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Family Values: It's not how much you've got but how you give

by Nicole Richards | July 2, 2015



Small in size but big in heart, the Flannery Family Foundation is helping to provide a safe haven for women and children fleeing violence in regional NSW. Bernadette Flannery shares her family's giving journey and tips for others who are just getting started in philanthropy.

"On a human level, the Flannery Family Foundation's support through the Lower Hunter property means the difference between being safe and, in some situations, living or not," [Carrie's Place Domestic Violence and Homelessness Services](#) CEO, Jan McDonald, says pointedly.

"In many cases, these women have no option but to return to a violent relationship because the choices aren't there for them to progress beyond emergency accommodation."

The property McDonald refers to is a much loved two bedroom miner's cottage in the Cessnock local government area that was owned by Bernadette Flannery's grandmother.

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"The house was always very special for our family," Flannery explains. "My grandmother grew up there and when it was time for her to move into aged care a couple of years ago, my husband and I decided to buy it to help her out financially and to keep it in the family."

"Around the time that we purchased the house I saw an article in the paper about Carrie's Place and I looked into it a bit and followed up and tried to

work out how we could help them," Flannery says.

"We talked to them about the house and said 'Can you use this property?'"

Not surprisingly, the response was a grateful 'Yes'.

The property is used as transitional accommodation for women and children exiting the Carrie's Place refuge. In four years, eight women and 17 children have called it home for between six and 12 months as they find their feet and prepare for a new life free from violence.

"We work at the intersection of homelessness and domestic violence," McDonald explains. "Having access to properties is of vital importance to us but there's just not enough available through government or supported housing."

"This property gives women the starting point so they can get settled and start pursuing other parts of their lives to live independently," McDonald continues. "While they're in the house, the women are working with a case manager who helps support their progress to the next stage which is usually moving into longer term permanent housing options such as a private rental or social housing."

The Flannery family pays building and contents insurance and donates the use of the property and its contents along with the rental income which also helps women gain a tenancy history that can help them secure their next, long-term home.

There are other, less tangible, benefits of the tenancy too. "It helps these women regain a sense of their self-esteem and self-worth before they move further along on their journey," McDonald says.

Though the house is privately owned by Bernadette and her husband, Shaun, the Family Foundation has assisted Carrie's Place with financial support of around \$10,000 per year for valuable unrestricted funding for one-off emergency expenses such as groceries or to pay for transport to help a mum get to a job

Ian Potter Foundation to 113 recipients including \$400,000 over three years to Bush Heritage Australia and \$347,000 over three years to The Nature Conservancy of Australia Trust

\$3.7 million total

National Institute of Complementary Medicine, UWS & Blackmore's Institute to University of Western Sydney \$400,000

FRRR Heywire Youth Innovation Grants to 15 community groups in rural, regional and remote Australia \$125,394

Westpac 2015 Mary Reibey Grant to The Big Issue's Women's Subscription Enterprise \$240,000

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interview.

This support is making a lasting difference to the lives of women fleeing violent homes McDonald says. "It means these women can truly start to recover from the relationship they've had and start to build their lives in a different way. They can see, sometimes for the first time, that there is a safe future for them."

Keeping it in the family

The Flannery's opted to bring structure to their giving in June 2012 by establishing a private ancillary fund (PAF). "We'd always done ad hoc donations here and there," says Bernadette. "We saw the PAF as a way to formalise our giving."

"I think early on, the biggest challenge is narrowing down your focus and choosing the areas you're going to support—at first that can be very overwhelming. For the first 12 months we just absorbed everything we could.

"Judith at [Australian Philanthropic Services](#) was really helpful in getting us started and we joined [Philanthropy Australia](#) and went to seminars and did a lot of research, a lot of learning and listening to narrow our focus down to families," she continues.

"Shaun and I both come from regional areas and we're both strong on family. Neither of us grew up with a lot of money but our families were always helping people [case in point: Bernadette's mum does volunteer admin work at Carrie's Place once a month] and now our three children are involved in the foundation too. They each have \$1,000 a year to give in areas they support which ranges from children, to educating women and girls to animals and the environment."

"Philanthropy Australia was quite good in putting us in touch with other families such as the [Snow Foundation](#) which was massive but so helpful. We grant around \$25,000 per year so we're only a very small foundation and I felt a bit insignificant at first, but everyone was so good at saying: 'Hey, you're doing something important' and that encouragement was fantastic."

"In the same way, our work with FRRR and the [Innovation for Community Impact \(I4CI\)](#) initiative and the idea of collaborating with other foundations was fantastic. It allowed us to fund and help places we wouldn't normally be able to help and we were able to learn from the bigger and more experienced foundations.

"For us, our giving is not so much about achieving something but helping people and knowing that the funds we give are beneficial and are making a difference to someone's life."

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Learn more about **Carrie's Place** by visiting their [website](#) or [Facebook](#) page.



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