



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW *good works*

WINTER 2022
ISSUE NO. 91

Vision



FROM FIRES TO FLOOD

**VINNIES SHOPS
TURN 100**

**INSIGHTS FROM
SLEEPING OUT**

**SHARING STORIES
THROUGH SONG WRITING**



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



In my first message since taking on the role as State President of the Society, I would like to begin with a story of hope prevailing over tragedy.

When people recall the events immediately following September 11, the town of Gander is unlikely to spring immediately to mind.

Located on an island of the Canadian province of Newfoundland, Gander became the temporary home to 38 planes when grounded flights from around the world were barred from entering US airspace. What followed was an extraordinary act of compassion and goodwill as locals responded without hesitation to support close to 7,000 displaced passengers through a life-altering event.

What occurred in Gander draws to minds the response of our own people in Lismore and across north-east NSW in recent times. Members have attended to

people who have lost so much in the floods, staff have put up their hands to assist with the clean-up efforts, and donors have responded by giving generously.

Having spent time in communities that are slowly rebuilding in recent months, I am heartened by the Society as one of many organisations and individuals working collectively to offer a helping hand to those who have lost so much.

In the face of such immense tragedy and heartache, we have acted with love, care and compassion towards people in their time of need, just as our founder Frederic Ozanam laid out in his vision for the Society.

To all our members, volunteers and staff, thank you for all that you do in pursuit of our good works. I look forward to getting out and working alongside you all over the coming months.

Paul Burton
State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

CEO'S MESSAGE



Dear friends,
A common sentiment held over the past three years has been, "When will things go back to normal?"

Amid the succession of unprecedented events that have diluted that term of the impact it ought to carry, it is understandable to find

people yearning for a return to a time where stability and certainty were more reliably present.

The times we find ourselves in are difficult and often disheartening. They are also where our people, carrying the light of the Vincentian spirit, routinely come to the fore with a hand up for people in need.

Throughout this edition of Vision, you will hear stories from the ground detailing the impact we

have been able to make across the Northern Rivers following the floods.

These stories make real the tragedy that has taken place, but also the resilience, compassion and humanity that embody our aspiration as a Society.

I would also like to recognise the tremendous result of this year's Vinnies CEO Sleepout, raising \$3.1 million in NSW and \$9.25 million nationally.

The demand for our services remains strong in instances of the everyday and the extraordinary. Through the generosity of our donors and by working as one united Society, we will be able to continue making a difference irrespective of the challenges that arise.

Jack de Groot
Chief Executive Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW



Providing ongoing flood assistance

The Vinnies NSW Flood Appeal has raised \$3 million and we also provided funding from our own reserves to ensure we helped as many people as possible.

We have distributed close to \$3.3 million in direct financial assistance to more than 6,000 people worst affected by the floods.

We will stay with the Northern Rivers community during their longer-term recovery and continue to provide direct assistance with food, water, clothing, and other material assistance to people impacted by the floods.

Particularly to more isolated communities we were unable to reach due to access issues in the direct aftermath.

Support for these communities will be locally planned and based on an assessment of need, in a person-centred support model.

Households are able to access white goods, financial support for basic essential items like fuel and groceries, other items based on community need, as well as referrals to specialist housing, mental health and other key local services.

The Society is working collaboratively with local communities to determine further on-the-ground priorities for recovery to deliver support based on those needs.

The Society has also distributed generators, tents, sleeping bags, towels, and fuel cards donated by generous corporate partners including Amazon, Ezy Charge, Work Wear, and BP.

The 2022 Northern Rivers floods are the worst flooding the region has experienced on record.

The floodwaters peaked in Lismore at 14.37 metres high and inflicted significant damage there and in nearby cities.

In total, the floods rendered more than 3,600 homes uninhabitable – more than the number of homes destroyed by the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires

The St Vincent de Paul Society was the only major charity distributing financial assistance on the ground in the week after the floods hit the Northern Rivers.

We were working out of seven disaster recovery centres and, in addition to financial assistance, our members have also been providing food, water, and everyday essentials.

Insurance is out of reach for many people in the area – the cost is staggering following bad flooding in previous years.

Nearly three quarters of people (74%) who we provided financial assistance to did not have insurance. A fifth of people we helped were partially insured.

With so many homes badly damaged and so many people having lost everything, there is a strong need for ongoing assistance.

The deluges that brought the floods may have stopped but the destruction remains.



OUR PEOPLE IN ACTION

"Devastation, but community helping each other."

As one of the first batch of Society staff members to lend a hand to flood-ravaged communities on the NSW North Coast, Richard Burgos used few words to sum up the contrasting emotions felt on the ground.

Making the long trek from Sydney to Lismore in the still of the night with a load of donations in tow, Richard and fellow Logistics leader Martin Pottage leapt straight into action working alongside members of the local fire brigade, Rural Fire Services and Australian Defence Force to clear out the damaged Vinnies Shop in Mullumbimby.

For Karen Ryan, a Tailored Support Coordinator assisting tenants at our social housing sites in Katoomba and Penrith, the scene left in the wake of the flood waters brought to mind images resembling a war zone.

"The sight of the devastation was more than I expected," Karen explains.

"It was muddy, smelly – things everywhere – furniture, shoes, clothes, rubbish... but also people and services

coming together to help and support."

As part of the all hands on deck response to clean up the Society's first floor office space, located above the Vinnies Shop in Lismore, after flood waters seeped through the carpet, the immediate response brought new meaning for Karen to the work the Society does in communities every day.

"It was good to feel that Vinnies is more than my role... [I got] to see the Vinnies community in Lismore come together and help not just people in need, but Vinnies people."



Giving people time to talk

As President of St Carthage's Conference in Lismore, Suzanne Nichols was at the forefront of our response to the floods.

"To see the destruction in the CBD is what really hit me; the floods in 2017 were bad, but not to this extent."

Stepping up with fellow members to offer support to impacted locals, alongside other social services providers and government agencies at recovery centres across the region, Suzanne found the greatest support



Society members could offer – beyond financial aid – was to listen to people in their time of need.

"We're trying to give people time to talk and share their stories," she explains.

"It's the same story over and over again – their home's destroyed and they've lost everything – many are walking around in the clothes that they escaped in and their handbag or wallet.

"We just hope that we're giving some assistance with the money and just letting them talk."

With the immediate response transitioning into a phase of recovery and rebuilding, Suzanne sees housing as a desperate need to ensure the future of the community over the long-term.

"We needed housing before it, so we need it twice as much now."

"The frightening thing for all of us is will the town recover? Will we shrink to becoming a small town instead of our big service centre?"

"It was suggested that [the Department of] Housing might house people outside this region, but for a lot of people this is their home, their connections are here.

"It's the connections that make you keep going a lot of the time."

PEOPLE WE'VE ASSISTED

LEE

The Winsome Hotel is a haven for many men in Lismore in need of a hearty meal and a safe place to stay.

When flood waters started to rise in the final days of February, Lee had just enough time to reach safety.

"We evacuated an hour before it was all too late for anyone to get out," Lee recalls.

A self-described 'local boy' who lived through the floods of 1974, Lee has been left to pick up the few pieces that remain from this latest and most impactful disaster.

"Pretty much everything I own – gone."

"I'm going to have to start all over."

For as difficult as these latest floods have been on Lee, he is glowing in his praise of the work occurring on the ground by the Society and other agencies.

"It's fantastic how all the agencies are coordinating so quickly.

"They're here to help and offer reassurance, I'm very humbled."



RENATA

As Renata stands in the remains of her flood-damaged home, a thought at the top of mind for many Lismore residents comes out.

"I don't even know where to start."

Left to deal with the fallout of the worst flood to hit the northern NSW community, Renata looks on at the sight of irreparable items and valuables, belonging to her and her



teenage son. They are piled up outside her ruined home alongside similar piles up and down the side of the road. "It's devastating – it's all just rubbish now, all just landfill – there's nothing."

While the road ahead is long and uncertain for Renata and countless others like her, the support offered by the Society and other organisations at recovery centres located throughout the region is providing solace in a time of need.

"Every cent that comes in, whether it's a meal voucher, whether it's substantial, is just so helpful and so welcome at the moment for the whole community."

"A little bit of money makes a huge amount of difference to people like us, every cent to rebuild and start again and pick ourselves up – it's enormous."

STACEY

When comparing the various floods that have hit Lismore over the years, Stacey has no doubts over the severity of this latest disaster.

"This is worse – I've never ever seen water like [it]."

"I don't ever want to see that again, it's pretty scary."

Born in Lismore and living in the Northern Rivers all her life, Stacey vividly recalls the harrowing details of the worst floods to ever hit the region.

"I was on the telephone to my cousin who lives over in South Lismore, she'd called me to say the water had hit and it was to her fourth step.

"I said, 'it's not to my house, not yet'.

"By the time I turned around it was basically to the top of my stairs, [it had] come through my floor and back and front door.

"I got off the phone and called the SES, they told me they couldn't come, it was too dangerous [and] to get to the highest point of the house, which was my roof.

