



While 9 in 10 people agree violence against women is a problem in Australia, only 5 in 10 people agree it is a problem in their suburb.

The northern suburbs of Sydney thought differently, identifying a gap in services across the region and **taking action.**

# Annual Report

FY23/24



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## Mary's House Services

was established in 2016 and continues to provide safe refuge accommodation, having just surpassed providing 14,000 nights of refuge to women and their children. We also provide specialist domestic violence casework support, and access to therapeutic and wellbeing programs for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and abuse.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with deep respect that we acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of our land – Australia. We pay our respects to elders both past and present and emerging.

The Mary's House Services team and board acknowledge the strength and resilience of First Nations people, and their right to thrive as sovereign owners of this land, and we are honoured to journey with them on the path to healing and reconciliation.

## NOTES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Identifying details of women and children mentioned in this report have been changed to protect their privacy.



# Hear directly from our clients

**Content warning:** Contains content relating to domestic violence and coercive control, which may be distressing.

Below is a transcription of statements from our clients whose identities have been changed for safety purposes. You can listen to the audio of their voices [here](#).

**Ana:**

Every time you're approaching the door, I had to take a deeper breath because I didn't know what was on the other side. What sort of mood is going to be there? What sort of terror is going to happen there?

**Cindy:**

I done everything - I did not do anything - (like) scream, have a friend. Just at home, shopping, take the children to school and come back, then pick up. But it's never enough.

**Sarah:**

When you try and get help, people make an assumption that because you have a nice front door, that you wouldn't need it. How could anything be possibly bad enough just because you have a nice front door?

**Cindy:**

I got a lot of help from Mary's House. I never know what is dealing with Centrelink. I never knew making email. Nobody, nobody can trust.

**Sarah:**

Abuse, the violence, domestic violence and intimate partner violence happens across all cultures, all homes, all educational backgrounds. I was lucky enough to get a good education - a Master's degree, and I think people think that if the home on the outside is beautiful and polished, then all the people who are inside must be like that as well.

**Cindy:**

Every single day he make it a problem because I never work in Australia. It's hard. It's very hard because I never, I never work. I never have been come by myself.

**Sarah:**

In my case, I ran a massive business, and did big things and what have you, and people make an assumption that it couldn't be possible, and it wouldn't happen to you. That's not true.

**Ana:**

It got to a point where I describe it like my soul was dying. What can I do? I need to get out. I don't know how.

**Sarah:**

You feel like you won't be believed so you don't do anything because you also think, especially if you're a competent human, you might think that... well, I thought I was crazy. And I didn't know anyone else like me. So, the things that I understand about Mary's House that is so special from my own experience was they were able to do things that were outside of the normal box of assistance.

**Ana:**

What was fantastic for me that there was finally an organisation who just looked at me as a being, as a human who needs help. And I'll never forget the feeling that I had when I came to Mary's House and it was the first time I was returning from work to my new temporary home in Mary's House. And I was sitting on the train and I was thinking, "I'm going back home without any fear." And that was the first time when I opened the door and I thought "there is just peace."

**Sarah:**

One of the things that quite often you do when you're trying to survive is you're needless and wantless and so you don't ask for help. And so receiving help without asking is really rare and I had nothing to give, which is actually why I want to help now.



# About us

Mary's House Services is a not-for-profit, grassroots organisation which supports women and their children escaping domestic and family violence and abuse. Mary's House Services receives no government funding for its services and is entirely supported by the community.

Established in 2016 due to a gap in services in the northern suburbs of Sydney, our services are available to women and their children from anywhere in Australia. Mary's House Services operates a women's and children's refuge and in 2020, we expanded our services to women living in the community with the opening of the Daisy Centre.

**Mary's House Refuge** provides a temporary home for women and their children. It offers safety, and immediate critical care essentials, with a specialist social work team to help women rebuild their lives and achieve their goals.

Mary's House Services, through its **Daisy Centre** provides practical guidance and specialist casework support to refuge and community clients, access to financial and legal advice, safety planning and emotional support via counselling and evidence-based, trauma informed therapeutic and wellbeing classes. The Daisy Centre has had more than five hundred enrolments since opening its doors in 2020.

Mary's House Services is committed to raising awareness about domestic and family violence, promoting education about the dynamics of abusive relationships, and advocating for societal change to create a safer and more compassionate community for everyone.

Find out more  
[maryshouse.org.au](http://maryshouse.org.au)

Located on Sydney's  
lower north  
shore

Developed by the  
community

A unique service  
in the area

For women and  
children of all faiths  
and cultures, from  
anywhere in Australia

Providing refuge  
and professional  
support services

Providing critical  
care and ongoing  
assistance

Not-for-profit

Community  
funded



# A Message from our Chair and CEO

## Governments must invest more



**Helen Conway**  
CHAIR



**Yvette Vignando**  
CEO

Recent State and Federal government announcements give the impression of significant increases in funding within our sector, but the reality is that the funding environment has changed very little, leaving services like ours reliant solely on the care and engagement of our community.

