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# 'Honoured, personally and professionally' – Lavinia Tyrrel finds her footing as Karinya House CEO

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Lavinia Tyrrel started as CEO at Karinya House following maternity leave with her second baby.  
Photo: Liv Cameron.

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The Karinya House mission is personal for its new CEO Lavinia Tyrrel.

She stepped into the role last month to carry on the inspiring 25-year legacy of founding staff member and executive director Marie-Louise Corkhill.

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Karinya House – a local, community-based, not-for-profit organisation servicing Canberra and surrounding regions – provides safety, shelter and a positive support network for women, something not readily available to all.

“I personally had a difficult time after the birth of my first baby, but what I reflect on in this role is that I had a roof over my head, financial stability and a safe home,” Lavinia said.

“Not every woman in the Canberra region has this. That’s the critical role of Karinya House in our community.”



Roundabout Canberra CEO Hannah Andrevski and Karinya House CEO Lavinia Tyrrel. Photo: Liv Cameron.

Lavinia holds a Master of International Crisis Management and degrees and diplomas in public administration, corporate and public governance, and anthropology.

She brings with her extensive experience in social services (health, education), governance, monitoring and evaluation, foreign policy,

national security and community and women's empowerment programs.

Lavinia has held executive, leadership and policy roles in the Australian Government, not-for-profits and the mission-driven private sector.

She said the organisation's values and ethos drew her to the role.

"Everything starts with the woman we're walking alongside, her experiences and what support she needs when parenting a baby. It's about her care, dignity, rights and needs," she explained.

"In my parenting journey, I had moments when I felt quite disempowered by some of the services and people I interacted with.

"From that experience, I have an appreciation for the Karinya House philosophy of respect and care, of working with women. And the belief that every woman has agency and power given the right support and opportunities."

Lavinia identified three major challenges the organisation would focus on in the coming years, the first being the impacts of accessible and safe housing shortages on the community sector.

"It's a complex issue and I won't pretend to have the answers. I know our Federal and Territory governments are working hard to tackle the issues," she said.

"But I also know there was a 10 per cent increase in women experiencing homelessness since 2016, and we know homelessness negatively impacts women pre and post-natally and their babies disproportionately.

"Women who are pregnant and with babies have specific needs in their housing and that, alongside the general pressure on public housing in the ACT, will be a big challenge."

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A perfect storm was also brewing thanks to “incredibly high demand” meeting with “a tight fiscal and fundraising environment”.

“The rising cost of living is impacting not only the women we walk alongside but the incredible community businesses and individual donors who support us,” Lavinia said.

“About 30 to 40 per cent of our budget comes from the generous Canberra community. But we are aware they’re operating in an increasingly tight environment themselves, which means we’re seeing a constricting fundraising environment.”



Lavinia said she was personally and professionally privileged to step into the CEO role at Karinya House. Photo: Liv Cameron.

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Lavinia said the very nature of the challenges faced by women seeking support from Karinya House was also evolving, and the organisation would need to adapt.

“We’re seeing an increasing complexity in the experiences and stories of the women we walk alongside,” she said.

“For example, a significant number of women we support are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They might have complex visa or migration issues they need help with.

“Karinya House is fundamentally based on the idea that every woman who is pregnant or parenting should be surrounded with the support she needs. If those needs are evolving, we will continue to learn and evolve with them whilst staying true to our values and mission.”

Lavinia said important goals in the coming years included establishing long-term funding reserves to meet ongoing demand and evolving parts of its service model to ensure the organisation could respond to increasingly complex experiences of women.

There is work to be done, but also, work to be carried on.

“I am incredibly honoured, personally and professionally, to step into this role,” she said.

“Karinya House was created by members of the Canberra community to serve this community and in this role, I see myself first and foremost as a custodian of a very important and unique service in the ACT.

“We will work to maintain its legacy of support of the past 25 years and carry it into the next 25 years and beyond.”