"I had two boys in the roof, my 18-year-old cat and then we were stuck - my 15-year-old was trying to smash through to get us out, but we only just got a new roof, so we couldn't get out.

"My neighbour next door smashed the window and got us out the next morning and we ended up going on the roof of his house.

"There was about eight of us on that roof until two boats came and rescued us – it would've been five hours after.

"I went down to my house a day later, my son found my 18-year-old cat alive and then my five boys started clearing my house out... I've lost everything."

Having assisted family members impacted by the floods in Lismore five years earlier, Stacey is drawing on those same connections in the interim while hoping to find a new long-term home in neighbouring Goonellabah.



a teacher before settling down where the Richmond and Wilsons Rivers meet in Coraki.

For a man who has been behind the lens, capturing so much history in real time over the years, the events that saw his house flooded occurred far faster than ever envisioned.

"I realised the water starting to come up and thought 'I better get out of here,' but I couldn't find my cat [Sweetie]," says Colin.

"By the time I found my cat, I'd lost my car as the water was too far up, I was there from midday until about five or six o'clock.

"I'd rung the police - a couple of guys with a boat came and they said, 'Do you need a lift?'"

Left to deal with the fallout at a church-turned-evacuation centre in town, the shock of losing so much so suddenly took an unexpectedly compassionate turn when a young girl named Asia 'adopted' Colin into her family.

"She started looking after me and introduced me to her family; the parents are terrific, she's the second of four children."

"They've lost their house, in fact, the house has moved about ten feet, so they brought me with them to Goonellabah.

"They're staying in a big trailer camper, I've got a little space with my cat, and little Asia said, 'I've put a chair in the shade for you.'

"I'll remember that all my life, how this little girl pulled me into the family - beautiful."

Spending time with the family whilst planning his next steps, the Society has been able to assist Colin with financial aid at one of the several recovery centres located across the region.

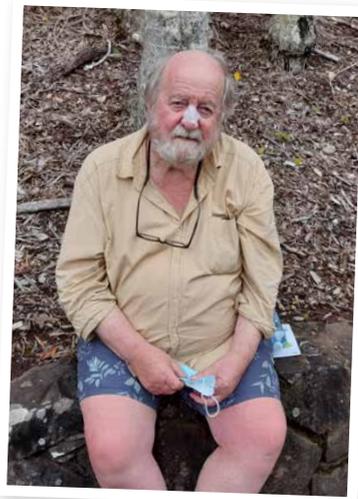
COLIN

It is said that every photo tells a story.

For Colin Beard, his is one of humanity in the face of hardship.

Living a well-travelled life as a photographer, capturing icons of sixties rock including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix, his diverse work has also been seen in major newspapers, fashion magazines and Australian Geographic.

More recently, Colin has shared his decades of knowledge as



"I'm amazed at the generosity, money's been put in my account which is going to help me pay new bonds, it's incredible."

While many residents impacted by the floods are determined to rebuild in the community, Colin sees his next chapter elsewhere and is working with his ex-wife to head south and start over closer to services.

"I could've tried to find a place here, but there's so many people looking and at my age it's time to be with more friends.

"I'll be close to her and also on a railroad line, that's the plan at the moment."



Celebrating a century of Vinnies shops

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is celebrating the foundation of its statewide retail activities and the charitable works they help fund.

In early April 1922 a group of ten shirt-sleeved men, two smoking pipes, all holding tools — a saw, spades, a hammer, trowel and a sieve for working soil — posed for a photograph that is now treasured in the history of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW.

Unfortunately, only two of their names are known – W.J. Coogan and D. Mulquinney.

The purpose of their gathering, in an earthen-floored, former blacksmith's shed in a paddock in the Sydney suburb of Newtown, was a working bee to prepare the building for what the sign behind them announced as the 'St Vincent de Paul Waste Collection Depot'.

There are two captions to this photo.

One, a typed note stuck to the back of the original print, reads,

"First movement in connection with what is now known as the Vincentian Welfare Stores was inaugurated. [Already the name was changing.]

**THE
STORES
ORGANISATION**

Aims and Objectives

To further the work of visitation of the poor in their own homes by providing depots for the receipt of clothes and furniture required to alleviate their distress. Such depots or shops to also provide families on lower incomes with good quality clothes at low prices. To give further opportunity to the members of the Society to bear witness to Christ by taking an active part in the quarterly drives, a feature of most parishes today.

The Birth of a dream...

NEWTOWN, 1922
The first store was established in a disused stable at Newtown in 1922. From that humble beginning grew the Stores Organisation as we know it today. Many seemingly insurmountable difficulties were encountered and overcome by the first Stores Brothers, to whom the Society owes an immense debt of gratitude.

CROWS NEST, 1969

One of our more modern stores servicing the lower North Shore area to Lindfield. The upper North Shore extending through to Brooklyn is covered by Hornsby store. These two stores between them collect some 170,000 lbs. of clothing annually for distribution to the poor.

...and the Growth

1947: 6 stores only in Sydney area.
1955: First country store opened (Mudgee).
1955-69: Further 64 country and 28 city stores opened.
1969: A total of 99 stores now operating.

"Established early in 1922 the first start was made in a paddock in Newtown on which mountains of manure had to be raked up and carted away and a dilapidated shed in the corner was made capable of being used, by a group of volunteer Brothers who went out for three or four Saturdays."

The manure, it might be noted, was sold to local gardeners and the funds put towards the upgrade of the premises.

The other caption, headed 'Willing Workers at the Waste Collection Depot', appeared in a report in *Freeman's Journal*, a popular Catholic-based paper launched in Sydney in 1850.

"The above snap gives an idea of the enthusiasm with which the Sydney brothers [a term for Vincentians] have taken up the work of the Waste Collection Bureau."

The report continued, "A depot was recently secured in one of the best parts of Newtown [666 King Street, not far from today's Vinnies shop, located at number 187] but the shed itself, and the fencing and gates, were in a most dilapidated condition..."

"When these various jobs are completed the depot will be capable of holding any quantity of useless and refuse articles that may be donated... last week's deliveries included a cartload of furniture, another of timber and glass from a demolished building, a wire dummy such as is used by dressmakers, a bath, and a couple of wash-tubs.



THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY
NOW HAS IN OPERATION

TWO DEPOTS FOR UNWANTED AND USELESS ARTICLES.

No. 380 King Street, Newtown
(Near Railway Bridge),

No. 346A Parramatta Road, Petersham
(Near Cannon Street).

You can materially help the Society by sending to either of the Depots all kinds of useless and unwanted articles, such as:—

Furniture.	Men's Clothing.	Tooth Paste Tubes.	Shaving Tubes.
Bedsteads.	Women's Clothing	Whisky Capsules.	Wine Capsules.
Paper.	Boots and Shoes.	Mirrors.	Silver Paper.
Bottles.	Tools of all kinds.	Gas Fittings.	Umbrellas
Baths.	Old iron.	Lead.	(Men's and Women's).

Send a Post Card to either address, or 'phone L1896, and the Society's Motor Lorry will immediately call.

"It will be seen that nothing, from a needle to an anchor, goes to waste at the depot, and everything means money for the Society's good works."

Before long the converted shed – "dark and dingy... most unsuitable for its purpose..." – would be unable to handle the quantity and variety of donated items, and other premises were being sought. King Street was again the focus.

The second move brought the Depot to No. 380, and by 1929 the business, for such it had become, opened a second depot in Parramatta Road, Petersham. By now there was an added focus on not only raising money for good works but providing affordable necessities for people of limited means, for example what was called "left off" men's and boys' clothing.

In 1930, *Freeman's* noted the Society's support for those in need totalled more than £40,000, a massive sum at the time (in 2020-21 the Society would spend \$95.2M in the

areas of people in need, homelessness and mental health, disability and capacity building and housing services).

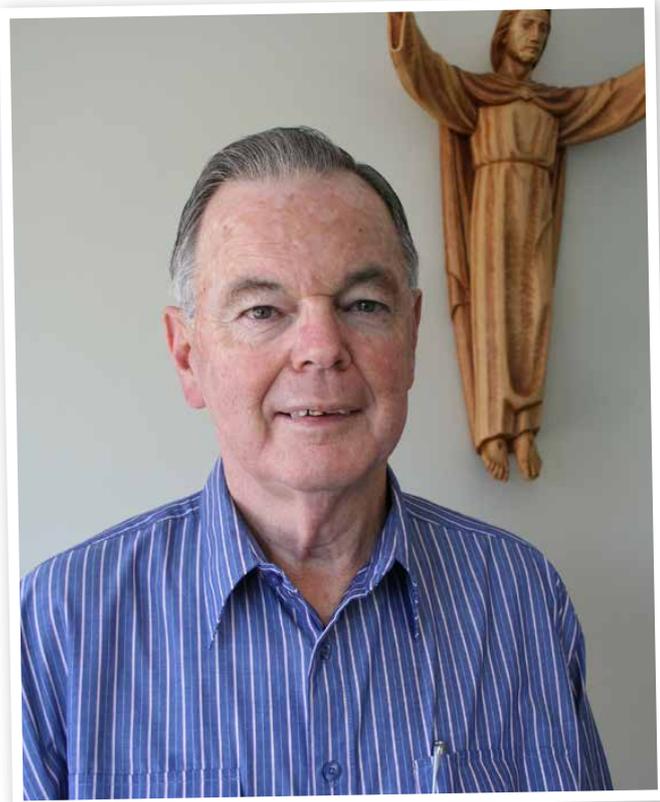
Over the years, the Society's retail outlets have had various names, from the Waste Collection Depots of the 1920s to the Vincentian Welfare Stores (from 1940), St Vincent de Paul Society Stores (1959), St Vincent de Paul Centres (1972) and a range of colloquial names, from thrift, bargain, charity and op shops through to the Vinnies Shops branding of today.

