



St Vincent de Paul Society  
NSW  
*good works*

WINTER 2019  
ISSUE NO. 85

# Vision



## **VINNIES CEO SLEEPOUT: RECORD FUNDS RAISED**

**OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

**LONG LOST LOVE LETTERS UNEARTHED**



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Friends,  
 Seeing the work of our members, volunteers, staff and generous donors, I am convinced that united we can battle anything. Vinnies goes from strength to strength, thanks to our dedicated people.

In this issue of Vision we celebrate so many of your contributions – from supporting an NDIS client to participate in the Special Olympics in Abu Dhabi (page 8); to sleeping out for a night to raise vital funds with our Community Sleepouts

(page 20); to the amazing story of how a Vinnies intern helped connect a family with their World War II history (page 10).

For more than 160 years, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has been assisting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in the community. And we are determined to continue for many more – thanks to your good work.

Yours faithfully,

Denis Walsh  
 State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

## CEO'S MESSAGE



So far, 2019 has been a year of positive change and growth for Vinnies in NSW. I'm excited to lay out our plans for the coming years in our 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, which you can read about over the page. More than just a document, this plan is a vision for how our team of members, volunteers and staff can build a better future for

people experiencing disadvantage.

We will continue to build on our achievements while meeting the challenges and opportunities that come our way. Last year alone, we assisted more than 125,000 people in need, improving lives through actions big and small. While wages and welfare

payments remain stagnant, demand for our services will only continue to grow.

In February, Vinnies was part of a coalition of organisations that signed an important compact with the NSW Government, pledging to halve the rate of homelessness and rough sleeping by 2025. It is not an easy issue to solve and the solutions are not simple. But our dedicated members, volunteers and staff continue to roll up our sleeves and do our best to serve those in need.

Thank you for your good work and your commitment to the mission and values of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

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

# Our vision for the future

Vinnies NSW is in the process of implementing our new Strategic Plan 2020-2022, to enable us to provide excellent services to people experiencing poverty or disadvantage. We launched the plan in March and it will commence from July.

Built around six strategic priorities to empower those in poverty and facing disadvantage, we have set an ambitious agenda to build 'One Society' that does more for the people we serve.

The six priorities are:

1. Excellence in service underpinned by evidence and evaluated for impact
2. A thriving membership, volunteer and employee culture
3. An entrepreneurial and sustainable financial approach to support our mission
4. Effective infrastructure and technology platforms and asset management
5. Robust governance
6. Advocacy and partnership to reform the structural causes of poverty and disadvantage

Vinnies NSW CEO Jack de Groot said that while the new plan will continue to celebrate our tradition, it will also allow us to meet the changing needs of the people we serve.

"Vinnies has an outstanding record of helping people in need - we remain committed to that. To ensure our long-term sustainability, there needs to be appropriate governance and infrastructure in place so that people facing hardship get the assistance they deserve," Jack said.

We achieved so much over the life of our last Strategic Plan. Our members assisted tens of thousands of people per year with a 'hand up'. We facilitated access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme for more than 30,000 people, entered into an ambitious plan to build 500 affordable housing units, and developed our service hub model that makes such a huge difference every day for people experiencing disadvantage.

Our new plan aims to continue delivering this life-changing, grass-roots assistance via members and volunteers, along with providing services for

homelessness and supported accommodation, community development, disability and health. We hope to provide these services as a more unified, cohesive Society, placing the people we serve at the centre.