**Almost eight years into delivering safety to domestic and family violence victim-survivors**, providing over 14,000 safe nights' accommodation at our refuge as well as an expansion of our services, **Mary's House Services receives zero funding from State and Federal governments for service delivery.**

In addition, because we are 'unfunded' by the government, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice does not collect our casework data about the women and children whose lives and wellbeing depend on our existence.

Consequently, governments are not recognising the lifesaving work that we do; we want to change that. We have increased our attention on advocacy for government support and requested that government departments gather data about families being supported by organisations like Mary's House Services.

**If we were able to combine the community's philanthropic vision and care with government funding, we would be equipped to significantly change the story of women and children's lives in our region and beyond**, providing them more safety and hope, and ultimately breaking cycles of domestic and family violence and abuse.



## Domestic violence trends across the northern suburbs and NSW

The appalling statistics about domestic violence incidents mirror our experiences at Mary's House Services. It is alarmingly clear that more women and children require our help. Although we are in the northern suburbs of Sydney, we also provide safe refuge and assistance to women escaping here from across the state and country.

In our immediate vicinity, in one year (from March 2023 - March 2024), the number of domestic violence related murders increased by 60%. Record numbers of women living on the lower North Shore (North Sydney, Neutral Bay, Kirribilli and Cremorne) are victims of alcohol-related domestic violence, according to data compiled by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics.

North Sydney LGA recorded Sydney's highest rate of domestic violence involving alcohol (a staggering increase of 45% over the 10-year period to March 2024), with the Northern Beaches and Mosman coming in second and fourth. In the Mosman LGA, 4 in 10 domestic violence related incidents involved alcohol.

## Your care and generosity are saving lives

To our compassionate community of supporters – it is thanks to you that Mary's House Services has been able to work to prevent homelessness and to provide safety and hope to our clients. To our pro-bono and community partners, corporate partners, every donor and foundation trustee, alongside our peak body: together, we are saving lives. Your generous support is deeply appreciated and valued, and on behalf of the Mary's House Services team, we sincerely thank you.



Australia's first Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner handed down her initial report card and in doing so said: "Family and Sexual violence needed to be taken as seriously as terrorism." – Micaela Cronin

## Staff, volunteers and Board members

We also extend our gratitude to our Mary's House Services staff and the entire Board. From frontline caseworkers to the finance, operations and fundraising teams, your dedication, expertise and compassion mean that women and children in our community and beyond can live their lives in safety, free from the persecutions of domestic and family violence and abuse.

A huge thank you also to our selfless volunteers - you all make our life-saving work possible.

Richard Harpham retired from the Mary's House Services Board in November 2023, at the end of his Board term, after more than seven years of service. Thank you, Richard, for your unwavering contribution, leadership and guidance over many years. Thank you also to Karen Bevan, for serving on the Board since 2021 as Director and later as Chair until September 2024, and for your generous support for the recruitment and onboarding of Yvette Vignando as CEO early last year.

Experienced board director, previous CEO of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, champion for women's rights and member of the local community, Helen Conway, joined the Board in November 2023 and became Chair in September 2024.

## Strategic plan 2024-2027

Mary's House Services' new strategic plan recognises the local and nationwide trend of more women seeking help to escape and recover from domestic violence. It also recognises the national housing crisis which is compounding homelessness risks for families in trauma. The plan targets sustainable growth, expansion of new partnerships, more crisis and transitional housing for our clients, and an expansion in our service delivery team.

We were delighted to see that, in the last financial year, our income generation strategies started to gain traction. As a result, we have recently increased the number of caseworker hours available for clients. There remains a significant gap in our capacity to meet demand - for refuge beds, for social worker support and our community programs - but over the course of our new plan, our team is determined to meet this challenge. Soon, we hope to expand our workplace facilities to accommodate future staff growth which is urgently needed to meet the upswing in demand, with more women and their children requiring support from our casework services and community programs.

We believe we will succeed because of our community's determination and the dedication of our teams, and because women's and children's lives depend on it.

Helen Conway, **Chair**  
Yvette Vignando, **CEO**

# A year in review

## Mary's House Refuge

### Accommodation and support

In the last financial year, the refuge provided safe accommodation to 18 women and 17 children. Children ranged from babies born while their mother stayed at the refuge, to young teenagers up to age 14.

 **2 newborns**

 **12 under 10 years**

 **3 11-14 years old**

Women seeking safety at the refuge varied in age from 19 to over 70 years old, with the majority between the ages of 25 to 54.