The Society, and Australian society at large, managed to weather the twin shocks of the Depression and the Second World War, gradually returning to normality. By 1947 the Society was operating six stores, or Centres, in the Sydney area, opening the first country shop, in Mudgee, in 1955, and a further 64 country and 28 city stores up to 1969. Not quite the ton, but close. By the 1970s this milestone would be reached and surpassed. The rest, as they say, is history. Today's shops, totalling 227 and counting, stock a wide range of quality clothing, household goods and bric a brac, needles perhaps, although rarely anchors.

Vinnies retail sales in the 2020-21 year totalled \$67.6 million, an increase on the previous year, which had been affected by COVID-19 closures.

As well as the coronavirus there have been other major challenges, including bushfires, which hit the east coast in 2019-20, and the devastating flooding in northern NSW in 2022. These events caused temporary shop closures, damage to buildings and stock, and an impact on shop volunteers, who today number more than 5,000.

As in the past, however, resilience has prevailed and the proud tradition of receiving and reselling pre-loved goods continues on.



Much loved Vincentian led by example

Vale Ray Reynolds
12 January 1939 – 5 March 2022

On 2 March 2013 the *Canterbury-Bankstown Express* ran a story about the recent commissioning of Ray Reynolds as the State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW at St Luke's Catholic Church in the Sydney suburb of Revesby.

Nine years later, at the same church, a funeral mass would be held to farewell Mr Reynolds and celebrate his long and dedicated service to the Society, which he had joined as a member even before leaving Dubbo for the wider world at the age of eighteen.

The article outlined Mr Reynolds' then 58 years of service and membership of the Revesby Conference. It noted his previous career with Telstra and the ABC, and as the

director of broadcast telecommunications for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee. He continued to be the chairman of the St Vincent de Paul Housing Company.

Feeling honoured by his appointment, Mr Reynolds said, "I have been blessed to be a member of this incredible Society for so long. I can say that I have never seen such a united and coordinated response to addressing poverty. It is very rewarding to be a part of."

Prior to his appointment, Ray Reynolds had been chair of the Society's aged care division and played a leading role in the sale of those operations when it decided to exit that field of work.

The heading in the *Express* was an apt summary of his years of selfless commitment: "Ray Reynolds leads by example..."

At the funeral mass for Mr Reynolds on 18 March 2022 Denis Walsh, elected to the State Presidency in 2015 when Mr Reynolds' term of office was completed, offered condolences on behalf of the Society to Maria Reynolds and the immediate and extended Reynolds family on the passing of a loving husband, father, grandfather, and, near the end of his life, great-grandfather.

In his eulogy, one of three delivered at the mass, Mr Walsh noted that the late Vincentian had been a member of the Society for nearly seventy years and had continued his involvement with the Revesby conference.

"Ray, with his business background, was able to lead the Society through a number of positive and very important governance, care and assistance and financial matters so as to ensure the financial sustainability of the organisation, including its shops, its special works and services," Denis Walsh told the congregation.

"At the end of his four-year term as State Council President, he described how he was most proud of knowing that for each and every day of his term, the Society made a profound difference in the lives of men, women and children across towns and cities in NSW."

Ray Reynolds' extraordinary dedication to the Society continued to the very end of his life. From his hospital bed, at 6.54 am on the day before he died, he emailed from his phone to the Society advising that he had no problem with a certain alteration, signing off with "Kind regards Ray Reynolds".

As Denis Walsh told the gathering, "He joined the Society in service of the poor as a young man and remained a loyal member to the very end." As the newspaper had put it, "Ray Reynolds led by example".

Bushfire response: Cultural land management in Kempsey

The Bushfire Community Recovery and Community Development program has involved 3,850 people, so far, in its planned 78 activities.

One of the early partnerships the Society established was with the Thunggutti Land Council in Kempsey.

The Society supported the Land Council, which was directly impacted by the 2019 fires, with a grant to train young men from the community in both traditional and modern land management practices – the first of its kind in this area.

The training focused on traditional cultural or cool burning, and modern weed management using artificial and organic pesticides.

The group of 10 young men have continued to be supported with additional training and equipment and have now established themselves as a commercial land care/ management service called “Ngurra Mungan” (Old Camp) that is already getting work from the local community and government alike.

The project has had a significant positive impact on the Thunggutti community, empowering members, creating pride in their skills, and strengthening relationships with other parts of the community.

Thunggutti Land Council CEO, Arthur Bain, said, “The Vinnies grant and ongoing support provided the seed funding for an ever-expanding opportunity to improve the physical, mental, social, and cultural health of the community.

“From the initial cultural burn at Mungay Creek, a relationship of mutual respect has been built between the Thunggutti mob and non-Indigenous neighbours.”

The land care team practiced their skills on a portion of land generally referred to by Thunggutti as “The old Mish”.

They were able to clear the area of invasive weeds and establish a cultural walk trail, which opens up further opportunities for cultural tourism and traditional storytelling.



Bushfire response: helping remote communities

The Bushfire Recovery and Community Development (BRCD) program is working with a remote community called Wyaliba, which is in the Glenn Innes LGA and home to around 100 households.

Wyaliba was right on the frontlines of the fires and over 50% of the community’s dwellings were destroyed or damaged.

Wyaliba has struggled for over 18 months in trying to gain rebuilding approvals for residents – a more difficult process than before due to higher, more stringent standards for ensuring homes can be more bushfire resistant. There are also complicated legal issues going back to when the community was founded in the 70s.

BRCD has organised for a planning and building expert to work with the community over several months.

The aim is to create a consolidated community redevelopment plan that includes some rebuilding of individual houses, as well as safe spaces for the community to use as part of a wider community emergency management plan.

FINDING A VOICE IN SONGWRITING



(L-R) Tom, Heather and Omar (OLC Music Coordinator) at the Ozanam Learning Centre music studio.

In addition to providing people with shelter, food and clothing, the services operated by the Society allow people to express themselves creatively.

Songbirds is one such program, run in collaboration with the Community Restorative Centre, that has seen members of the Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC) community tell their stories through music.

Tom's story

"Music for me has a power to save, a power to move, a power to create."

There is heft to a life lived in the way Tom speaks about music and song writing.

Contributing the blues-toned track 'Shadowlands' to the Songbirds project, Tom has been able to give voice to a story that first started on the other side of the world.

Growing up in the UK before moving to Australia to make a life in 1976, his career as a social worker took a tragic turn when the breakdown of his marriage left him homeless.

Spending three years on the streets of Sydney, including a stay at the Matthew Talbot Hostel, before finding his feet once more, a constant through all that life has offered up has been music.

Coming into contact with the Ozanam Learning Centre from its earliest days in the 2000s, Tom's involvement with Songbirds has given him the skills to appreciate the structure of song writing and the tension and release present within music.

Taking part in additional programs at the Ozanam Learning Centre, including Music to My Ears, where he performs as a member of the Forbes Street band, Tom finds that, irrespective of where people come from, a sense of community and connection exists because of music.

"Music brings you together, that's all there is to it."

"It's fitting in, like a jigsaw puzzle and you put it together. That's how I look at it – and we make up a picture."

Heather's story

As a regular to the Ozanam Learning Centre in recent years, Heather finds the meaning the place carries can be explained in the simplest of terms.

"It gives you something to look forward to every week."

Growing up in Adelaide before moving to Sydney by way of Melbourne, Heather's life changed dramatically when an MRI scan revealed a diagnosis that forced her onto a disability pension.

Subsequently, coming into contact with the Ozanam Learning Centre before the onset of coronavirus, Heather's initial involvement in art classes offered at the Woolloomooloo precinct slowly turned into something more after a chance interaction with Omar, the OLC's music coordinator, piqued her musical curiosity.

"I would write heaps of words down on a page, but I didn't know how to put them in a structure. I didn't know what a verse, chorus or melody was either before I joined the band."

Contributing the song 'Narrow Road' to Songbirds, Heather is also responsible for designing the cover art for the album.

With the impact of COVID disrupting the day-to-day activities offered at the OLC over the past two years, Heather is looking forward to returning to the "family environment" of the service on a regular basis.

"The OLC has been really good, when COVID dies down I'll be coming here almost every day again – I like the place."

SongBirds is available to stream on Spotify and a limited CD run of 200 copies can be purchased through the Ozanam Learning Centre.



Getting a foot in the door – OLC hosts job readiness workshop

Staff from EST10, one of Sydney's leading recruitment agencies, hosted a free job readiness workshop at the Ozanam Learning Centre earlier this year.