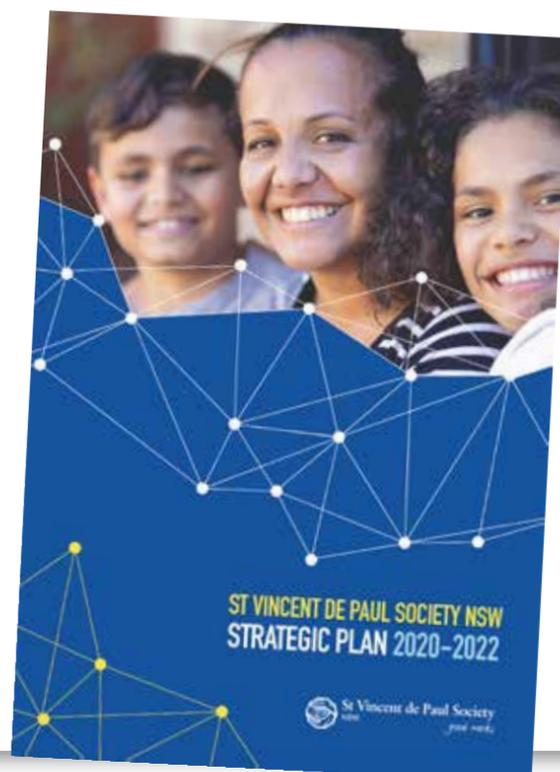
The Strategic Plan 2020-2022 focuses on three years rather than the previous plan's five-year period, allowing us to be more agile and adapt to the ever-changing world.

"We have listened to the feedback collected through our recent surveys. Thank you for sharing your views. The contributions of our members and volunteers are central to Vinnies' work, both now and in the future," Jack said.

"There are changes afoot - implementing this plan will involve adapting the way we work and how we are structured."

We are being supported by consultants the Nous Group since April on the implementation process, including working with all of our people to co-design an internal management structure to best support the plan.

You can view the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 at [www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/NSW/Strategic\\_Plan/](http://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/NSW/Strategic_Plan/).



## Advocacy on the agenda

All members, volunteers and staff are invited to our 2019 Social Justice Forum, taking place on Saturday 7 September in Sydney.

The Social Justice Forum is an opportunity to come together to learn more about our social justice priorities, shape our next campaign, and strengthen the relationships, knowledge and skills needed to achieve positive change.

In the past year we've advocated for affordable housing and energy, the rights of people seeking asylum, and raising the rate of Newstart. Working in partnership with a wide range of organisations and communities, our Right to Home campaign has helped secure voluntary affordable housing targets and the expansion of State Environmental Planning Policy No. 70 - a mechanism that makes it possible for councils to levy affordable housing contributions - across NSW.

But there is still so much more to do. At our 2019 forum we will:

- Launch our next state-wide advocacy campaign and

plan collaborative local actions

- Explore new approaches to influencing decision-makers to achieve positive change
- Learn more about our priority social justice issues

To register your interest in attending, please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019SocialJusticeForum> or scan the code above.

For any questions about the event, contact Rhiannon Cook - [Rhiannon.cook@vinnies.org.au](mailto:Rhiannon.cook@vinnies.org.au) or call 0432 250 830.

Date: Saturday 7 September

Time: 9:15am to 5pm

Location: Mary Mackillop Place, 7-11 Mount Street, North Sydney (a short walk from North Sydney Station)

Cost: FREE with lunch and refreshments included (if you require financial support to cover travel and accommodation costs, please let us know).



## Moving forward with WE CARE

Welcome every person seeking assistance  
Engage fully with them to better understand their needs

Collect relevant information  
Assess the need with the person requiring assistance  
Respond in the most appropriate way  
Evaluate by following up with the person assisted to determine how they are progressing

The Vinnies WE CARE framework is about giving the people we assist a consistent experience wherever we meet them, either in their homes or in any of our centres.

The framework provides a step-by-step guideline to ensure the person remains the centre of what we do, and our service is accessible, friendly and effective.

WE CARE is the culmination of three years of consultation with our 4,000-strong members, drawing upon their vast experience and knowledge to create a standardised service model.

Since launching WE CARE in August 2018, 10 Conferences



and 3 Hubs are fully implementing the framework, while 40+ Conferences are well on their way to embracing it.

