



## FROM COMA TO CHARITY CHIEF

# AWL NSW WELCOMES NEW CEO THERESE MARKOU

During her darkest hours – losing her daughter in a fatal car crash, being wheelchair bound, then experiencing homelessness – Therese Markou relied on the comfort of her companion animals. Now she is returning the favour in her new role as CEO of Animal Welfare League NSW.

Times changed and the clientele with it so that Mt Gravatt Produce became Ms Markou, who took up the position in early July after serving four months as interim CEO, is uniquely well-positioned to lead the organisation, bringing with her a wealth of experience in the not-for-profit sector, as well as her own personal motivations.

She is a former CEO of the NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, which she became involved with at a grassroots level after the organisation helped rescue her in the aftermath of a deadly 2003 car crash.

The crash, which was caused by a fatigued driver, took the life of her 11-year-old daughter, Nicole, and left Ms Markou with life-threatening injuries. This tragedy motivated her to fundraise and volunteer for the SES and other charitable causes. She has also worked as a private advisor to not-for-profit CEOs through her consultancy business CEO Mission Accomplished, and has published a book, Mission Accomplished, that shares systems and strategies for success in the charity sector.

In addition to her operational work, Ms Markou has been a member of numerous NFP committees, sat on multiple boards, and has delivered more than 150 speeches as an inspirational public speaker.

While her professional resume is a great asset for AWL NSW, perhaps what makes her best suited to the role is her deep love of animals and personal experience caring for her pets despite serious challenges.

In the aftermath of the car accident that took her child's life, Ms Markou's marriage broke down due to domestic violence, and despite still suffering ongoing physical injuries, she fled her property and hometown.

Desperate to escape her living situation, but not willing to part with her beloved pets, she lived in a shed on the property where her horse Eme was being agisted, and brought her cat with her.

"When I was recovering from my accident and in a wheelchair, it was the comfort of my cat Crystal sitting on my lap and being with me that helped me on the rough days, so I know the great love and comfort that companion animals can bring to people's lives," Ms Markou said.

"I have experienced being homeless with a pet, and I know that life can serve up some very difficult surprises for both humans and animals, so I hope to be able to help companion animals and their owners in my new role". Ms Markou also said that she felt the organisation was a good match to her experience and skills, and she wanted to help contribute to the cause of animal welfare.

"Animal Welfare League NSW has a fabulous track record in the care and advocacy of animals, and I'm looking forward to helping to grow our generous base of animal lovers and volunteers," Ms Markou said.

"This is a great opportunity for me to marry all of my energy, skills and values and put them into the service of a great organisation that is so committed to making a positive impact on the world."

This enthusiasm was shared by the Chair of the Animal Welfare League NSW Board of Directors, Christine Richardson, who said Ms Markou was a great fit for the almost 60-year-old organisation.

"We are thrilled to have Therese on board as CEO," Ms Richardson said. "Her phenomenal background in leadership, management and fundraising, combined with her 'make-it-happen' attitude from her own personal experiences, are just what AWL NSW needs to fulfil our big vision of all companion animals in the state having a safe and loving home."

AWL NSW was established in 1958 as a registered charity to provide expert care to surrendered, neglected and abandoned companion animals. The organisation runs multiple shelters in Sydney, has 15 branches, and offers education, rehoming and discount desexing programs. ■