The aim was to give participants an opportunity to gain the skills and confidence to stand out in the job market.

The workshop brought together a diverse group of attendees with varying job histories and life experiences.

Following an opening presentation from Roxanne Calder, EST10 Managing Director and author of *Employable – attributes to assure your working future*, participants were walked through where to find jobs online and in-person, how to put together a professional resume and tips to help take on interviews with confidence.

The EST10 team finished the day by spending time with each of the participants to better understand their individual circumstances and offer sound advice on how to get a foot in the door.

One of the attendees on the day, Martin, is hopeful about his chances of finding part-time work after being forced to defer his studies due to the impacts of COVID.

"It's been a reset period for me - I want to do something relevant to my skillset and experience," he explains.

Coming to Australia from Myanmar on a student visa six years ago, Martin has grown to feel at home in Sydney,

initially studying engineering before transferring to pursue his creative passions in music.

"Sydney has become like a home to me; I don't feel like an international student, I feel like a local."

"I'm hoping that I'll find a job in a few weeks' time."

EST10's involvement with the Society began after Roxanne participated in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout last year. Making a commitment to go beyond one night to make a difference to the lives of people experiencing disadvantage, the first job readiness workshop belatedly took place in the first quarter of 2022, following a delay brought on by the omicron lockdown across NSW.

Job readiness workshops are just one of the many programs offered at the Ozanam Learning Centre, a service run by the Society providing a safe and welcoming space for people to gain skills and express themselves in an inclusive community.

Plans are underway to hold further job readiness workshops hosted by EST10 in June.



30 Years of Service

A lot has changed over the past three decades, however a constant throughout that time has been Denis Corkill's involvement with the Society.



Receiving a lifetime membership certificate in recognition "for dedicated years of serving Christ in the poor with love, respect and dignity", Denis first joined the St Mary's Conference on 1 January 1992.

Generously giving of himself across various positions over that time, Denis remains a beloved member of the Conference and neighbouring Our Lady of the Rosary parish.

Above: Lifetime membership Certificate presented to Denis by Anthony Ruzgas, ex-President Nepean region.



Acknowledgment plaque unveiled on Wiradjuri land

Our Forbes Conference and shop celebrated the mounting of a plaque of Acknowledgement recognising the lands of the traditional owners, the Wiradjuri people.

Members and volunteers invited local First Nations groups, along with representatives from local schools, council and other support agencies in the area to gain greater understanding of Wiradjuri history and culture.

Local elder Aunty Aileen Allen commenced the event with a Welcome to Country, which was followed by an overview of the Society's Reconciliation Action Plan and the good works of the local Conference and shop.

Acknowledgement plaques for all buildings in the West region are being prepared, with similar events to recognise the lands of the traditional owners being planned over the coming months.



Members farewelled on the day (L-R): Terry Wynne, Vineyards Regional President; Brother David Hayes, Spiritual Advisor; Paul Gleeson, RAFTS Vice President; Denise Lucas, Twinning Officer; John McKendry, Central Council President.

Maitland/Newcastle Members Farewelled

A long overdue catch-up commemorated a changing of the guard for members across the Maitland/Newcastle Central Council.

After completing his term as Central Council President last October, John McKendry was belatedly farewelled in-person by incoming President Brian Halligan at St Philip's Church, Kotara.

Following formalities, including speeches from Brian, John, Sister Carmel Hanson and Deacon Vince Ryan, a morning tea facilitated by Mary Ryan was enjoyed by all, including Clare Van Doorn who called in from flood-affected Lismore to commemorate the occasion.

A hand up for students

The South East Sydney Regional Council has been supporting disadvantaged students for six years through its School Aid program.

Schools in the area are invited to express interest in grants and, once approved, are provided with funds from the Society to assist at-risk students with breakfast and lunch clubs, school uniforms, excursion expenses and textbooks

Grants totaling in excess of \$400,000 have been distributed to schools in the region during that time, helping to ensure that more than 4,000 children aren't left behind.

Meet our new State Council President

At 72, State Council President, Paul Burton, has been a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society for close to 40 years.

He was raised in a small farming community in New England in northern NSW but his transport and logistics career kept him mobile, working out of Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, and Tamworth, before retirement in nearby Manilla.

Crediting his grandfather's legacy as a Vincentian for inspiration to join the Society, he did so in the 1980s while living in south-western Sydney.

"In our parish, at the time, we found that there were people coming from the northern side of Sydney and doing what they could to help out people in that neighbouring suburb.

"And then I got to understand that we were surrounded by a lot of public housing estates," he says.

Collaborating with another Vincentian, Eddie Solarz, the two men established the momentum for the founding of the conference of St Thomas More at Ruse in Campbelltown.

"It was a real eye-opener for us and there was real passion in that newly-formed conference to get out and try and make a difference," he says.

Mr Burton says he has stayed with the Society because of the people, the mission, the spirituality, and the Society's heritage.

"When you're with a group of Vincentians you're always in good company.

"The main thing that spurs my spirituality with the Society is learning about those that have gone before us.

"Reading Frederic Ozanam's letters, he was a great letter-writer and a great communicator.

"And what he did in those few short years of his life was immense and the worldwide organisation that he has created it is something that is really exceptional and from such humble beginnings.

"I think that's particularly inspired me," he says.

A more recent source of inspiration is the Society's response to the floods in the Northern Rivers.



"Our members and the people that have been involved in coordinating the response to that have been absolutely exceptional and inspirational.

"And the membership really has to know what they're part of and this is a tremendous example.

"Part of my agenda going forward as the State Council President is to make sure that that knowledge and access to that knowledge and appreciation of all of that is out there for membership," he says.

Mr Burton says he nominated as a presidential candidate on the advice of a colleague who told him: "You are a grassroots Vincentian with a business background and this is what we need."

"And I took that to heart a bit and I looked at all the grassroots involvement of my whole history up to now.

"And it's been pretty much that way with my involvement with the Society, even as Central Council President, I still get involved right at grassroots levels," he says.

Asked what his message to members in NSW is, his answer is simple: "I'm available."

"If anybody feels that they need to talk to me about any particular issue – and I don't care what time of the week it is, what time of the day it is – I will make sure that I give them the time.

"If it means that we're going to enhance the mission of the Society in any way, they have my attention straight away," he says.

CORPORATE PARTNERS STEP UP FOR THE COMMUNITY

IGA Christmas Appeal

A very big THANK YOU to IGA and their customers who have once again made a huge difference in the lives of people doing it tough through the Christmas and holiday period. IGA raised over \$360,000 nationally for the Vinnies Christmas Appeal through the sale of Vinnies Christmas Bauble tokens at the checkout and products with a Community Chest ticket over the months of November and December.



IGA stepped up once again during the Flood Appeal by donating \$300,000 from its network of retailers to affected communities in NSW and QLD, as well as selling \$2 Flood Appeal tokens to IGA customers at the checkout.

Abergeldie

Abergeldie has renewed and raised their funding for the Night Patrol Van in Parramatta and Mount Druitt over the next three years. The partnership will see Abergeldie staff donating their time to volunteer on the Van Service on a regular basis, providing a hot drink and meal, but most importantly companionship, to the people accessing the van service.

Grill'd

Through the Grill'd '8 and Donate' program, for every eight burgers purchased, customers can choose to donate a meal to local people in need. Grill'd customers donated 6,380 burgers in NSW in 2021, with Grill'd using the funds allocated for each loyalty burger to support the Sydney Night Patrol Van Service. This year Grill'd will close its Galleries Restaurant in Sydney for the first Tuesday of each month, starting in May. It will provide an exclusive night for people accessing our Sydney Night Patrol Van Services to have a free meal, including a burger, chips and a drink and social sit-down eating experience. The first event was a great success with over 50 people attending who receive regular support from our Night Patrol Vans.

Port Waratah Coal Services

We have been successful in a partnership application with Port Waratah Coal Services who will provide funding to the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service in Newcastle. The funding will allow Vinnies to support 27 men and five families and provide them with the essentials they need as they leave crisis accommodation into long-term housing, rebuild their lives and reconnect with the community.

ripen

We extend our thanks to Matt and the team at ripen for providing the funding and hands on work, with the help of East Built, Outside Space, and DSY Media to restore Elsie's Women's Refuge. The support has helped provide new refrigerators and furniture, as well as refreshing and uplifting several areas — indoors and out — around the refuge.



Amazon

Thank you to Amazon for their generosity in donating much-needed essentials and materials such as water, towels, electrical generators, tents, sleeping bags, and cooktops that were provided to people impacted by the floods and displaced from their homes.

Flood appeal donors

A huge thanks to the generous companies that provided support to the Vinnies Flood Appeal, donating over \$1.8 million in financial and in-kind support to assist people devastated by the floods.

A special mention to the following corporate organisations for their significant contributions: Amazon, IGA, Metcash, NewsCorp, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, oOh! Media, Australian Chinese Buddhist Society, Whitehaven Coal, Bondi Hospitality Group, The Depot Bondi, Lyone Foundation, Michael Hill, Gelato Messina, Lander & Rogers.