 **25-54 years average demographic**

We can accommodate four women and their children per night at the refuge, but we extend comprehensive information and referral to all who contact us for support. The refuge is full all year-round. If we had funding to increase capacity by quadrupling our accommodation services, we would still be challenged with capacity. The need for increased safe accommodation for women and children escaping abuse is urgent across the entire northern suburbs.

### Referrals and capacity challenge

Over the past year, we received over 330 requests for support directly from victim-survivors, referrals from support networks or from other agencies and professionals such as frontline health providers, local hospitals, police, psychologists, counsellors and other not for profit organisations in our sector, which also struggle to meet demand. Most referrals to Mary's House Services from other not for profits were from organisations which receive some or all their domestic violence funding from government but still cannot meet the ever-increasing demand.

 **330+ referrals**

Noting that our frontline services remain unfunded by government, it is absolutely crucial to our success that community, corporates and philanthropists continue to step up to enable us to save lives and give hope. Despite community generosity, we must substantially increase financial support to expand our casework and accommodation capacity. We cannot meet the ever-increasing demand for services. Last year, we declined 72 crisis accommodation referrals due to no vacancies in the refuge or lack of capacity in our casework team.

**Referral declination**  
underscores the urgent need for expansion

### Casework team

Our casework team, consisting of specialised social workers and a specialist in housing, supported 59 families during the year with intensive case management, all from within the Sydney metropolitan area. Additionally, we provided advice and referral services to 19 families, helping them navigate their immediate needs. In many cases, a referral to the right service at the right time will avoid women needing other help such as accommodation in a refuge. Thanks to a grant from a private foundation provided at the end of the year, we have recently recruited a dedicated Intake and Referral Worker which will increase the number of women we can support with advice and referral services. The new worker will expertly assess, triage and refer the multiple requests for support we receive, as well as provide crisis counselling when needed. Most importantly, the new role will free up our other social workers to support more women with the ongoing longer-term support they need.

**78 families**  
provided with casework and housing support



4,200 hours

of dedicated specialised casework services

Last year, our casework team provided over 4,200 hours of direct support, to women and their families. The team assisted clients with access to vital community supports, including access to family law advice, immigration services, and housing support; ongoing support extends to addressing long-term needs and helping families rebuild their lives. Examples of support provided by our social workers include assessments, safety planning, crisis counselling, advocacy, goal setting/reviewing, education on the dynamics of domestic and family violence, accompanying women to make statements at police stations, access to government agency support, health and education services, attending courts with clients, referrals to government's Victim Support Scheme, counselling, funding and support for relocation, and sourcing household items.

We need more frontline specialist caseworkers

Professional development ensures our expert team is supported to offer best practice services for clients; during the year their training included courses on drug and alcohol issues, child protection, LGBTIQ+ inclusivity, advanced counselling for domestic abuse survivors, and suicide prevention. Vicarious trauma training was also provided for our team, to support their wellbeing and safety.



## Housing crisis

Our housing specialist worker is instrumental in collaborating with our social workers and external agencies to secure long-term, affordable housing for our clients; identifying and securing affordable housing remains one of the most significant challenges faced by clients.

### Accessing housing

- **Almost one in three of our refuge clients moved to private rental accommodation;**
- **6% of refuge clients accessed housing through the government's Rent Choice Start Safety Program;**
- **41% of refuge clients were ultimately relocated as priority clients to longer-term social housing.**

Many clients stay in the refuge beyond the time they require intensive casework support or accommodation, because of the crisis in availability of affordable housing in NSW.

One of our key strategic goals is to increase our ability to support clients with housing options. Our casework team is developing more community housing partnerships to increase options for clients. At the same time, our Philanthropy team is working hard to secure more financial and in-kind support to enable us to offer more crisis accommodation rooms as well as medium-term transitional housing options.

## Child-centred services

Mary's House Services also aims to expand its frontline service delivery team. We are building our financial capacity to provide more child-focused, therapeutic and material support to mothers, and ensuring children and their mothers can make choices that support their wellbeing. During the year, we broadened and strengthened our relationships with local children's services, including child and family nurses and general practitioners, and partnered with a local child and family psychologist. This year, we were required to make 21 child protection reports, working closely with the Department of Communities and Justice to ensure the best outcomes for children.

### Child protection

reports up 33% on previous year

Reports on child protection are managed sensitively in collaboration with the mother, and with a careful focus on culturally appropriate communication and children's safety at the centre.

Managing child protection risks when supporting domestic violence survivors on temporary visas is a significant challenge. Clients on precarious visas often face difficulties securing long-term housing due to limited vacancies and their visa status; despite our best efforts, supporting and exiting these clients from the refuge remains complex and resource intensive.

