

Kathy Lilis



Kathy has dedicated her life to supporting women and their children find safety and support during and after experiencing domestic and family violence. She is the program manager of the Eastern Adelaide Domestic Violence Services, a program of Women's Safety Services SA.

EARLY LIFE

Kathy grew up in Mile End and attended Cowandilla Primary School. Her parents met in Adelaide but had both migrated from different parts of Greece; her father in 1955 and mother in 1963. Kathy attributes her strong community relations to her parents' model and alongside her older sister, the family was a very close knit unit. Kathy's father worked for the E&WS and she has fond memories of going to work with him during school holidays and during the evenings to light the security gas lamps that protected their job sites on the streets. In the summer they joined her mother during her dinner break as she worked afternoons and evenings. The family enjoyed camping, fishing and road trips, and her parent's home was always filled with friends visiting, drinking coffee or sharing a meal. The girls were always encouraged to continue their education and follow their interests.

Kathy went on to Adelaide High School and then to Flinders Uni to study a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and sociology but had no clear career directions in place. It was here she met her husband of now 31 years. She went to UniSA and completed her social work degree. The couple moved into the Campbelltown area when they married and Kathy loved it from the start with its multicultural community, festivals, continental shopping and green spaces. They have one daughter.

CAREER

Kathy started her social work career in Child Protection before applying for a job at the Edwardstown women's shelter. Four years later she applied for a position at the Eastern Adelaide Domestic Violence Service. Kathy has worked in this service for the past 24 years as a case manager, team leader and now the program manager. The service provides support and accommodation to women and their children experiencing domestic and family violence. She still provides on call back up and support for the day-to-day work as well as supervising the staff which includes a community development manager, property/admin manager and 7 specialist DV case managers.

Working in such a high stress position, Kathy has learnt to leave work at work, and establish a cut-off point on the way home to ensure a positive work life balance. Her advice is to find a symbol to shut off your day's work or set a place to process your day and leave it there. Kathy is concerned that there seems to be less training for newer staff to protect themselves from the trauma that surrounds them with this work and sees setting positives for the day and building supportive relationships as key skills in high demand jobs. Kathy finds her background

in psychology helps her to manage staff dynamics and well-being as well as to support women who return to the service for an opportunity to live safely in a violent free environment. Kathy says it often takes women a number of times to finally get away from violent perpetrators.

The service provides 11 units on site, the service offers 15 supportive and 18 transitional housing locations and continued support for women and their children as required once they have transitioned. This means that they may be working with 60-70 families at any time and up to 250 families per year.

With 28 years' experience in domestic violence services, Kathy has noted that finding available and affordable housing is harder than ever and that levels of domestic and family violence have escalated due to changed values and lifestyles. Kathy sees the violence in media, games and lack of positive role models as part of this concern and finds that women with more positive outcomes tend to be those that have more support and more positive role models in their lives or who have received education about the dv they have experienced.

Breaking the cycle of violence is not easy and needs constant education and awareness raising. It's about building community capacity. Kathy appreciates the Campbelltown Council's efforts of championing these issues by putting up banners and raising awareness through conversations and projects to ensure DV does not remain hidden in the home and women are aware that there is help available to them. It's about empowering them to make choices so they can live without violence. Kathy would love to see zero tolerance especially of breaches to intervention orders and for charges not to be downgraded and laws such as the strangulation law to be enacted consistently.

Kathy finds that living and working in the same community has many benefits. Building strong community supports and relationships with the local churches, council, service groups, politicians and partnerships with businesses has been essential in supporting the service. There are fewer formal action groups in the community addressing the issues nowadays, so the service really values their local community and their willingness to work alongside them.

In 2021 Kathy was nominated for the SA Women's Honour Roll by staff and the service and appreciates the acknowledgement of her work.

WELLBEING

Kathy enjoys her family time, getting away to their beach house, big family events and time with friends. She believes in sharing what she has with others and always willing to lend a hand where she can. Kathy loves baking and staff are often the lucky recipients of her work. Kathy also follows in her parent's path by volunteering for the Halkidikeon Society of SA Aristotle in the Greek community and can see herself volunteering more when she retires.

REFLECTIONS

Kathy views success as being happy and content, not about money or achievements but in being happy in your own space and place. Advice she would tell her younger self would be not to give up, but to believe in yourself, work hard and even at your lowest point believe that things will get better - you will succeed if you persist.

Her advice for young women is to be passionate about what you believe in and in your work as that is what will sustain you.

"Learn from what has happened in your life, build confidence in yourself and your abilities and keep moving forward."