NSW Vinnies Community Sleepouts – shining the light on homelessness in regional NSW

The NSW Vinnies Community Sleepouts will take place once again in mid-August 2022 to shine a spotlight on homelessness in regional NSW.

Now in its fifth year, the Sleepouts will revert back to in-person events after COVID-19 forced events online in 2020 and 2021. This is an important event where locals can support locals by coming together in solidarity

to raise vital funds to support people experiencing hardship in their local area and gain a deeper understanding of homelessness.

Recent years have been extremely tough with back-to-back natural disasters, a global pandemic and now the increasing cost of living, so the need for assistance is greater than ever before. The event intends to attract over 550 participants state-wide where community members will brave the cold in 14 locations across NSW, aiming to raise more than \$350,000 for local Vinnies homelessness services and programs.

People can join as a team with their local sports club, business, community group or sign up as an individual to rally together to make a real difference in their patch of NSW. To register or give now go to www.vinnies.org.au/communitysleepout. Events will all take place on Friday 19 August 2022 in the following locations:

- Albury
- Armidale
- Bathurst
- Central Coast
- Deniliquin (Thursday 18 August 2022)
- Dubbo
- Fred's Place, Tweed Heads
- Hunter Region
- Orange
- Southern Highlands
- Tamworth
- Wagga Wagga
- Western Sydney



Fundraising for floods

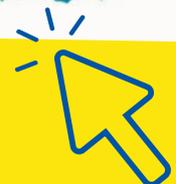
The community fundraising portal has been inundated by generous members of the public, community groups, conferences and corporates wanting to fundraise in support of the Vinnies Flood Appeal.

Through the Community Fundraising Website - fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au we were able to help these supporters to set up their own fundraising pages on our portal, allowing them to promote their participation in the Vinnies Flood Appeal to their social and professional networks and gather donations on behalf of Vinnies.

In total, we raised \$214,000 across this platform for the Flood Appeal, directly supporting the recovery efforts in flood affected regions across NSW and QLD.

Notable contributions include St Vincent's Health Australia, who kickstarted their campaign with a \$150,000 donation and have dollar-matched their employees' donations as well.

We are so appreciative of these community members, conferences and supporters.



"I want to give her what she wants which, at the moment, is gymnastics and swimming. She is a sporty kid and I love it. Because when I was young, I always wanted to do sports, but my parents couldn't afford it."

THE VINNIES WINTER APPEAL

helping families
like Leah and
Charlotte



This year, our Winter Appeal is focused on ending domestic violence, the campaign's theme is Make it Stop.

To help us do that, Leah shared her story – and that of her daughter Charlotte – with us.

At just 22, Leah has been failed by many people in her life who have been closest to her.

From an early age, her story is one of people around her deliberately trying to remove her ability to choose for herself.

Control of another person is the driving force behind domestic violence, and it is something so common that one in six Australian women have experienced it at the hands of a current or former partner.

At 11, Leah's mother would leave her caring for her younger sister on her own.

Her father was verbally abusive with Leah and physically abusive to her sister.

At 16, she found herself couch surfing and then living in a youth hostel.

Even finding short-term accommodation there came at an emotional cost.

"The only way I could get help was if my parents said they didn't want me. They confirmed that which hurt."

Shortly after, she met her boyfriend.

Leah became pregnant and her boyfriend didn't want the child. Pregnancy is a time of heightened risk for women who experience domestic violence.

After fleeing the violence, at 17, Leah delivered a baby daughter six weeks premature.

Alone, at 18, Leah then met her second boyfriend, and the couple would be together for the next two years.

During that time, he was physically abusive, and financially controlling.

"It started with threats. He would hit me.

"I was just angry because I wanted to protect my kid."

Leah was scared and wondered where she would go and how she could protect herself and her daughter.

Leah ended the relationship after a particularly traumatic experience.

"I was scared of everyone, everything. The pain, the aching."

Leah turned to her sister who called an ambulance and Leah ended up in the hospital.

"I was really broken, but it was where I actually got help."

This led to Leah being put in touch with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The Society has provided Leah with support to find housing, food, clothes, furniture, white goods, and emotional support.

"When I got there, the biggest challenge was dealing with the PTSD. I was loving life so much where I was having major highs from going to the beach and finding that calm. And then I would have huge lows, and nightmares, and insomnia. And I didn't feel like I deserved it, but I knew my daughter deserved it."

The assistance has opened an array of choices for her that had been closed due to the neglect and abuse she had experienced from those closest to her.

Leah's main goal is to provide the kind of life for her daughter that she didn't have as a child.

"I want to give her what she wants which, at the moment, is gymnastics and swimming. She is a sporty kid and I love it. Because when I was young, I always wanted to do sports, but my parents couldn't afford it."

"I just want her to be this strong, independent little woman. And I think she already is. Trust me, she is boss – she's house boss."

Nationally, one woman a week is killed on average by a perpetrator of domestic violence.

At the same time it is important to remember that it does not have to be physical and can take many forms, including financial control and social isolation.



Domestic violence is the number one driver of homelessness for women and children.

Last year, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW helped more than 2,400 women escape domestic violence.

It's estimated that there are 2,400 more who have had to return to a violent partner because the only other choice was homelessness.

There is a similar number in the state who have escaped domestic violence into homelessness.

Women like Leah deserve a better choice than continuing to remain in a violent home or leaving to live in their car or worse.



You can help us help them by donating to the Vinnies Winter Appeal at <https://www.vinnies.org.au/nswwinterappeal> or by calling **13 18 12**.



From humble beginnings to becoming an institution of the Australian fundraising calendar, the Vinnies CEO Sleepout has produced another tremendous result with more than \$9.25 million raised nationally.

Taking place for the 17th time across the country on Thursday 23 June, more than 1,400 business and community leaders rose to the challenge of raising vital funds and awareness in support of people experiencing homelessness.

This included 425 in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong – together they raised \$3.1 million to help the Society continue its good works in New South Wales.

The Society will be able to transform the lives of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness by using the funds raised to provide accommodation, food, healthcare and individualised support designed with the ultimate goal of providing a safe and permanent home.

Deborah Knight, 2GB and Channel 9 Presenter, once again acted as Master of Ceremonies for the night, while Joe Hildebrand, Sky News Presenter and NewsCorp columnist, hosted the pre-event live-stream.

For Jack de Groot, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, the 2022 theme of 'early intervention' provided participants with an opportunity to understand the importance of the Society's work.

Particularly, the misery that can be avoided if someone is helped before they slip into homelessness.

"It is incredibly heartening to see the outpouring of generosity from participants and the community who have donated to this year's event," Mr de Groot said.

"While donations will help us alleviate that hardship in the short-term, it is the gathering of thought leaders we see here tonight who can use their influence to help provide change in the long-term."

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council President, Paul Burton, emphasised that money raised at the event will benefit people across the state and the nation.

"There are Vinnies services throughout NSW, so we can provide help where it is needed.

"Homelessness, housing affordability, housing scarcity, and domestic violence are faced by people from the coast to inland centres," Mr Burton said.

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout originated in 2006 when Western Sydney businessman Bernie Fehon elected to forgo a traditional fundraising dinner by holding an event modelled on sleepouts run by the Society in schools.

After raising a modest total just under \$5,000 in its first year, the Vinnies CEO Sleepout has gone on to raise more than \$80 million nationally over the lifetime of the event.

SYDNEY

The Sydney event returned to White Bay Cruise Terminal, Rozelle for the fourth time with participants braving the conditions on one of the coldest nights of the year.

Leaders from across business, community and government heard first-hand accounts of resilience in the face of adversity from people who have been supported by the Society.

They heard from people who had experienced homelessness, domestic violence and other forms of disadvantage.

One family spoke to the participants from the stage about how the Society helped them when they needed it and how it had opened the door to possibilities like education for their children who now have bright futures ahead of them.

Emmanuel Roussakis, Director at Aussie Industries, finished as the leading fundraiser in Sydney – and NSW overall – with a phenomenal total of more than \$172,000.

NEWCASTLE

Participants from across the Hunter slept out in the courtyard of the social housing complex operated by the Society in Cardiff.

With over 4,000 applicants, including 300 listed for priority housing, on the waitlist for housing throughout the region, participants saw the direct benefits of providing people with a stable place to live and wraparound support services.

More than \$155,000 was raised by the participants in attendance which will be used to provide services offered by the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service in Wickham.

Adam Boyle, Pegasus CEO, topped the Newcastle tally with his personal best total of more than \$22,000. Having taken part in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout each year since 2011, the local businessman has brought in more than \$107,000 in total.

WOLLONGONG

Illawarra-based business and community leaders provided direct assistance to people experiencing hardship as part of a revamped Vinnies CEO Sleepout concept in Wollongong.

Participants prepared a meal for locals experiencing hardship at the Coniston Hub before learning about the



pressure leading to a growing number of people needing to seek assistance from the Society.

Many have jobs that would have previously allowed home ownership or rental but with the affordability crisis and scarcity of housing this is no longer the case.

The event raised more than \$116,000 which will be used to assist Vinnies Vans in the region and provide temporary accommodation to men at risk of homelessness at John Purcell House in Nowra.