# Our clients' stories



## Isabella's path to healing

Isabella came to Mary's House refuge after being referred by a hospital social worker. She had endured a severe assault by her partner and was in the third trimester of her pregnancy, fearing for her safety and her unborn child. She was determined to seek safety and create a better future for herself and her baby.

From the moment Isabella arrived, our team prioritised her safety and well-being. We worked with the hospital social worker, midwives, and a perinatal psychologist to ensure Isabella received the comprehensive care she needed. Safety planning and education about the dynamics of domestic violence were crucial first steps, helping her to understand and manage the risks she faced.

To promote Isabella's emotional healing, she participated in some of our community programs, including art therapy. Isabella's physical health was equally important. We arranged for child and family nurse appointments to take place at the refuge, and coordinated medical appointments, ensuring that Isabella and her baby received all necessary healthcare.

The combination of support from our caseworkers and access to our community programs, along with safe accommodation at Mary's House refuge likely saved the lives of Isabella and her baby. Our team also secured Isabella affordable and safe long term housing. Our community partners helped us furnish her home with essential needs including white goods, providing a stable environment for her and the baby. Isabella and her baby remain connected with our community programs and will receive ongoing support as they build their new life.

## Anika's journey: finding safety and hope

Anika is 35 years old. She came to us at Mary's House Services after being referred by a Sydney-based women's emergency service. When she arrived, Anika was allocated a dedicated case worker who provided her with comprehensive casework support to navigate her complex situation.

Anika's journey was not just about survival; it was about rebuilding her life. Our team conducted a thorough domestic violence safety assessment and developed a personalised safety plan, which was regularly updated to ensure her ongoing protection.

Understanding the trauma Anika had endured, we connected her with psychological support. In addition, Anika participated in art therapy programs at our Daisy Centre, providing her with therapeutic outlets for healing. We worked closely with her on matters concerning her children; for example, Anika's toddler received comprehensive medical care, coordinated by her case worker.

We arranged access to a playgroup three times a week to help her child socialise and start to thrive in a safe environment.

Recognising Anika's urgent and complex need for legal support, we referred her to our legal clinic for family law advice. She has now been accepted into transitional housing, where she is supported to achieve her goals for her family and improve her financial position. It's only because of the generosity of our community that we were able to provide life-changing assistance to Anika and her child – they are now safe and able to move forward with hope.

# A year in review

## Community programs at Mary's House Services

In the past year, the Daisy Centre experienced a 34% increase in enrolments in our community programs, indicating that more women are seeking our support.

**34%**  
increase in enrolments

One in three program enrolments were clients who were also being supported by our specialist social workers. Many of our first-time clients referred themselves to our programs or were told about us by a former client.

**1 in 3 women**  
case managed by a Mary's House Services specialist social worker

Compared with the previous financial year, the overall number of women assisted with clinics and programs increased.

**from 175 to 211**  
women assisted by the Daisy Centre

Over 60% of our clients attended two or more programs with some women having attended up to 10 programs over two years.

**+61%**  
registered for 2 or more programs

This reflects the complexity of issues faced by our clients and their need for ongoing support while they seek to recover, and often continue to face post-separation abuse.

women attended up to  
**10 programs over two years**

Our programs are designed to:

- promote emotional and physical safety
- increase financial independence, and
- build social support and community connection.

**“I was made to feel safe, heard and that there might be hope for the future.”**

# A year in review

## Community programs at Mary's House Services

### Community program streams

Our five focus areas aim to support women and their children to overcome a range of social, emotional and financial barriers and enhance their ability to thrive and live free from abuse.

#### Safety

All women and children to feel physically and emotionally safe.

#### Health & Wellbeing

All women and children to have access to programs that enhance their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

#### Knowledge & Skills

All women and children are provided knowledge and skills to live a life free from abuse



#### Connection & Empowerment

Women and children are in charge of their own lives and feel a sense of choice, control and community.

#### Financial Security

All women and children are supported to become financially independent.

“It is great to have a place to be able to come to terms with the multi-faceted generational enormity of the situation and process it in a safe, supportive place with people who understand the complexities.”

Daisy Centre clients are offered:

- Specialist caseworker support
- Safety clinics (safety assessments, technology checks and home audits)
- Financial counselling
- Domestic violence and abuse support groups
- Parenting workshops for survivors of abuse
- Employment support
- Referral pathways to health professionals
- Trauma-informed exercise classes
- Social outings and morning teas
- Art and exercise therapy

### Technology-facilitated abuse checks

- In-house counselling
- Financial wellbeing workshops

During this past year, we offered the Black Box parenting program in recognition of the impact domestic violence and trauma has on parenting and children. The program provides mothers with practical knowledge and strategies to nurture their children, and helps them continue to develop safe, predictable and meaningful relationships post-abuse.

