

Ross House is a place for small community groups to grow, connect and evolve. It is the only truly self-managed and community owned not-for-profit building in Australia. The community organisations that manage this building, represent some of the most marginalised people in Australia and for many, it is the one place they have a voice.

In 1980, a seminar for self-help groups drew attention the needs of independent small community organisations, who were finding it hard to survive and thrive on their own without access to vital resources, such as low cost office space and shared resources. It was at this time that the R.E. Ross Trust approached the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) with a major donation for a project to assist small community organisations. The rest, as they say, is history and Ross House opened its doors in October 1987.

Since opening its doors, Ross House has become an important part of the fabric of Melbourne. The organisations operating from Ross House form an eclectic patchwork of multi-cultural groups, self-help groups and small community organisations committed to social justice and environmental sustainability.

Ross House receives no regular funding and relies on the income generated through facility hire and grants to ensure affordable office space can continue to be provided to small community groups working towards creating a more fair and just world, for us all.



TENANT TESTIMONIES

International Women's Development Agency

(Tenant between 1998 - 2007)



International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) exists to advance and protect the rights of women and girls, in all their diversities. IWDA partners with women's organisations in Asia and the Pacific to transform the root causes of gender inequality.

Many not-for-profits initially struggle to find affordable accommodation for their organisation. IWDA's first meeting in 1985 was held at co-founder, Ruth Pfanner's house, but by 1998, IWDA had found a home at Ross House. By supporting IWDA with subsidised office accommodation, resources and a collaborative and supportive environment, RHA enabled IWDA to become the internationally recognised success story that it is today.

When IWDA eventually moved out to give other smaller charities a home at Ross House, they wrote the following for the 2008 RHA Annual Report, highlighting the importance of facilities like Ross House in the success of Melbourne's charity organisations.

"It was with a mixture of joy and sadness that IWDA moved out of the Ross House building earlier this year. The very opportunity to live and grow in a unique building like Ross House is one of the many factors that enabled us to develop as an organisation and in the end contributed to our departure, having outgrown the space we inhabited on the third floor for over ten years."

Being a part of Ross House was not simply about being one of the many community and social justice groups that are fortunate enough to inhabit the space, it was about being reminded of the tireless and varied work of those around us; about encouraging each other and sharing experiences and ideas and it was about a sense of belonging. The organisational structure of Ross House and the collaborative, participatory decision making processes of its governing body speaks volumes about the way that Ross House thinks outside the square. Thank you for letting us be a part of your wonderful community!"

International Women's Development Agency
www.iwda.org.au



Community Music Victoria

(Tenant since 2004)

Community Music Victoria develop, promote and facilitate group music making amongst Victorian communities.

"Being part of the Ross House community provides Community Music Victoria with a firm scaffold from which to operate, supporting as it does the logistical requirements of running an office. There's shared access to resources, training and meeting rooms, and it's reassuring to work alongside other community groups and not for profit organisations, who identify with the same challenges of managing big visions on small budgets and with whom to share and celebrate success stories."

But it's more than this. Strong communities are forged through mutual respect, effective communication, shared values and inclusiveness. Stepping off the street through the automatic doors it's quickly apparent that Ross House offers an oasis of community mindedness, encompassing all of this smack bang in the middle of Metropolitan Melbourne and great things happen in this building all the time.

The social justice and environment movement continues to flourish within its walls and the effects of the work undertaken among the beehive-like structure of offices and meeting rooms offers hope, inspiration and enrichment to lives and communities not only in its immediate environment but across the state of Victoria because of the rare egalitarian existence of Ross House, and Community Music Victoria is proud to be part of it."

Deb Carveth, Community Music Victoria
www.cmvc.org.au



Photo: Community Music Victoria

Human Rights Arts and Film Festival

(Tenant since 2018)



The Human Rights Arts & Film Festival (HRAFF) is a not-for-profit arts organisation that explores diverse and inspiring human stories through the mediums of film, art, music and forums.

"The thing we love about working in Ross House is the feeling that you are working within a community striving to make the world a better place. There is a real esprit de corps in the building and tenants routinely support each other and work together."

We love the building, tenants and management. It is a true feeling of community solidarity and grassroots action and very close-knit. Ross House is now one of the only truly affordable places for grassroots organisations in Australia. Without this building, many organisations would simply not be able to exist. But it is more than cheap rent - the office has a soul, and you are really working alongside your colleagues to help solve some of the world's greatest problems.

Ross House is the perfect place for the Human Rights Arts & Film Festival because it is truly our home in the sense that we are with our people."

Aleta Moriarty, [former] CEO, Human Rights Arts & Film Festival
www.hraff.org.au



Photo: Human Rights and Arts Film Festival

The Wilderness Society

(Tenant between 1999 - 2005)



The principal objective of The Wilderness Society is protecting, promoting and restoring wilderness and natural processes across Australia for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth.

The Wilderness Society began in 1976 with a meeting of just 16 people in the home of Tasmanian GP Dr Bob Brown. They met to stop the Franklin Dam project, which was being proposed for construction on the Gordon River, in close proximity to the environmentally sensitive Franklin River in Tasmania, Australia. The passionate campaign that emerged to save the Franklin River became one of the most significant environmental campaigns in Australian history. During the campaign, both the Gordon and Franklin River areas were listed on the UNESCO World Heritage Area register.

In December 1998, the Wilderness Society (Melbourne Branch) wrote to Ross House Association in dire need as the cost of leasing space in Melbourne had become cost prohibitive and it was no longer financially viable to keep operating their shop and office on Little Bourke Street. On their application for tenancy they wrote *"the future of our Melbourne Branch is in doubt because of the expenses of our current location"*.

The Wilderness Society found a home in Ross House from 1999 to 2005, allowing them to continue their operations and the fight for survival of fragile wilderness across Australia.

"Melbourne is the nation's capital for community support and activism as well as social justice and environmental campaigning. Ross House plays a crucial role in supporting and nurturing the growth of new and innovative organisations."

Gavan McFadzean, [former] Victorian Campaign Manager, The Wilderness Society
www.wilderness.org.au



Ross House provides much more than accommodation.

The Association and its members are joined through a shared commitment to social justice and working towards an environmentally sustainable society. The Association exists to support independent small organisations by providing a place for diverse groups to connect and grow. Together, the Ross House community strives to build a better future for people and the planet.

Since opening its doors, Ross House has housed over 300 organisations and welcomes an estimated 70,000 visitors to the building each year. Ross House has a collective membership of over 20,000 individuals, each receiving direct support; the broader scale social impact of our members' work is immeasurable, but without a doubt immense. Ross House engages with over 600 active groups and accepts over 5000 meeting room bookings each year for vital advocacy, education and training programs. With a permanent wait list for tenancy at Ross House, the need for it to remain an affordable and accessible community hub within the heart of Melbourne is critical.

The impact of Ross House reaches far beyond the walls of the building and its day to day operations.

"In some ways, the best way to assess a resource like Ross House is to imagine what it might be like if it wasn't there and if it wasn't here, there would be a very wide range of organisations and people who would have no voice in this community. Ross House is that voice. It provides the opportunity for a wide range of organisations to work together and to be taken notice of in terms of how circumstances may be improved for people who are disadvantaged."

Hayden Raysmith AM



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