

A RESTFUL HAVEN

Founded in 1988, Catherine House provides safe refuge and integrated services to women experiencing homelessness in Adelaide. Thanks to a recent garden makeover, the facility now also provides a safe and peaceful space for residents to enjoy the great outdoors.

*By Yvette Reade
Rotary Club of Adelaide Light, SA*

FOR women who experience domestic violence, a fractured family life or mental illness, the only answer can be to leave home to escape their situation. This is often unplanned, and for women who have no family or friends to go to, they often have no choice but to face the uncertainties of life on the streets.

The fortunate find their way to safe refuge in facilities like South Australia's Catherine House, who provide permanent and short-term sanctuary for homeless women at several facilities across Adelaide, as well programs to help them rebuild their lives.

Despite the welcome security provided by Catherine House's Adelaide City premises, the grounds were empty and unmaintained. The Rotary Club of Adelaide Light decided to makeover the back and front gardens, giving the residents some peace and beauty to enjoy after the trials they have faced.

The club approached local companies for in-kind donations, with Stratco South Australia happily donating a large pergola and Waterpro an automated irrigation system, in response. Approvals and permits for the erection of the pergola at Catherine House were arranged by the club through both the City of Adelaide Council and Housing SA.

Former club member and landscaping company owner Kym Pedler, with the help of his son and grandson, undertook the removal of dead and dying trees and plants, and assisted with paving installation and plant choices. A dollar for dollar District 9500 Rotary Foundation grant assisted in funding the rest of the \$20,000 makeover.

"Our Rotary members and the members of the Rotaract Club of Adelaide City were the labour force over many weekends, turning over the soil, laying the automated irrigation, planting bird-attracting plants and mulching to give the plants their best chance of survival," club president Rob McLennan said. "Our club also purchased an outdoor table and seating from Stratco for the residents to enjoy the shade of the pergola."

The gardens were officially opened in December 2018. Rotarians and Rotaractors will continue to run joint working bees for weeding and other maintenance required to keep the gardens in top condition.

The Rotary Club of Adelaide Light started the Rotaract Club of Adelaide City five years ago. As well as helping the women of Catherine House, the makeover project proved to be an

opportunity to build relationships between the clubs.

"Working with the members of the Rotary Club of Adelaide Light gave Rotaractors a chance to really build on the common ground of friendship, trust and support that already exists with our sponsor Rotary club," Rotaract Club of Adelaide City president Heidi Wolff said. "I believe this project further broke down age and cultural barriers, due to the relaxed atmosphere, which is not always seen in a formal meeting situation.

"The project also gave Rotaractors the opportunity to learn practical gardening and landscaping skills that we can use around our own properties without having to undertake a TAFE course."

The new garden, complete with shady seating area and birdbath, is now a restful haven for the women of Catherine House.

"We are so incredibly grateful for the ongoing support we have received from the Rotary Club of Adelaide Light and the Rotaract Club of Adelaide City," Catherine House CEO Louise Miller Frost said. "This garden make-over has had a huge impact on our clients who reside at this facility. It gives them a safe and peaceful space to enjoy.

"It also gives them the opportunity to take time out of their day and enjoy their beautiful surroundings, while getting the opportunity to breathe in the fresh air and see the sunlight. This is incredibly important for women living with a mental illness."

For more information on Catherine House, contact Rotary Club of Adelaide Light public relations director Yvette Reade on 0419 043 042 or club president Rob McLennan on 0430 930 067. •

CATHERINE HOUSE

Catherine House has operated in South Australia since 1988 to provide supported accommodation services to women experiencing homelessness, who are 18 years and older and are unaccompanied by children. Catherine House operates a number of facilities in Adelaide that provide emergency, short-term and permanent accommodation for homeless women. They help with homelessness, emergency programs, mental health programs, transitions, and the Catherine House Women's Centre.

In the subsequent 30 years, this partnership between the Sisters of Mercy, SA Housing Trust and the Adelaide City Council has refined its model and is now recognised as Adelaide's only recovery-based service for women experiencing homelessness. The Catherine House recovery model includes two mental health programs, and a number of in-reach services from government and private providers to ensure each woman has the opportunity to link with the services she needs to recover from the issues that brought her into homelessness.



CLOCKWISE: Breaking the earth at the start of the project; Rotaractors Karragh and Kiirsty cleaning pavers; The Back garden after two months of scorching weather in Adelaide, but the new irrigation system works well; Laying the front garden's irrigation with the help of Rotaract and Rotary members.