We also commenced a pilot of a mentoring program designed to support clients who require ongoing emotional and social support after they have finished working with our specialist social workers.

## Community partners

Development of services underpinned by strong partnerships has been critical to the success and development of our community programs.

Examples of services supported by partnerships include providing financial education and counselling, and technology checks to reduce the risks associated with technology-facilitated abuse.

### Over 99.3% of women

who present as victim-survivors have experienced some form of technological abuse

Our Family Law Clinic is run with the support of legal firms. Statistics indicate that up to eight in 10 family law matters involve some form of family violence or abuse. Legal support was provided to 37 women in 12 months via the Family Law Clinic, with some women returning multiple times.

### 8 in 10

family law matters involve some form of family violence or abuse

**“I experienced the best, professional advice, and beautiful service.”**

**“Thank you for offering the service. It was helpful. I did feel a bit nervous and overwhelmed. But my questions were answered, and advice offered in a way I could understand.”**



## Clients' stories

Hear directly from Donna about her experience attending the Daisy Centre programs:

‘I felt the most validated I have ever felt in my whole life, being amongst women who come from all walks of life. We are all from different backgrounds, ages, and personalities but the one thing that connects us is the trauma we went through. I cannot express how important it was for me to feel like I belong somewhere. I am tired of feeling alienated from everyone else, so I really am truly grateful for meeting the women in my class. The skills and knowledge I have learned so far are crazy, even though I may not be the best at them, and it may take a while for me to learn new things and unlearn the past unhelpful things I used to survive. I cannot wait for term two of the class and really hope you are able to offer this program in the future, for all the other women who feel lost, alone and who are in debilitating physical pain”.

Leonie’s story of finding support:

Domestic and family abuse is a complex issue that often leaves women feeling lost and confused. Many women who have experienced ongoing abuse have little knowledge of the dynamics involved in the harmful behaviour of their partner or family member.

To increase clients’ understanding of the complexity and patterns of abusive relationships, our Reflect and Restore program includes a session covering topics such as the range of behaviours experienced in domestic and family violence, the cycles of violence and abuse and the impact of post-separation abuse.

When attending the program, Leonie shared her situation, saying she felt unsupported by her mother in everything she was experiencing. In her evaluation of the program, she said that Reflect and Restore gave her the language to discuss her experiences of abuse with her mother and her siblings.

Leonie also said that her new knowledge highlighted that she had experienced intergenerational abuse—something that had never been spoken about previously in her family. She told us that the program enabled her to have a frank and open discussion with her family and that this had strengthened her relationships. Leonie said her family is now providing her with the support that she and her young child needed.

# Social impact

## Mary's House Services and Refuge

**14,000 nights**

safe accommodation provided since 2016

**18 women  
17 children**

(three newborns, 12 children <10yrs, three teenagers) safely accommodated

**25-54**

is the average age range of our clients

**19 to 70**

Client ages ranged from 19 to 70

**78 families**

provided casework support

**21 child protection reports**

about children at significant risk, mainly from witnessing their mothers' assaults

## Daisy Centre community programs

**200+ women**

assisted over the past year

**36% increase**

in clients provided with legal and financial counselling services

**500+ registrations**

in community programs since 2020

**55%+**

of clients attended more than one program, with 60% enrolling in more than two programs.

**30%**

of enrolments in community programs were clients receiving casework support from our social workers.

**other referrals**

were about 50% from external agencies and the other half, self-referred.



Thank you for your care for the safety and lives of the women and children seeking support and refuge from violence and abuse. From major partners to corporate supporters, to donors and trusts and foundations, to those who have pledged a gift in their will, to community and service organisations and the educational institutions and sports organisations who are stepping up with support, we extend our sincere gratitude to you all.

Together we are saving lives and giving hope – our achievements are only possible with your support.

# Philanthropy and communications

2024 marked a rejuvenation in our fundraising efforts – gradually recovering from the challenging years of the global pandemic, our community has again stepped up to respond to the national emergency of domestic and family violence.



With a fresh outlook from July 2023, our then new CEO and our Board made a strategic decision to appoint a full-time manager for fundraising and communications, and to grow the team that is at the heart of what makes our frontline client work possible.

Supported by our leadership, our philanthropy manager was tasked with an immediate focus on increasing revenue from our generous community – the community that built Mary's House Services, and their networks. We recognised the urgent need to increase income to meet the upswing in demand for our services, with more women and children seeking support.

Key to our income generation success in the past year was a robust communication strategy, highlighting the vital work of our frontline staff at Mary's House Services. We have focused on educating the wider community and governments about our range of life-saving services for women and children in our community, and for those seeking refuge in the northern suburbs, escaping from other areas.

