

# MARKETS IN THE COMMUNITY:

## Mary's House

KangaNews is proud to introduce a new series featuring the charitable endeavours of Australian and New Zealand capital-markets professionals. In its inaugural feature, three well-known market participants share their work with **Mary's House**, a women's refuge dedicated to providing crisis accommodation for women and their dependent children escaping domestic violence. The refuge is located in Sydney's lower north shore and, although associated with the Jesuit Parish of Our Lady of the Way in North Sydney, is a nondenominational initiative.

### PARTICIPANTS

■ **Jeff Brunton** Investment Director, Global Equities and Fixed Income AMP CAPITAL, Supporter MARY'S HOUSE

■ **Tricia Ho-Hudson** Head of Capital and Regulatory Strategy COMMONWEALTH BANK OF AUSTRALIA, Board Member MARY'S HOUSE

■ **Louise McCoach** Consultant GILBERT + TOBIN, Board Member MARY'S HOUSE

### INTERVIEWER

■ **Lucy Symonds** Trainee Staff Writer KANGANEWS

**S** **YMONDS** How did you each come to be involved in Mary's House?

■ **BRUNTON** All of us are parishioners at St Mary's church in North Sydney. I got involved through my wife Laurie and her work with St Mary's. In the early stages of the project Laurie was part of a working group, alongside Tricia, that was essentially tasked with converting a property into a fantastic community-based project.

■ **HO-HUDSON** The property owner wanted to see it used for a community purpose so the parish put out an expression of interest to form a working group and discuss potential concepts for the property. This working group was a cohort of people who didn't know each other but wanted to see something positive come out of a grassroots initiative. I came from a finance and risk-management background and Laurie is

an example of someone who came from a community-service background.

I had known Louise before we worked together on Mary's House but not as well then as I do now. The excitement, as well as all the pressures, of trying to get a start-up project off the ground is a bonding experience. You often don't realise how much is involved in a project like this when it is first starting out. In particular, it tests how you respond to issues outside a professional context.

■ **MCCOACH** This has definitely been the most rewarding challenge for me. The way we need to communicate ideas and express ourselves to engage and influence the community can at times be quite different from what we are used to in the corporate world. You also have to be very mindful of the diverse range of perspectives, motivations and talents around the table.

■ **BRUNTON** At the end of the day everyone is a volunteer. There is no corporate hierarchy and every individual is giving up time with their family to be a part of it. Some volunteers, like Tricia and Louise, are also taking on the extra commitment on top of a full-time career.

**SYMONDS** How did you transform the property from a home for five women and children to accommodate up to 19 women and their dependent children?

■ **HO-HUDSON** The property was not originally a residential space so it was a massive renovation to convert it into a multi residence. What has been surprising is just how many people have been interested in helping. If you target a request, making it within a contact's capacity, it is a lot easier for them to say yes. With Bunnings, for instance, we didn't ask for money but for things that were on the shop floor. As a result,

### MARY'S HOUSE SUPPORTERS



Jeff Brunton



Tricia Ho-Hudson



Louise McCoach

Bunnings is responsible for almost all the property's fit out.

**SYMONDS I understand that it is quite unusual for a women's refuge in Australia to accommodate dependent children.**

■ **BRUNTON** It is definitely unique for a domestic-violence refuge to have the ability to take children. Women who are unfortunate enough to be in a domestic-violence situation will often stay with their partner because they can't leave their children.

■ **HO-HUDSON** A lot of women who need to leave their partners will initially end up in some sort of women's shelter. Women's shelters are often designed for those who suffer from homelessness, drug addiction, gambling or alcohol issues. It is an awful situation to be in if you don't suffer from those issues – especially if one of these ailments has been a factor in your domestic-violence environment.

There are specialist homeless shelters but not many where you can take your children. On top of this, there are few refuges that are centrally located – near good schools, the courts, supermarkets and banks.

**SYMONDS What has been the main challenge you have encountered?**

■ **HO-HUDSON** One of the difficulties in working in the smaller not-for-profit area is that even with progress you reach a stage of 'immature maturity'. It is not until projects are well established that you can get full support from outside agencies. Fixed infrastructure, governance, finance and operational assistance is what we are all used to having in our daily working lives.

In the beginning it can be quite scary to walk into something where these channels are not already set up. Personally, I think it draws on the skills of people who come out of our industry. We are individuals who are usually quite strong and resilient.

**SYMONDS How do you think your experiences as financial and legal**

**professionals have lent themselves to this project?**

■ **MCCOACH** Our skill sets have undoubtedly been useful, on a number of fronts. Things like what a constitution should have, how you set up a board and what structure a committee should take are basic concepts in our world but very important to get right when establishing a not-for-profit such as Mary's House.

I have also been involved in a crowdfunding initiative which was one of the most successful in Australia for a not-for-profit organisation. Because of the milieu we work in we have contact with high-net-worth individuals and media channels throughout the business community, which was especially helpful.

It also affected my approach to fundraising, which was essentially to employ an underwriting strategy. A successful crowdfund depends on reaching 20 per cent of your target on the first day, so you need to open with a lot of confidence. So before the campaign even launched, I essentially ran a bookbuild, which involved a lot of 'roadshow' work behind the scenes going to potential donors to ask whether they would be prepared to donate on day one and what their likely commitment would be.

**SYMONDS How did you come up with the crowdfunding concept?**

■ **HO-HUDSON** We very quickly became aware of the fact that domestic violence is not a popular topic, especially when you are trying to attract donors. We knew we needed to have a strategy that captured the real interest in domestic violence at the grassroots level. Crowdfunding is a vehicle for this.

■ **MCCOACH** I got interested in crowdfunding because at the time it was a new area in fundraising and I wanted to understand it myself. Tricia was instrumental in bringing to my attention that you can't do everything – you have to pick one thing and do it well. So this was something where I thought I could make a difference, plus I love building relationships and crowdfunding is very much about this.

The average crowdfund for a not-for-profit project is A\$10,000 (US\$7,618) and many don't raise anything. We raised nearly A\$23,000 on the first two days with the final amount donated coming in at just over A\$107,000.

■ **HO-HUDSON** The psychology behind crowdfunding is quite important, especially for not-for-profit organisations. Because it is an online fundraising platform people can see the progress and they feel incentivised to help you achieve a target. It is quite different from the traditional way of fundraising. There is a different type of visibility associated with it.

■ **MCCOACH** However, it's not just about the money we raise – it's about the message going out to the community and the conversations that emerge from it. I will even be sitting in the dentist's chair and all of a sudden they will be offering *pro-bono* dental services to the women. It is quite amazing. You tap into people's willingness to give and reinforce the value of protecting women and children in the community.

What excites me about Mary's House is that although we are not an advocacy group our work has a trickle-down effect of creating conversations. People start to come along to training on the topic and begin to recognise warning signs in friends. They start talking to their daughters and their sons about it. •

Mary's House opened its doors to women and their dependent children affected by domestic violence on October 12. If you would like to donate to Mary's House please visit <https://maryshouse.org.au/donations/donations/how-can-you-help-us> or contact [info@maryshouse.org.au](mailto:info@maryshouse.org.au).

Members of the Australian and New Zealand capital-markets industry are welcome to contact KangaNews if they would like their own or a colleague's work with a charitable organisation or project to be profiled in this editorial series. Please contact Samantha Swiss via [sswiss@kanganews.com](mailto:sswiss@kanganews.com).