We've received some great feedback from people we assist, members and volunteers, including:

- People we assist appreciate the follow up call to check how they are going.
- Members are able to choose tasks that best suit them.
- New members have been recruited for specific tasks.
- Conferences feel more in control and are able to better serve people presenting for assistance.

As a key feature of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, WE CARE will continue rolling out to Conferences across the state. To learn more about the framework, please contact Marte Tagle at the State Support Office: [Marte.Tagle@vinnies.org.au](mailto:Marte.Tagle@vinnies.org.au).

## Something to love

Together with Twentieth Century Fox, Vinnies celebrated the release of the hit movie *Bohemian Rhapsody* on 4K Ultra HD, Blu-ray, DVD and digital.

Our shops throughout Australia celebrated 1970s fashion and music by providing a range of vintage and vintage-like clothing ready for customers to get their Freddie Mercury look.

Supported by a number of Instagram fashion influencers like Jules Sebastian, Erin Holland and Monika Radulovic, the promotion included a competition where customers could share their fashion finds on social media using the hashtag #somethingtolove, telling Vinnies why they love their vintage *Bohemian Rhapsody* outfit.

The lucky winners received prizes fit for a Queen fan: a 50" 4K UHK Smart LED TV, a copy of the *Bohemian Rhapsody* movie on Blu-ray, and ten *Bohemian Rhapsody* merchandise packs including Blu-ray discs, a *Bohemian Rhapsody* T-shirt, cap and soundtrack.

A huge thank you to Twentieth Century Fox for collaborating with Vinnies to promote fabulous vintage fashion!



## GRAB A BARGAIN BY THE BEACH

The Coogee community were thrilled when they heard Vinnies was opening a new store at the popular beachside suburb.

The store is situated on Coogee Bay Road, just 200 metres from the beach. Since opening in April, it's quickly become a favoured destination for locals and tourists alike.

The Coogee Vinnies Shop has it all: clothes (including designer labels!), jewellery, accessories, toys, books, CDs and DVDs, household items and bric-a-brac. There are quality items to suit men, women, kids and babies.

Store Manager Marissa and her team at the Coogee store invite you to shop, donate your pre-loved items, or join the team and volunteer!

"We hope you will drop in and take a look at our new store and we look forward to meeting you soon," Marissa said.

## Ozanam Industries & Clean Up Australia – we make a great team



Once again Ozanam Industries partnered with Clean Up Australia for their 2019 campaign. We are so proud to be associated with this incredible Australian initiative.

Ozanam's supported employees assembled over 7,000 Clean Up Australia kits and then dispatched these kits to businesses, institutions and individuals throughout Australia.

Ozanam Industries provides meaningful, sustainable and valuable employment to more than 100 people with disability at three work centres, in Stanmore, West Ryde and Coonamble.

Ozanam's priority is to ensure that each employee has the opportunity to develop their full potential as a member of the Australian workforce through effective, relevant and ongoing training. Support staff work with each employee to achieve their personal and individual goals. The result is dedicated employees, committed to achieving high standards of service excellence.

With more than 40 years' experience, Ozanam Industries provides professional services to some of Australia's most respected companies, government departments and community groups.

Adrian is a valued member of the Stanmore work centre. He packages and labels Australian-made food for dogs. He is committed to excellence and gives 100 per cent to every task he is involved in, an attribute greatly appreciated by his supervisors. In February, Adrian was honoured with the Employee of the Month award.

Izaz Ali has been working for Ozanam Industries for four years. He works on the production floor and enjoys sealing customer products on the new sealing machine. Izaz worked in the St Vincent de Paul Society Resource Centre at Stanmore for two months, covering for the Resource Centre co-ordinator's annual leave. He has recently graduated from the Certificate II Cleaning Operations course and is about to undertake the Certificate II in Warehousing Operations course.



## REACHING FOR GOLD!

By Jared Thompson - Local Area Coordinator, South-West Sydney

During my first ever NDIS plan review meeting, I met a lovely Vinnies LAC participant named Charmain. I discovered she competed in bocce Australia-wide with her husband Tony. (For those who do not know, bocce is similar to lawn bowls.)