Using a range of donated services, our marketing and communication plans have raised local and state-wide awareness of our work. We are immensely grateful for new and long-term pro-bono partnerships with generous small, medium and larger organisations, all of which have enabled us to build awareness of the services we provide, as well as communicate the urgent need for more financial support.

With an increase in human resources in philanthropy and communications, we have been able to develop a more comprehensive set of communications for all our supporters – one of our central goals is to ensure that individual donors, trusts and foundations, community organisations and corporate partners know how deeply grateful we are for their essential support.

Halfway through the year we appointed a new team member to carefully manage supporter data and its use in communications – this additional resource has significantly enhanced our ability to tailor our communications with our valued supporters and extend the impact of our communications.

To further increase income for services, our team have been strategic in grant applications, refined communication content and increased the range of impactful communications and expanded our community of donors. During the year, we launched a refreshed website, also thanks to generous pro bono support. Two of our events during the financial year attracted new community supporters and corporates who have now joined us to increase our capacity to provide services to more women and children: the Terry Hills Golf and Country Club charity day and our annual Mary's House Walk.

Beyond events, numerous community organisations ran their own fundraising initiatives on our behalf, also attracting new supporters for Mary's House Services. Our team gave presentations about our work to various groups - ranging from church congregations to schools and sports organisations, community groups and corporates. All these initiatives have been essential to our success, because at the time of publishing, Mary's House Services receives no government funding for its services.

Our engagement with the community and supporters has never been stronger, but we aim to re-double our efforts in the coming year. With an ongoing increase in the number of women and children seeking support, and significant underfunding by governments, our philanthropy and communications team is determined to attract more support – because everyone has the right to live free of violence and abuse.

# Our people



## Volunteers

Our volunteers demonstrate their unwavering commitment and passion for our cause, some of them offering weekly support and others available for events and strategic projects. Our volunteers' dedication has been instrumental in achieving our goals and enables us to have more significant impact on women's and children's safety.

During the year we were supported by 36 active volunteers, with over 1,600 hours of volunteer time.

*Fundraising:* volunteers played a crucial role at our 2023 annual Mary's House Walk assisting with registration, raffle ticket sales and guiding participants. We also acknowledge St Ignatius' College Riverview students and parents for their contribution, and hope to see more schools and students participate in 2024.

*Community outreach:* volunteers supported community fundraising events such as at the Mater Hospital Mothers' Day stall and the Terry Hills Golf and Country Club event.

Support services: volunteers provided childminding, processed grocery and laundry orders, provided grant support and detailed report-writing, marketing and media and PR support, collection and delivery and packing of donated items, morning teas for community programs and administrative support.

Mary's House Services volunteers were joint winners of North Sydney Council's Community Builder Award in 2024, recognising their outstanding contributions.

Volunteers who participate in client interaction roles receive support from our Community Programs team. To further support our volunteers, last year we began development of new training program focused on education about domestic violence, vicarious trauma, and policies and procedures related to volunteering.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our volunteers. Your dedication, hard work, and passion make a valued contribution to our client services, thank you.

## Members

Entering our ninth year since Mary's House refuge was first conceptualised, we particularly recognise the work and vision of the concerned citizens of the northern suburbs who were the founders of Mary's House Services.

Some founders still support us today, providing support and guidance. Your selflessness will always be remembered. Thank you to our past and current Mary's House Services members—we deeply value your support.

## Our staff

With growth, we have been able to provide increased support for staff members' health and wellbeing and enhanced internal HR processes including the introduction of HR software to improve communication and management of employee documentation. In addition, we have increased the range and number of professional development opportunities for staff. This has helped strengthen our workforce and enhanced our productivity. One of our core strategic goals is to centre our people—we aim to do more in this space over the next year.

We recognise that our frontline staff require support to reduce the risk of experiencing vicarious trauma. With financial support from a private foundation, we were able to conduct vicarious trauma training for all staff—managing this risk is part of our ongoing commitment to staff wellbeing.

Looking ahead, we are strengthening our induction processes and enhancing our staff education on core organisational policies. Our focus will continue to be providing a healthy and safe work environment that prioritises personal and professional growth and wellbeing.



# Our Board



**Helen Conway**  
Chair of the Board

Helen Conway is an experienced leader, director, senior executive and lawyer who has worked in a range of organisations in the commercial, public and not-for-profit sectors.

Helen spent 10 years in private legal practice, including 7 years as a partner in a major law firm in Sydney, and then moved into the corporate sector where she worked as a senior executive in the insurance, transport, energy, retail and construction industries for 18 years. At the same time, she undertook various directorships in the health, transport and superannuation sectors.

