do that". She joined the group and performed for the first time in December. "When I am performing and singing I am happy".

Robyn also accepted what she refers to as her "ultimate" challenge when asked to speak about her experience of homelessness at the National Homelessness conference back in August. With support from her RP case worker, Deb, and education and employment tutor Sharon, Robyn's confidence continues to grow and she now regularly engages in speaking opportunities at schools on behalf of Catherine House.

Being a part of the Recovery Program has also taught Robyn many basic life skills, such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting and how to maintain a tenancy. Robyn's childhood prevented her from learning these.

***"I don't have any family, Catherine House has shown me what it is like to feel like I have a family for the first time in my life. I honestly didn't know people could care that much and I don't know where I would be without Catherine House."***

Robyn's future is looking incredibly bright. With the help of her case worker, she is going to start applying for permanent housing and hopes to return to part time work whilst maintaining her TAFE studies in 2020.

Robyn has also completed one of her life long dreams - to climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge. She used the budgeting skills she learnt at Catherine House and was able to save for her trip to celebrate not only her 40th birthday but everything she has achieved in the past few years!

**Keep shining Robyn, we are so proud of you!**



## From Louise

I'm rather sad to say this is my last column for a Catherine House Connections Newsletter. It has been a fantastic three years where I have been so privileged to be the public face of Catherine House.

In my past three years at Catherine House, I have come to know a community that cares, a community that is so generous, and a community that is willing to commit to making a difference to those less fortunate. I have been so honoured to be the public face of a service that strives to help the most disadvantaged in our community in a way that is meaningful and makes a permanent difference to their lives. The quality of the services and the amazing outcomes for clients is, I believe, unrivalled.

I know Catherine House holds a special place in the hearts of so many of our supporters. I can also tell you that it holds a special place in the lives of many of our current and former clients. While we understand that for some clients, being homeless is a memory they would rather forget; nonetheless many of our former clients keep in touch, tell us amazing stories about their new lives, their recovery, and how they are now giving back to the community that supported them. Their stories are so inspiring!

I do a lot of public speaking for Catherine House and people often come up to me afterwards and thank me "for what you do". And I always say, I am the person who has the honour of representing Catherine House in the public's eye, but I'm not the person sitting in front of a client or on a phone, listening to a story of trauma and helping someone to pick their life up again, making sure the living environment is welcoming and valuing, making sure they have nutritious meals, attend the appointments they need to get to, helping them access



medical care, helping them engage in social activities and overcome their anxiety, helping them to learn new skills or rediscover old interests. It really is an honour to represent Catherine House out in the public, but it's the staff and volunteers who are the ones who really enable Catherine House to make a difference in the lives of the clients we serve and none of this would be possible without community support – you are the "value-add" that makes all the difference.

I would like to thank you all for the opportunities and support you have given me, and the trust you have had in me to lead Catherine House. I am constantly amazed by the difference we make to the lives of our clients, and I am very proud to have been a small part of the Catherine House story.

My last day at Catherine House will be 6 March – fittingly, International Women's Day.

**Louise Miller Frost**  
CEO

## End of Year Celebration!

Our End of Year Celebration is a chance for the Catherine House community to come together to acknowledge and applaud, the tremendous courage and commitment of our clients towards their recovery and future lives. It is also an important opportunity for stakeholders to hear first-hand from clients, the impact of their support and the difference it has made to their lives. All that attend our client celebration events, leave with a full heart, a tear in their eye and immense pride about just what can be achieved, when people work together to create opportunities for women affected by homelessness, and our December 2019 End of Year Celebration event was no different. Our aspirational environment enables women to move beyond their fears and plan for success in their lives.

The event showcased:

- Performances by our Music Group.
- Inspirational speeches by our clients sharing their achievements.
- Deirdre Flynn (Director of Client Services) interviewed Case Workers about what they admired about our clients and what drives their passion for this work.
- Certificates were awarded to clients for their Community Engagement work; 43 different events they were engaged in!
- Sharon Stewart (Education and Employment Officer) and Jean Georgopolos from TAFE awarded clients with their My Time, My Life, My Future and Live Your Best Life ACE Accredited Course Certificates; 13 recipients in total.



- Lisa Grant (Women's Centre Coordinator) shared the many highlights of the Women's Centre throughout the year, evidencing the rich diverse range of activities and workshops for clients.



The afternoon was rounded off with delightful refreshments and a relaxed gathering in the courtyard, which was beautifully decorated, as another way of honoring our clients who work so hard towards change for themselves and their future. Thank you to our clients, staff and supporters for making this such a special event.

## Client Reflection *Written by Tess*

Two years and seven months ago, I entered the Catherine House Emergency Program. I, like many women who reach homelessness, was totally dysfunctional. I had terrible difficulties communicating as I could hardly string a sentence together. I had two suitcases which contained all that was left of my worldly goods and I was completely, utterly broken.

My previous experiences left me feeling no joy or enthusiasm for anything. I was in a constant state of confusion and terror. I couldn't stand any sort of physical touch and I could not make decisions. It is extremely difficult to find somewhere to live when you can't cope or deal with even the most basic of life's issues.