During the meeting, Charmain revealed she had been selected to represent Australia in bocce at the Special Olympics hosted in Abu Dhabi. With the funding she received from the NDIS, she obtained assistance to travel to and from competitions and training sessions.

Although she was very excited to go to Abu Dhabi to represent Australia, she was quite anxious about going to another country and being surrounded by people she had never met before. In the meeting, I worked together with my LAC colleague Karen Hams and Charmain's Support Coordinator to ensure that in her next 12-month NDIS plan, Charmain would have the support she needed to compete confidently.

In doing so, we boosted Charmain's confidence. By the end of the meeting, she was bursting with excitement to compete and represent Australia. We wished Charmain luck and said we would be looking out for the results when she came back.



Sure enough, a few months later, Karen saw Charmain and Tony being interviewed on Channel 9! Charmain was flashing her shiny gold medal after she and Tony came first place for bocce at the Special Olympics. Charmain and Tony were both filled with excitement and absolute joy as they described their experience in Abu Dhabi. Karen and I were absolutely over the moon to hear of their amazing accomplishment.

Charmain's funding from the NDIS had helped her achieve her goals. It goes to show that a comprehensive and well-developed NDIS plan provides confidence and opportunities to participants and their families.

**The SPARK social circus comes to town**  
 Children at Fairfield Public School recently had the opportunity to learn to cartwheel, juggle and hula hoop thanks to SPARK social circus.  
 SPARK is a Vinnies program that supports children and families from refugee backgrounds to engage with the local community and connect with other children at public schools in a fun and creative way.  
 Katherine Woolnough, SPARK Program Development Officer said "the program aims to help kids connect with other kids at the school, build their confidence and self-esteem and foster a sense of belonging".

"It's so much fun!" Katherine said.  
 "It's one of everyone's favourite programs. SPARK staff and volunteers approach it as beginners too as I don't know how to juggle or cartwheel either!  
 "But the circus trainers are there to help the kids get the most out of it. We're teaching them social skills as well as physical skills. The kids are learning how to work together in a circus troupe, a big team.  
 "They're learning how to take turns, how to support each other, how to communicate with each other – skills that are important for all aspects of their life," Katherine said.  
 The children have the opportunity to show off their new skills at a final performance show. They plan and rehearse their performance and also have a group dress rehearsal. In their final performance, the children showcase all they have learnt and celebrate their hard work, to an audience of their peers, parents and families.



## HOLD THE FRONT PAGE

Like all Vinnies Shops, Casino receives some unusual donations and it's not always easy to know what to do with them. Such was the case with a rare WW2-era newspaper gifted from a deceased estate.

Long-serving Shop manager Dianne Maher remembered the local Northern Rivers Military Museum, set up a year ago and now displaying an impressive collection of memorabilia from two world wars and other conflicts, including Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

All of the items had been sourced from the local area and stored safely in a heritage-listed timber hall. The project, a labour of love by a team of volunteers, has been receiving widespread acclaim.

"We don't know who donated the folder of newspapers, which also included Sydney publications from as far back as 1896," Dianne said. "We thought they should go to good homes, and the military museum seemed perfect for this historic coverage of a major WW2 battle."

The front page of the 13 October 1941 issue of the Daily Telegraph & Daily News featured a dramatic picture of a Soviet field gun moving eastwards to protect Moscow from threatened Nazi attack. An accompanying photo shows Nazi troops ankle-deep in mud, participating in the German offensive to do what

armies from Napoleon onwards had attempted: capture Moscow. They, too, would fail.

Much of the broadsheet-sized paper was taken up with war news, including how a strong force of Polish troops was fighting beside the Australians at Tobruk, and the tale of four young English sailors captured by the pro-Nazi Vichy French and sent to a horrendous West African internment camp.