Taking part in his eighth Vinnies CEO Sleepout, Daniel Munk, Aster Group CEO, maintained his standing as the highest local fundraiser with more than \$37,000; since first sleeping out in 2015, Mr Munk has raised over \$214,000 to support services in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions.

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout continues to make a profound difference to thousands of lives every year. The event is made possible thanks to the ongoing dedication of our members, volunteers, employees, sponsors, and participants.

With the funds raised we will be able to restore hope and provide certainty through food, clothing, healthcare, accommodation and the support to gain long-term stability.

Registrations are now open to take part in the 2023 Vinnies CEO Sleepout: www.ceosleepout.org.au.



When reaching out for help led to long-term employment

Andrew has been working with the St Vincent de Paul Society for seven years.

He helps sort clothes donated to the Society but, over the years, has worked in the logistics arm of the charity, doing deliveries and pickups for the many goods that need transporting.

Prior to that, for a period of more than two decades, he was dropping in and out of homelessness.

"I lived on the streets for eight months solid. That was just before Vinnies and before that I was couch surfing, before that I lived on the streets again.

"So, I did a fair few times on the streets and then I sort of found myself even more homeless," Andrew says.

"I hit ice, so my drug habit made me end up, realistically, with Vinnies.

"I had an ice addiction, alcohol addiction, I got to the point I couldn't live no more.

"I handed myself into Royal North Shore Hospital and they submitted me to the mental ward.

"I was just psychotic. I was out of it.

"And they said to me, look we'll try getting you into rehab."

This is what brought him to Freeman House in Armidale, where he participated in the rehabilitation program for four months.

"They helped me in the sense of they got me a house where I'm living still, to this day.

"Freeman House supplied me with a brand-new fridge, washing machine, and everything, so that was very nice of them as well," Andrew says.

He also credits the Society with supplying him with furniture for his new house.

Even though, at this point, he has lived there for about eight years, after such a long period experiencing homelessness, Andrew had some concerns when he first moved in.

"I didn't know how I was going to go living in a house, paying bills, doing this, doing that, cooking for myself,



trying to eat healthy, I just couldn't comprehend it at first because my head just wasn't there," he says.

At the same time, he took up an offer to volunteer with the Society.

"So, I kept my mind active by volunteering for eight months, nine months, and then someone left and opened up a lot of hours and so they actually offered me a position," he says.

"So, Vinnies has taught me a lot. I've got over a lot of issues. I've found a lot more, better friends than what I used to have.

"Life is going on the up not on the down," Andrew says.

His supervisor, Matthew Taylor, says Andrew is a valuable member of the team.

"He's sort of the epitome of what Vinnies does and we're just lucky to have him here, so that he can share his story.

"He's quite open about his experience as well. Not just the experience but the healing process and how you go about that.

"There's also the work side that Andrew does, you know, he gets in there and enjoys his work, enjoys the volunteers and everyone at work enjoys his presence as well," Matthew says.

Reaching out for help

Ryan has had time to dwell on the past.

Right now, he is choosing to look ahead.

Going down a self-described downward spiral that culminated in a prison sentence, the prospect of re-entering society without support or a place to live loomed as a grim possibility.

"I saw ads on TV where people are on the street and thought to myself 'is that going to be me in a couple of weeks?' – it was hard and very confronting to realise the position that I was in."

With no family or personal ties in New South Wales and few housing alternatives to draw upon, a call to Vinnies at the urging of his parole officer began the process of starting over.

Undertaking an initial phone assessment with the staff at Edel Quinn, a Vinnies service for men at risk or



experiencing homelessness in the Riverina, Ryan received a much-needed sense of certainty with an offer to stay at Edel Quinn upon his release from custody.

"The first phone interview I did was very emotional for me; I'm 36-years-old having to reach out to somebody and ask for help, I've never had to do that before."

Remaining in regular contact with staff during the final five months of his sentence, the assistance Ryan has received from Edel Quinn extends far beyond a place to sleep.

Gaining a new sense of perspective on life with the support of Vinnies, Ryan is looking forward to finding work and having a home of his own, as well as opening himself up to accepting help from others.

"My life was at its lowest point, I didn't see many ups to it, I didn't see much going on – Vinnies and Edel Quinn were there for me. They showed me that there is light at the end of the tunnel."

'In good hands' – John's story

John is one of the residents at Jim Da Silva Farm, a support service located in the Southern Highlands offering a home to men experiencing homelessness and other complex needs.

First arriving at 'the Farm' in 2017, following an admission to a mental health ward, staff referred John to a rehabilitation service as a means of treating his struggles with alcohol without having to exit him from the drug and alcohol-free service and into the likelihood of homelessness.

Having previously struggled to live independently on the private rental market or in social housing as a result of an acquired brain injury, history with drug and alcohol abuse and periods of incarceration, the help offered through the rehabilitation program led John to return to the Farm in mid-2019.

With a new outlook on life and the stability of housing offered with wrap-around support, John was approved

for funding through the NDIS to meet his needs and reconnected with his father and sister after years of estrangement.

Going on to gain skills to live independently with confidence, such as cooking, budgeting and managing appointments, John currently works part-

time while also engaging with the wider community by attending a local college for lead lighting, barista and literacy and numeracy courses.

Spending his spare time gardening and tending to the 14 chickens that supply residents with fresh eggs each day, John has stability in his life and sees himself "in good hands at the Farm."





Members and social justice advocates from across the state converged on Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney for a day of advocacy and connection as part of the 2022 Social Justice Forum.

Beginning proceedings with a Welcome to Country from Yvonne Weldon and a spiritual reflection by Sister Carmel Hanson, an opening address from Brooke Simmons, Vice President Social Justice, highlighted the opportunities for change presented by the recent Federal Election.

Jack de Groot, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, facilitated a panel discussion on working to shape more just and compassionate communities. Speakers included Jihad Dib MP (NSW Member for Lakemba), Father Peter Smith (Promoter of Justice and Peace for the Archdiocese of Sydney) and Alice Salomon (Uniting).

Having launched the 'Build Homes, Build Hope' campaign at the previous Social Justice Forum in 2019, the afternoon session focussed on the Society's continued call for governments to increase the supply of social housing.

John Engeler, Shelter NSW CEO, provided a snapshot on the state of social housing in NSW, followed by a presentation from Michelle Fonti on the actions taken by the Society during the last three years of the 'Build Homes, Build Hope' campaign.

Members concluded the day by discussing campaign actions in the lead-up to the State Budget and NSW Election in 2023. One action agreed upon was a campaign to send handwritten letters to Dominic Perrottet, every day, leading up to the NSW Election in March.

Envisioning A Fairer Australia

St Vincent de Paul Society members called for A Fairer Australia during the 2022 Federal Election.

During the course of the campaign, which resulted in Labor winning government after nine years of the Liberal-National Coalition in power, our members engaged with candidates to discuss policies outlined in the election statement developed by National Council.

The election statement, titled 'A Fairer Australia', identified five key areas of action:

- Poverty and Inequality
- Homelessness and Housing
- People Seeking Asylum
- Secure Work
- First Nations justice

Members in the South region met with Labor MPs Stephen Jones (Whitlam) and Dr Mike Freeland

(Macarthur), while Vincentians in the marginal seat of Reid collaborated with other organisations to meet candidates.

Other members wrote to candidates in their electorates and attended candidate forums to raise issues highlighted in the A Fairer Australia statement.

Members reported that candidates appreciated being provided with local information on the Society's work in electorates supporting people experiencing housing stress, poverty and homelessness.

Our members will continue to meet with parliamentarians in order to form collaborative relationships in order to address local issues and shape crucial policies that directly impact the people we assist.



Tom Gersbach, Dr Mike Freeland, MP for Macarthur, and Patrick Jordan.



To learn more about engaging with your local MP, contact the Social Justice Team at: social.justice@vinnies.org.au.



Discover something new at North Belmont

Shoppers in Lake Macquarie and Newcastle have been flocking in to discover a bargain at the latest Vinnies Shop to open – North Belmont.

Commencing trade to the public in late February, following months of behind the scenes work from teams across the Society, the 200 square metre site is the 23rd Vinnies Shop located within the Maitland/ Newcastle region.

Official proceedings took place in early March with Father Gerard Mackie, Belmont Parish Priest, conducting a blessing and members of the Bahtabah Local Aboriginal Land Council welcoming attendees onto country before performing a smoking ceremony.

Speaking as Master of Ceremonies on the day, Phil Coyte, Director of Retail and Logistics, highlighted the direct impact shops make in enabling the delivery of services for people experiencing disadvantage and hardship.

"With the funds raised from our network of shops across the state, members from the Eastlakes Regional Council, covering Belmont, Charlestown, Swansea and neighbouring suburbs were able to support 969 people with \$208,000 in financial and material assistance during the past year," Mr Coyte said.

"This is all possible due to the efforts of members, volunteers and staff working together towards a common goal as One Society."

the drop

Some of fashion's leading brands from Australia and abroad collaborated with the Society on 'The Drop' as part of the centenary of Vinnies Shops in NSW.