After spending 3 months in the Catherine House Emergency Program, I entered the Recovery Program which is designed to help homeless women who are experiencing mental illness. A Recovery Program is exactly what it is. It's not just a shelter; it is a safe and stable environment in which to recover with support to help you do so.

When you enter the Recovery Program you are assigned a case worker to help you sort out your life. They help you to piece your life back together, assisting with phone calls, going to appointments and decision making. The case workers and the rest of the staff not only advocate for you, but also nurture and celebrate every little achievement. They are persistent in a very kind and gentle way. So, before you know it you have your affairs sorted and a support network which, in turn, gives you the space to breathe and focus on your issues.

There is a Women's Centre attached to Catherine House and they have a variety of fantastic short life skill courses to help you get back on track and build confidence. I attended two such courses there, 'My Time' and 'Live your Best Life'. Both courses helped me to build confidence and realise what skills I already had to build on. In short, it all adds up to the perfect environment to heal. And heal I did, very slowly but surely.

One of the key issues which Catherine House helps women with is that of obtaining secure, appropriate, permanent housing. In February of 2019

I moved out of Catherine House and into my own home. Although I was completely ready for this transition, I still felt overwhelmed and afraid, but in true Catherine House form, my case worker and other staff members made the process completely manageable. As I have mentioned I had lost all of my worldly goods so I was starting from scratch, which was an extremely daunting task indeed. They helped me source and obtain everything I needed, one step at a time. I received donations in the form of white goods, furniture, soft furnishings and essential household items and I now find myself living in my own secure place with all I need.



My experience has profoundly changed the way I look at humanity and what my priorities are. So inspired am I by all the amazing women I have encountered through Catherine House, the staff, the volunteers and, in particular, the Catherine House clients, that I have gone back to postgraduate studies at Flinders University. I am currently undertaking a Masters of Screen and Media Production (learning how to make films) expanding on my previous professional career as a photographer, something I never thought would be possible again. As my confidence grew I wanted to explore ways in which I could further develop my abilities. This course appealed to me as I had

already decided that I would like to spend the next part of my life sharing women's stories and raising awareness for those in need. One thing missing, however, was a home computer to complete my assignments. Again Catherine House came to my aid and supplied me with a donated laptop which has been invaluable. Having successfully completed my first academic year of study, I feel well on the way to achieving my goal of creating films and will continue to do so this year.

***So here I am at the age of fifty, with a bright new future in lovely secure home which is a direct result of Catherine House giving me a safe environment, time to do everything thoroughly, generous support and the advocacy to speak for me when I was unable.***

## Recovery is never neat or pretty!

*Recovery from homelessness and what leads one there, is hard, confronting and can be painful, and it rarely goes to plan. But what we know, is that clients are in the best place to begin this journey of looking inward, then outward to a new future, here at Catherine House.*

*Here is how one of our clients, Sandy, responded, when we asked if she would share her recovery journey.*

***“When asked to share my journey in a couple of paragraphs, I knew it would be very difficult indeed. My story has risen from the ashes of despair to a new and exciting chapter in my life, where I wait each day with anticipation of what lays ahead.”***

I wish I could wave a magic wand, and rid our world of homelessness and domestic violence and much more, but as that

is not realistic I've come along way with Catherine House by my side.

As a woman in my 50's I never could have imagined that I, myself, would be homeless. It's one of those circumstances that you imagine will never happen to you, and now I stand with all that goes with homelessness and walk the walk with the guidance of my support workers at Catherine House. They have been my saving grace.

There are never enough words to explain, but once again, thank you Catherine House on behalf of all women.”

*We think it's important for our readers to understand that recovery from homelessness can be long and acutely challenging, but it is buoyed by hope for the future, and every small step forward that a client makes, is to be celebrated.*

# From Homelessness to Hope – Where are they now?

*Written by Slawka*

It has always been my dream be a beautician, but due to different life situations it has never been possible to realize.

Everything that has since happened around my beauty journey has been like a dream...

I finished my annual study at College to become a qualified beautician and finished with an International qualification and obtained a Diploma of Beauty Therapy

Considering that English is my second language, it was a really incredible feat in my life...

After graduating I have started to save and slowly buy my own equipment. It is difficult to explain the joy and satisfaction this has brought me.

Working with clients during my work experience over the busy Christmas period helped me to develop further.

At the age of 50, I started fulfilling my dreams, which were always only dreams, and I never had the opportunity and courage to try and was full of doubts that was too late. I have started as a volunteer in the newly built Calvary Hospital, which is also offering new possibilities for my future.

I am the best example that even after 50 we can fulfil our dreams that could not have been fulfilled before.

Life is in our hands ,we just have to believe that we're brave and good enough...it's my life lesson that dreams will never come true; if we don't take the slightest step to bring them closer.

