

EXAMPLE STORY

Disability, Welfare & Social Inclusion
Families in Crisis
East Maitland Bowling Club



WINNER 2017

Outline your unique story/project/program

Carrie's Place Domestic Violence and Homelessness Services Inc. has been providing support services for people experiencing domestic and family violence, and/or homelessness in the Maitland and Lower Hunter area since 1979.

East Maitland Bowling Club Ltd (Easts) first began supporting Carrie's Place when we were approached for a donation. Easts has continued to support Carrie's Place over the years, with cash financial support and in-kind support such as the free use of meeting rooms. Carrie's Place continues to receive our financial support via the ClubGRANTS program.

In 2016, East Maitland Bowling Club entered into a formal agreement with Carrie's Place to provide the rent-free use of a club-owned suburban residence located in East Maitland for the purpose of providing emergency accommodation for families in crisis due to domestic violence.

Leading up to this agreement, Easts committed to a significant investment in substantial renovations at the property, including upgraded security measures, to ensure the building was capable of safely and comfortably accommodating families under extreme duress.

Easts has also retained responsibility for all the usual costs associated with leasing a property, as well as ongoing grounds maintenance, general maintenance, insurances and other ad-hoc costs.

In the eight months since finalising the agreement, eleven families in crisis have been safely sheltered at the property provided by East Maitland Bowling Club.

Why was this story/project/program addressed as a priority?

The prevalence of domestic violence, and the plight of victims who seek to escape their situation has received significant media attention in recent years. Current statistics indicate that more than one woman per week is killed at the hands of their current or former partner.

Increased awareness and activism against domestic violence is successfully encouraging women to seek help when they are caught up in such circumstances. The pressing issue is how best to help families in crisis who urgently need shelter and other support services when they make the decision to seek safety.

In 2015, the local newspaper (Maitland Mercury) reported that up to thirteen women per week were being turned away from Lower Hunter domestic violence refuges due to a lack of crisis accommodation.

A second article indicated that these figures were the "tip of the iceberg" and that the Hunter was in the midst of an accommodation crisis for women and children attempting to escape dangerous situations.

The President of the East Maitland Bowling Club, Bill Hopkins OAM, became aware of the accommodation crisis in the area through local media. He was also aware that the Club owned a four bedroom residence that was currently vacant owing to the need for renovation. After consulting with the CEO Steve Duggan and the Club's Board of Directors, Bill decided to investigate whether the property could be used to help support families in crisis.

In 2016, Bill and Steve met with the local Labor candidate for the seat of Paterson, Mrs Meryl Swanson, whom they knew had a particular interest in Domestic Violence support services, to ascertain her views. Mrs Swanson responded with enormous enthusiasm and immediately wrote to the Board of Directors to formally request their support for the project.

When the matter was formally presented to the Board of Directors for approval, it was already their view that domestic violence is a significant problem with repercussions not only for the victims and their families, but for the entire community, and they were very eager to assist.

The existing relationship that the Club had with Carrie's Place, made them the first choice for offering use of the property.

Tell us what resources contributed toward this story/project/program?

The value of the contribution of the property to the people who need the building for crisis accommodation cannot be calculated. Financial assistance includes the following:

- Waiving of expected Rental returns
- Annual Council/land rates
- Annual insurance
- Ongoing Grounds Maintenance
- Minor maintenance costs from time-to-time

Costs indirectly associated with the venture include:

- Time committed to monitoring and managing matters pertaining to the property, management of accounts etc, by Club staff.

How did the project/program meet the local community needs?

Although initially alerted to the need for crisis accommodation by local media (refer to attachments), it was through consultation with representatives from Carrie's Place that the desperate urgency for accommodation was fully understood and the difference that the residence could make to the lives of families in crisis became clear.

The success of the project is difficult to quantify as there are significant sensitive issues of privacy associated with the project, and East Maitland Bowling Club is conscious of protecting the security of the people who stay at the property.

As mentioned previously, eleven homeless families have been safely housed in the residence provided by East Maitland Bowling Club. The provision of the property to be used in this way has an enormous impact

on the lives of the people affected. East Maitland Bowling Club is proud to be in a position to offer this support to vulnerable families in crisis.

Do you have long-term plans/goals for this story/project/program?

In addition to providing the residence rent-free, the Board of Directors has agreed to cover ongoing costs such as rates, insurance, and maintenance costs.

Clearly, the project is of enormous benefit to the people in need, and will therefore be supported by East Maitland Bowling Club for the foreseeable future.