Customers were provided with the opportunity to discover a new weekly 'drop' of designer clothing during April and May at our Brookvale, Paddington, Newtown, and Thirroul shops.

Kate Waterhouse, Nadia Fairfax and Paula Joye contributed some of their very own pre-loved items to support the campaign, while local brands Lee Mathews, Matteau, One Teaspoon, Scanlan Theodore, Shona Joy, active-streetwear P.E Nation, UK loved Boden, sunnies to the stars Local Supply, plus many more donated a generous amount of brand new goods, allowing shoppers to discover never been worn before items from their favourite brands.

More events are planned to commemorate 100 years since the first Vinnies Shop opened in Newtown, including volunteer thank you events across the regions and a commemorative magazine to be released later this year.



A lifetime of good works

Maurice O'Donoghue speaks with more than a hint of humility when reflecting upon his years of service as a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

"I have just hung around a little longer."

Honoured with Life Membership at St Mary's Church, Corowa last December in recognition of his 60 years of service, the 83-year-old Wahgunyah farmer has performed a variety of roles over that time, most notably acting as secretary of the local Corowa Conference for the past 25 years.

Developing a unique ability to succinctly reproduce handwritten and typed meeting minutes twice a month in his role as secretary, the self-described 'run-of-the-mill' member has seldom missed a meeting since joining the Society on 11 December 1961.

Born on 10 January 1939, Maurice has lived on the border of the Murray River for most of his days while spending his young working life carrying out jobs on the railways and shearing sheep for 30 years.

Following the passing of his father in 1990, Maurice returned to his family farm where he continues to tend the land to this day.

Through all that Maurice has seen over the years, attending Conference meetings and carrying out jobs as a Vinnies member has been a constant.

First attracting the attention of the Corowa Conference President through his involvement with the local church and Young Christian Workers organisation, Maurice was invited to join Vinnies as a 22-year-old.

"My first job was periodically mowing an old lady's lawn."

"I never thought at the time whether she donated any money for this duty. When you're young you're idealistic and it gave one pleasure to be helping people."

Other tasks he has performed during his six decades include visiting people in need of assistance in their homes, hospitals and aged care, cutting and delivering firewood, helping with the production of Christmas hampers, clearing out donation bins, fundraising and much more.

In reflecting on the impact Vinnies is able to make in communities every day, Maurice views individuals coming together for collective good as a key factor.

"The saying is that one person alone can only do so much, but a group is able to achieve a lot more.

"Experience is a great teacher, and a group of people are most likely to have much more than an individual. Also, one does more collectively because one doesn't want to let the team down."

While his role within the Society is less consistent from earlier days, Maurice can still be found each Sunday helping to put away donated goods and fulfilling his duties as Conference secretary.

"Now, my main thought is to allow those at the 'Coalface' to tackle the main work and I will be a back-up man when required."

Beloved by his fellow Conference members for all that he has done over the course of 60 years, Maurice remains humble as ever in the recognition of serving those in need within the community and supporting fellow members.

"I cannot say that there's been any overwhelming moments, but naturally one gets a certain satisfaction when one has arranged something that makes the recipient better off."

"Of course, working with generous people is itself a great reward.

"I've heard it said that we need the Society as much as it needs us, and I agree wholeheartedly."



(L-R) Past Corowa Presidents Arthur Campbell, Kevin Freeman & Peter Bates, Secretary Maurice O'Donoghue, and President Paul Lemmon.



A century of service in the Sutherland Shire

In 1899, with the St Vincent de Paul Society's presence spreading in the greater Sydney area, a group of early Vincentians reached out to people in need in the southern suburbs of Cronulla-Sutherland.

It was easier said than done, for their visitations would depend on saddling horses or hitching up a cart or buggy for a long ride to people's homes.

The area's first conference began in 1907 at Penshurst, with both St Patrick's Conference and St Aloysius Conference in Sutherland being formed on 19 February 1922. They were the 76th and 77th conferences in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Later that year, with the Depression years yet to arrive, a Society report noted the brothers were engaging in special works such as hospital visits and helping with school fees and books.

By the 1930s, times were tougher, as Fr Donovan discovered when he rode along the shoreline to Kurnell bringing essentials to jobless folk living in huts. In a stroke of fortune, his group was given horses left over from the classic film *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, set in the Arabian desert in WW1 but shot in the local sand dunes. Later, the priest would upgrade his horsepower to an ex-army 4WD.

The need for the Society's activities would only increase as the population swelled in the aftermath of another war and the southern spread of Sydney's population.

In 1950, the Caringbah Conference took up part of the area serviced by the Cronulla Conference, conducting

home visitations (400 in 1964, with members regularly accompanied by their wives), and over the coming years a range of special works, including investment in low-cost housing and respite care.

In 1973, the first women's conference in Cronulla was formed, with a celebratory mass held in St Aloysius Church – the beautifully appointed church, which in 2022 would host the celebratory mass for the first century of the Society's membership commitment to the Sutherland Shire. It dates from the same period.

The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Richard Umbers, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Sydney, who spoke about the Society's origins and the work of members, echoing the words of founder Frederic Ozanam: "No act of charity was foreign and no person served was alien to the Society."

Sutherland regional president Pat Cudmore added that Society members, historically and to this day, encountered many "sad stories of need".

The demands on Sutherland Shire regional conference members have been increasing, with a total of 550 instances of assistance provided in the last financial year, representing more than 1100 people helped. Nearly half of all people assisted were in government housing, with a further 39 per cent renting.

Such statistics, replicated in varying degrees across the state, confirm the importance of the work undertaken by the conference members of Sutherland Shire since the Society's expansion into this area a century ago.

Vinnies O-Week 2022

For university students, Orientation Week (or O-Week) is all about making the most of their time on campus — connecting with peers, engaging in club life and discovering groups of people with shared interests. Vinnies Youth members were present at campuses engaging with students and discussing the good works of the Society.



Vinnies attended 17 different O-Week events across 12 universities, including:

- University of Sydney
- University of NSW
- University of Technology Sydney
- University of Wollongong
- University of Newcastle
- University of New England (Armidale)
- Macquarie University
- University of Notre Dame
- Australian Catholic University (North Sydney, Strathfield and Blacktown)
- Campion College
- Western Sydney University
- Charles Sturt University (Wagga Wagga, Bathurst and Orange)

During O-Week, we received 800 expressions of interest to either volunteer or become a member of Vinnies, and we are in the process of onboarding close to 100 new members across the state.

Each university held a follow up social event with the new recruits, to welcome them into Society life and build comradery!

Our Vinnies university groups and young adult conferences are excited to continue serving their communities through programs such as buddies days, home visitations, sleepouts, fundraising and other activities throughout 2022.

Youth Leaders Come Together

Vinnies Youth leaders from across NSW came together in March for the State Youth Retreat to learn, collaborate and plan to serve their communities over the next 12 months.

The three-day event held at Long Point Conference Centre in Western Sydney saw speakers from across the Society and beyond attend, including:

- A group Q&A session with Vinnies CEO Jack de Groot and MVRO Executive Director Sam Crosby.
- Vinnies Services Executive Directors Niamh Mannion and Elaine Griffin spoke about the wide breadth of service provision across NSW
- Dimitrios Papalexis (2019 NSW Youth Worker of the year) facilitated an asset-based community development workshop for our youth leaders.

The State Youth Retreat is an annual event which brings together Youth Representatives and aspiring young leaders to enable peer support, networking, learning and leadership development.

Madeleine Sirris, Vice President for Youth, said of the young leaders: "These are not just tomorrow's leaders – they are leading and making a positive impact in their communities right now!"

"It's so fantastic to have everyone together, to be face to face and connecting with youth leaders from right across the state, you just can't beat that."

Other youth representatives, when asked of their thoughts noted "The retreat was super insightful and I learnt so much, connected well with others, and had the absolute best time!"

"I have left the retreat feeling renewed and inspired to put our dreams into reality. We have an amazing bunch of committed young leaders with great ideas to help grow the Society and its far-reaching impact across the state."



From Sicily to Riverstone, a migrant's dream comes true

**Vale Giombattista 'John' Cannata
(6/3/1928 – 2/12/19)**

Giombattista ('John') Cannata grew up in Comiso, a small town in the province of Ragusa on Sicily, a long way, geographically and culturally, from Riverstone in north-west Sydney, where he would spend the greater part of his long life.

In the 1950s, Australia was almost another planet for a young Sicilian who had lost his father at the age of two and never ventured beyond the island. John's care was shared by relatives, and in a country on the losing side of the conflict, every opportunity for a better life was worth considering.

In his early 20s, with little money and no contacts in the foreign land, the young man – yet to be known as John – embarked on the journey he knew was most likely to be one-way, at least for a long time.

His life is recounted by Gaetano ('Guy') Boncardo, Sydney-born but of Sicilian heritage, some 25 years younger, who became a close friend and would deliver the news that his late countryman, as he considered him, had left a generous bequest to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and to St John the Evangelist at Riverstone. Guy had little knowledge about John's financial affairs but was aware he had lived frugally and put money away for most of his years in the new country.