Helen has demonstrated a strong commitment to community service, fairness, diversity and inclusion. She has undertaken voluntary work in a wide range of not-for-profit organisations. She was previously the Judicial Head of the NSW Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

Helen is a champion for women's rights. She was previously the CEO of the Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency, a statutory authority with regulatory and other responsibilities.

Helen is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (FAICD) and a member of Chief Executive Women. She is currently the Chair of YWCA Australia, KU Children's Services and Australian Business Volunteers and also a director of Youth Off the Streets.



**Dr David Scott**  
Deputy Chair of the Board

David is an experienced not-for-profit director with diverse skills in leadership, corporate governance, financial analysis, mergers and acquisitions, strategy, research, and social policy.

He has over ten years of experience as a not-for-profit non-executive director and is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (FAICD). David was President of Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury Sydney.

David's banking career included heading the team responsible for all Commonwealth Bank mergers and acquisitions in CBA's Group Strategic Development department. David has academic qualifications in science, social policy (PhD, MPS) and an MBA. His PhD research provides practical insights to enhance advocacy efforts for marginalised Australians.

He is a non-executive director at Transform Aid International (Baptist World Aid Australia) and non-executive director and President at Council on the Ageing (NSW).



**Claire Cooper**  
Director

Claire Cooper became involved with Mary's House in March 2016, as part of the team recruiting and managing volunteers. She also headed a committee tasked with raising awareness of domestic violence among schools in the local community.

Claire has a degree in law from Southampton University, England and practised as a commercial property solicitor in London before moving to Sydney in 1991. She lived in Jakarta Indonesia for five years where she was a founding member of Yayasan Balita Sehat, a Foundation for Mother and Child Health (FMCH). Claire published a bi-lingual cookery book, the proceeds of which went to the FMCH. During this time she was also editor of the Grapevine magazine, a publication produced monthly for expatriates living in Jakarta.



**Josh Dowton**  
Director

Josh has been a friend of Mary’s House since 2016 and brings to the Board a wealth of experience in community engagement, partnership brokering, transformational community development, adult education, and local church ministry. He has a passion for systems thinking, strategic planning, and organisational health.

Josh was one of the founding members (and is the current Chair) of the Crows Nest Safe Village Project, which brings together local services, organisations, Councils, and faith groups to respond to and reduce domestic abuse in the local community. Josh is the Executive Pastor of the Northside Baptist Church.

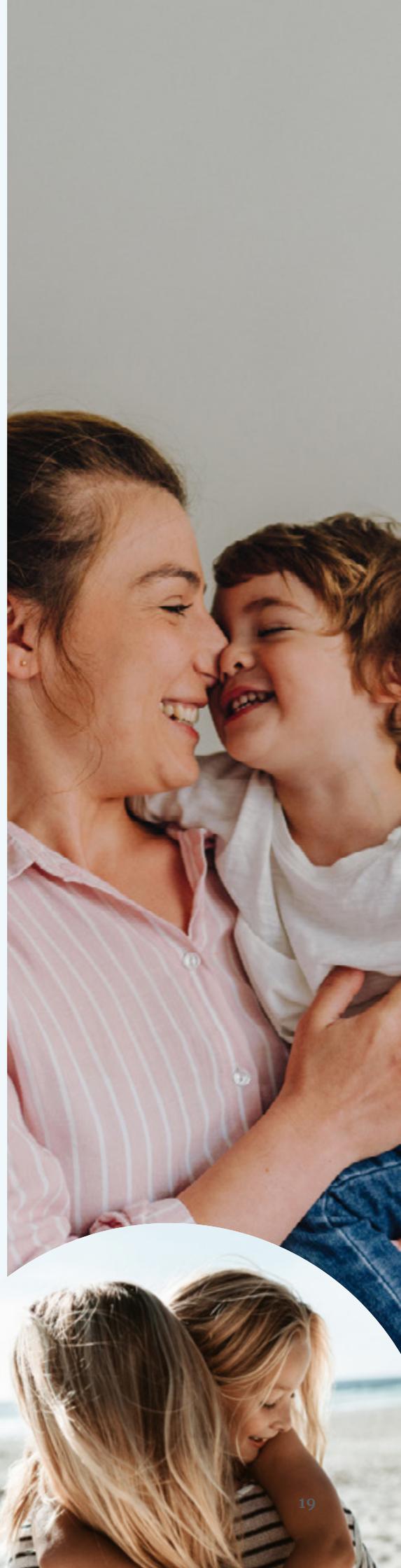


**Karen Bevan**  
Director

Board Director and former Chair (stepped down as Chair in July 2024, retired from Board September 2024) Karen has 30 years’ experience working across government, research institutions and not for profit organisations in roles including executive leadership, strategy, operational leadership, policy analysis, research, training, service delivery and community development.

