

## About Us

The W.A.S.H. House exists because of the vision, dedication and lobbying of a small group of inspired local women and workers from Essie's Women's Refuge. These extraordinary women identified the unmet support needs of the growing number of women escaping domestic violence being relocated to public housing in the Mount Druitt area.

The demands on the centre have been constant, and ever increasing so over the years we have changed, in an effort to ensure the service remains effective and as responsive as possible to the needs of the women. So although the W.A.S.H. House was initially set up to support women once they moved on from the refuge, we have grown to providing services for all the women in our local community, primarily in Mount Druitt, but encompassing the surrounding Blacktown and Penrith Local Government Areas.

Funded under the Western Area Assistance Scheme in July 1982, the WASH House was supported and housed by Essie's during the establishment phase before signing a tenancy with Department of Housing in August. Ideally, the women wanted a cottage close to the shops and railway but were happy to occupy the house at No 30 Myrtus Crescent, Bidwill, and open for service provision on the 11th of September. With persistent lobbying and creativity the premises at Myrtus Crescent were progressively extended and renovated during the ensuing years to accommodate the growing demand and range of services, including occupying No 32.

Funding for the project was "picked up" by the then Department of Youth and Community Services (now known as DoCS) and in our fourth year of operation funding was increased to the equivalent of two full-time salaries, making the W.A.S.H. House one of the better funded women's information and resource centre's!

In 1997 the WASH House moved to its current Kelly Close premises, with the Op Shop and Emerton Centre being established in 2000, and extending to 3 shops by 2004. Our new location in the CBD, close to transport hubs and other service providers has increased access to our services for women across the area.

We are committed to woman's rights to equality, to choose their own destiny and to have a safe environment for themselves and their children. We view women as capable, worthy, and of innate value.

Much like the washing machine that inspired our naming, the WASH House operates on a variety of settings. On an individual level our key purpose is to assist women to become aware of their own self worth, improve their quality of life and reach their full potential. To this aim the W.A.S.H. House provides information, resources, support services and group work as well as advocacy and assisted referrals.

On a second level the W.A.S.H. House has a community development brief to promote both opportunities for the local community as well as quality services to meet their needs. We aim to build social capital and capacity by actively participating in interagencies and whole of community initiatives as well as developing strategic partnerships and programs.

On a third level the W.A.S.H House is concerned with the broader societal level, and issues both for women and a local community that experiences social, economic and locational disadvantage. It seems that lobbying and advocacy are dirty words in the community sector of late however the WASH continues to strive to keep women's issues on the public agenda and give a voice to the community regarding issues of interest.

The history of the W.A.S.H. House is one of constant growth and flux and our journey rich and varied. There have been challenges, times of hardship and moments of despair, but there has also been much joy, celebration and achievement. Over 25 years faces and projects have changed, but what has remained constant has been to approach our work from a social justice framework; a commitment and belief to the local community; to equality and contributing to the quality of life of women, their families and communities.

The WASH House has remained a meeting place: facilitating participation and reducing isolation. Providing information and referral has promoted connection to community, access to services and needs being met. Services have been responsive, client focused and provided support, advocacy and opportunities. Relationships have been built on respect,

empowerment and self determination.