"John settled in the suburb of Ashfield and worked various labour jobs and as a night-shift worker cleaning school classrooms," Guy says.

"By the mid-1970s he had saved enough money to buy a block in Riverstone and build a tin storage shed and workshop. He also built a very basic three-room house made of concrete bricks which he made himself. It had a brick floor and a tin roof supported by recycled timber from which John also made his furniture."

True to his Italian roots, John was a keen gardener and got around town on his Vespa motor scooter. By 1990 he was ready to retire.

A lifelong Catholic, John was well known to the local parish priest, Fr Eugene Stockton, as was Guy who took up the priest's suggestion that he visit the elderly Sicilian.

"It was then that I came to know him well," Guy recalls. "He was a simple and very sincere man. He read his Italian bible often. He would enjoy a glass of wine and we would talk in our Sicilian dialect."

One day, his friend gave him the surprise of his life.

"He said he had some savings and showed me his bank book. The balance was substantial and I realised he could afford to have a proper house built and purchase new furniture."

In 2018, on his 90th birthday, Giombattista Cannata received a Papal Blessing from Pope Francis, a highlight of his religious life.

Familiar with the support Vinnies offers community members, Guy has followed the example of his friend and promised to gift the Society in his Will.

"It gave John great comfort to know his bequest was going to good causes, Vinnies and St John's, that he trusted," Guy adds.

"We will all remember John very fondly because of his simplicity and sincerity," Guy adds.

"It has been my privilege to have been his friend."

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is deeply appreciative of all donations received through its Wills and Bequests program, which benefits our charitable works with a wide variety of families and individuals in need of material and emotional support.





Hope

A brief reading from the gospel of John;

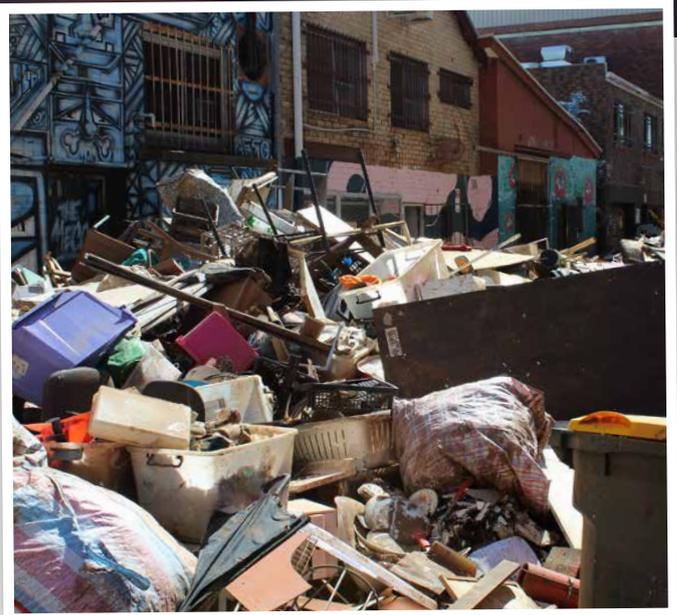
"Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Over the past few months, I have spent some time with our members, volunteers, and staff on the Far North Coast of NSW.

To be honest, it was an exhausting and difficult time. I sat with our people in the Recovery Centre in Lismore, which was set up at the local Southern Cross University campus. I have actually spent time in similar Recovery Centres or Hubs for other floods and during times of bushfires...but this was somewhat different.

Lismore and many of the surrounding regions and towns were literally drowned by this extraordinary flood. In many ways that flood continued at the Recovery Centres but, instead of dirty river water, it was a flood of tearful humanity. I sat for several hours with our members who compassionately and caringly obtained identification and bank details from people with extraordinary stories.

One gentleman, in his eighties, chattered – in tears – with me that he was lucky to be alive. He had been through several of the floods over the years and knew



what was needed and the mess he would have to clean up in the morning, so he went to bed! He told me that something woke him, he thought possibly his guardian angel, and as he got out of bed, his feet were standing in water. Before he knew it, the water was filling his bedroom rapidly and with no lights in the dark, he called for help. Luckily, two younger men swam into the house, tore sheets of gyprock off his walls and floated him onto the roof of his two-story house, where someone with

a boat saved him. He also told me that two older women in his street were not as lucky, as they sadly lost their lives. His story was ordinary, not extraordinary, as similar tales were expressed by many whom I met.

Another told me of the devastation of the township of Woodburn, where cattle sadly hung dead in the trees.

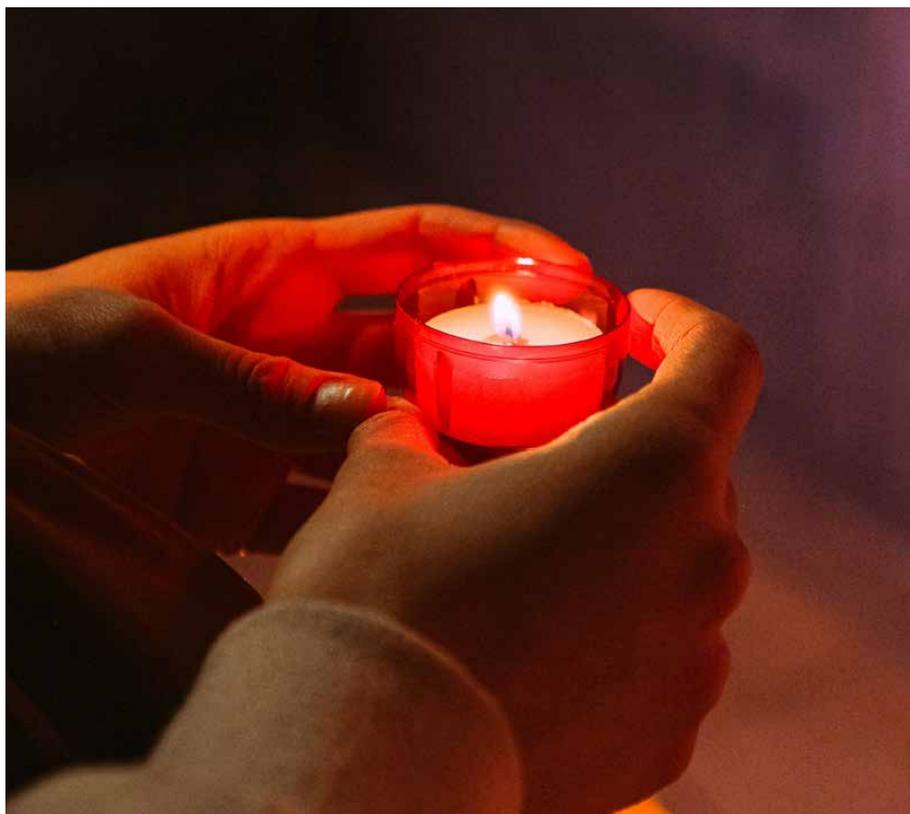
It is difficult to be a pastoral presence in this space. Not only is it strikingly emotional to be with people and to listen as their heart breaks in front of you, expressing the stories they have wrapped up inside them, but also there is little words can do that will give solutions, fix problems, mend lives or even share hope.

However, hope sometimes shines in the most remarkable light. A woman who had waited some time to see us finally sat at our table and cried as she retold the shock of watching 50 years of her life and her loves be dumped and carted away as rubbish. As she was telling us her story, she tried to open her waterlogged purse and it just fell to pieces in front of us. In that moment no words seemed to comfort but one of our members leant across the table held her hand and said, "Would you like a new purse?" The woman looked up and said yes and our member simply asked, "Red or green?" The woman laughed and said "Let's start anew, I have never had a red purse." It was delivered to where she was staying even before she got home!

So, hope, deep hope is actually wrapped in a red purse. I guess I would call it Vincentian hope; few words and yet grounded in the practical. A red purse opens the heart to a future of possibilities and that red purse fractured that darkness to encounter light and hope again.

Andrew Hamilton SJ recently wrote in the Jesuit magazine Eureka Street that, "Hope is really an expression of love and of the trust that love is ultimately stronger than hatred or apathy. It is idealistic but practical and is worth giving a go."²

Hope is not optimism. Hope is digging deep into the soul to find the essence of our identities, values, loves and beliefs.



It is said that hopelessness is of the same fabric or cloth as hopefulness – both come from a place of desolation and even despair. In hopelessness we are in a moment of closed down possibilities, in hopefulness we live with a spark, no matter how dimmed, of supported dreams and possibilities.

Such hope, such essence of a spark of life inside is opening up a map to move by. In this moment, alternatives and paths express an infinity of dreams. Moreover, I believe it is with such sense of hope that we continue to hold in our prayer all struggling in this tragedy, in this moment and even more so in the many moments ahead.

God of healing and hope, Your presence surrounds us and holds us, even when darkness overwhelms.

In all the spaces where suffering quenches the human spirit, let the gentle touch of hands, serenity of gaze, warmth of heart and quiet understanding, release fear, awaken hope, nourish strength and instil peace.

Amen.

¹ John 13.14-15

² Andrew Hamilton SJ, <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/hope-against-hope>



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