Through her experience she brings together a deep understanding of community services practice (particularly domestic and family violence, child protection, early childhood development, family support and out of home care), public policy, legislation and research to drive practice and strategy, systemic change and public policy development. She has deep experience working with all levels of government, community and NGO stakeholders to support strategy development and implementation. Karen has worked extensively in community engagement with diverse communities.

Karen has been a volunteer mentor with women who have experienced domestic and family violence seeking employment and is committed to improving the pathways and experiences of women and children fleeing domestic violence. In addition to her Board role with Mary’s House Services, Karen is a member of the Youth Law Australia Board and a consultant and leadership coach for community services. Karen is the CEO of Full Stop Australia.



# Finance and governance

The community demonstrated their care and understanding about the national emergency that is domestic and family violence, by answering our urgent call for more assistance. Mary's House Services broadened its community of supporters; and we asked for more donations to meet the upswing in demand for specialist support, crisis housing, safety services, therapeutic and practical supports for our clients. We are immensely grateful.



Income from donations, grants, community fundraising, events and corporate gifts totalled \$2.27 million, an approximately 100% increase compared to the prior year. Most of our income came from trusts and foundations, appeals and events. The Mary's House Services team will continue working hard to repeat this revenue increase, so we can achieve our key goals of providing more lifesaving crisis accommodation, and more specialist domestic violence workers.

Total expenses for the year amounted to \$1.8 million, compared to \$1.5 million in the previous year. Last year we employed an additional caseworker thanks to generous philanthropic support from a donor family, and we hired a database specialist which contributed to our

success in attracting more donations, as well as supporting our careful maintenance of confidential data. In addition, we upgraded some of our IT infrastructure and provided more to our clients in the way of practical and security-related support (known as brokerage); our depreciation and amortisation expenses also increased. Other expenses which increased included old and superseded equipment write-offs, contract accounting fees and merchant fees, due to increased donations received. Thanks to the generosity from a range of people and organisations, we significantly reduced our events and promotions-related expenses compared to the previous year, resulting in more revenue available for our frontline services. The audited financial report is available on our website.

Mary's House Services acknowledges and thanks Richard Harpham and David Scott who served as Chairs of the Finance Committee during the financial year, as well as our past and new Finance Coordinators for their guidance and work on managing our finances.

The Board held six meetings over the 2023-24 year. Board members are volunteers who are elected by the members of Mary's House Services Ltd.

Access to our financial report is available on our [website](#).



Mary's House Services Ltd is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It has reporting and compliance obligations to the Australian Charities and Not for-profits Commission. Mary's House Services is an organisational member of the Fundraising Institute of Australia.



# We need your help

Financial support is key to our sustainability and growth, enabling us to support and save the lives of more women and children, but it is just one of the many ways you can help Mary's House Services.

Below are a range of ways to support our work through donations, volunteering or actions, including projects requiring support from large and small donations:

- Short-term client accommodation options including hotel stays (one to three nights)
- Medium-term client accommodation options (12-18 months)
- Employment of more specialised domestic violence caseworkers, including a child specialist
- Gift cards in various denominations to provide to clients for essential shopping to support their families
- A new car for refuge client transport
- More "never alone" security devices and safety watches
- Referrals to new donors and corporate supporters
- Referrals to donors who may wish to support with a gift in their will
- Hosting and organising community fundraisers
- Professional support to help clients find employment
- Coverage of removalist costs to move clients to safe accommodation
- Short-notice donations to cover cost or purchase for essential household electrical appliances and white goods
- Pet accommodation, billeting and vet care costs
- Donations to cover cost or provide security equipment at post-refuge accommodation
- Donations to cover cost of new technology for internal operations, such as computers and phones
- Sign up to our occasional newsletter and follow us on socials

To have a confidential discussion about making a gift in your will to Mary's House Services, please contact our Philanthropy and Communications Manager, Janine Wood or ask to speak to our CEO.

## Janine Wood

+61 4 32 445 206

janinew@maryshouse.org.au

## Contact Us

Client referral and support line: 1800 002 111

Office administration, fundraising and communications: 02 8937 2094

Email [info@maryshouse.org.au](mailto:info@maryshouse.org.au)

ABN 43 606 187 839

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[youtube.com/@maryshouseservices](https://youtube.com/@maryshouseservices)

How you can help women and children traumatised and endangered by domestic and family violence:



Donate and consider becoming a regular monthly giver



Partner with us to fundraise for our work



Participate in our events



Consider making a gift in your will to support our work



Refer us to new supporters



Volunteer with us



Create awareness of our service in your community

**Notes and considerations:** Identifying details of women and children mentioned in this report have been changed to protect their privacy.



ORGANISATIONAL  
MEMBER  
CODE COMPLIANT



Member



Member



[maryshouse.org.au](https://maryshouse.org.au)