This is my favourite motto:

**“ Don't Wait For Your Ship to Come In...  
Swim Out to Meet It ”**



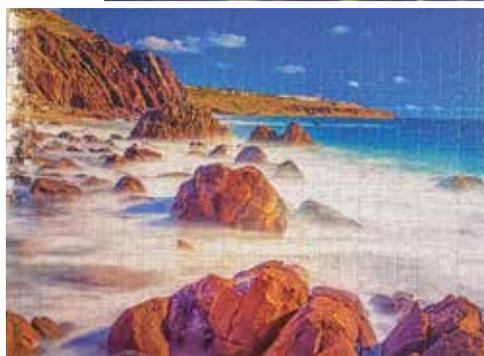
## Jigsaw Therapy

*All puzzles are therapy puzzles. Piece by piece, you feel the progressive muscle relaxation as your thoughts quieten to find the next piece. You experience a sense of achievement with yet another satisfactory snap of interlocking shapes. You create something beautiful – escaping into the calm of sorting and piecing together for 20 minutes relieves anxiety. This proved true for Emma, who found comfort in the therapy of jigsaw puzzling.*

A jigsaw puzzle project was set up in the Permanently Supported Accommodation Program (PSAP), free for any client to attempt as they pleased. Clients and staff would have a turn as they passed.

But then Emma stumbled upon the puzzle, and completed it with ease – she would complete a puzzle quicker than a new one would arrive! Emma has even completed a 1000 piece, unassisted, in just a matter of weeks. Staff member Helen worked with Emma to mount each of her finished jigsaws, which is now displayed in the house for all to enjoy.

Emma thoroughly enjoyed her time completing each jigsaw puzzle; she found they distracted her when she was feeling anxious. Jigsaw puzzling became a calming session for her to relax and unwind after a busy day of studying and applying for volunteer work. Emma now works at the new Calvary Hospital as a volunteer, and is loving it!



# 2019: Your Impact

## Catherine House

- 54 Women provided with safe and secure accommodation every night of the year
- 496 Unique clients supported
- Case worker provided for every woman entering Catherine House
- 55,936 meals and snacks provided
- Provided 480 essential personal product packs to clients
- South Australia's only homelessness and recovery service for women only



## Emergency Program

- 2 Additional crisis beds opened
- 1,220 Hours of telephone support provided for women seeking emergency assistance

## Women's Centre

- Over 3,000 visits to the Women's Centre
- Over 700 activities, courses, workshops and projects delivered
- 18 different activities/sessions available to clients



## Education, Scholarships & Employment

- \$10,000 Kym Adey Catherine House UniSA Scholarship awarded
- 30 Women received TAFE Academic Transcripts
- 80 clients benefited from non-accredited Adult Community Education Foundation courses
- 57 Clients participated in accredited ACE work or ACE courses
- 47 Women were invested in an Education & Employment Pathway Plan
- 6 clients received grants from newly established Lyn Sarah Education Fund

## Most Frequent Client Feedback

- "Catherine House saved my life"
- "I would not be here if it weren't for Catherine House"
- "I am thankful I became homeless, because it got me to Catherine House"
- "Catherine House has changed my life"



**Thank you for supporting  
women experiencing homelessness**

Keep in touch:  
@catherinehouseadl



[www.catherinehouse.org.au](http://www.catherinehouse.org.au)



Catherine House Inc.



# CARE + Nourish

## Catherine House Emergency Kitchen Program

### DAILY SUPPORT

For a tax deductible donation of \$200 you can support our Emergency Kitchen Program for a day.

By supporting the CARE + Nourish Emergency Program Kitchen for a day you will receive:

- Your name/organisation/business/ school or community group displayed on the Catherine House Website.
- A personalized card to send your thoughts and words of encouragements which will be displayed in our dining room.
- Name recognition of your support in the Catherine House Newsletter.
- The satisfaction of knowing your gesture is providing nutritious meals and care for women experiencing homelessness.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Over  
**29,000 meals**  
are provided in the  
Emergency Program  
Kitchen  
each year!

### WEEKLY SUPPORT

For a tax deductible donation of \$1000 you can support our Emergency Kitchen Program for an entire week!

By supporting the CARE + Nourish Emergency Kitchen Program for a week you have the choice of the following:

- **A hosted private tour of Catherine House and volunteering opportunity in our Emergency Program Kitchen (maximum of four people)**
- or
- **A half day working bee at Catherine House for up to six people**

In addition to this you will receive:

- Business Logo or Name to be displayed in the EP Kitchen for the week of sponsoring.
- Business Name/Link/Logo featured on our website Post on our Facebook/Instagram/LinkedIn.
- Name recognition of support in the Catherine House Newsletter.

### For more information or to book:

[www.catherinehouse.org.au](http://www.catherinehouse.org.au)

Jaylee Cooper, [jayleec@catherinehouse.org.au](mailto:jayleec@catherinehouse.org.au)

(08) 8232 2282



Catherine House Inc.



Catherine House Inc.

### Contact Details

PO Box 6031 Halifax Street

Adelaide SA 5000

Phone 08 8232 2282

Email [reception@catherinehouse.org.au](mailto:reception@catherinehouse.org.au)

For more information visit  
[catherinehouse.org.au](http://catherinehouse.org.au) or

  [catherinehouseadl](https://www.instagram.com/catherinehouseadl)