A sign that some things have changed little in nearly eight decades: a businessman returning from the Netherlands Indies, today's Indonesia, said exporters were missing a huge opportunity through failing to advertise their products in our northern neighbour.

He called Java "a ready market" for many goods, including – as we now know – chilled beef. Wine, "especially hock", also had potential.

Alas, his advice came too late: in March 1942 the Japanese occupied the Indies and by war's end in 1945 the Indonesian nationalists had taken over and would end foreign investment for many years.

**IMAGE:** President of Casino's Northern Rivers Military Museum, Owen Newell, Vinnies shop manager Dianne Maher, and museum curator Kevin Magey with the donated 1941 newspaper.



## A mighty love unearthed

*Emelina Phillips is a student at Campion College. She undertook an internship with Vinnies NSW in 2018 where her love of history and a chance discovery led to an extraordinary meeting. Here, Emelina shares the story of Peter and Philomena, and their legacy of love.*

This story begins in the early 1990s at the Vinnies Shop in Brookvale, where a vintage-looking box of letters was found. These letters remained in a storage room for more than 20 years until Vinnies had to vacate the building in 2017.

As part of the clear-out, the box was brought into Vinnies State Support Office. Looking through the box, staff realised that these were no ordinary letters, but love letters written during World War II. There were other interesting items from the period including telegrams and an excerpt from a newspaper heralding the end of the war. The significance of these letters was deeply felt, and it was decided that Vinnies should try and track down any existing family members and return the box to them. As a liberal arts student with a love of history, I jumped at the chance to

take an internship with Vinnies to try and find the descendants of the letter writers.

The day I arrived at the office and my eyes fell onto those letters, I quickly fell in love with this beautiful story. There were hundreds of letters to explore, and weeks later I would count 1,424 letters in total contained in the box.

This correspondence in England dates from 1936 to 1946. These letters cover the period of Peter and Philomena's courtship, Peter joining the Royal Air Force (RAF) in 1940, their secret marriage, Peter's work with the RAF, and the birth of their first child Angela.



**“They were overwhelmed that these letters still existed, having thought they had been lost or destroyed, yet were now present in front of them.”**

For me to make sense of their story and start researching online, I spent the first few weeks chronologically ordering the letters, and began to note down names, dates and places, as I read each letter in order. There is one letter where Peter mentions having visited his birthplace. Another letter spoke of his birthday, and others mention names of Peter and Philomena's siblings. It was these sorts of details that would prove invaluable in my online research.

A fascinating detail in the letters is actual historical events that are mentioned. For example, in one letter, Peter writes to Philomena about his long hard day working at the RAF, being on the lookout for parachute troops and working in other duties. Yet, after this Peter writes “it's nothing compared with the B.E.F retreat from Dunkirk. That was simply terrible, but I'm happy to think they are safe home in England now.” This letter was sent on June 6, 1940, and the Dunkirk evacuation finished on June 4, two days prior. With the smell of 80 year old letters, reading historical events and old phrases like “listening to the wireless”, and “sewing a pullover”, I was truly holding real history in my hands!

I began to put the pieces together, yet the results still placed me in England, and I was unsure how this box of letters had come to Australia. I typed Peter's full name on ancestry.com and was surprised to discover his name, date of birth and death, and the location of his place of burial in Sydney.

I then visited the cemetery website and typed in his name and did the same for Philomena. They were both buried in the same lot and cemetery, and their birth dates matched up with my research. I wasn't sure if it was them, but I just had to find out: this was my first actual clue and lead towards finding any relatives.

The next week I drove to the cemetery, and with the manager's help, I was led to their place of rest. I saw their names, birth dates, and a message their three children had left for them inscribed on the plaque. The children's names were listed, the eldest being Angela, and I then knew that this was Peter and Philomena from the letters.

I was so excited at this discovery, and once I explained who I was to the manager and the purpose for my visit, he was able to give me the name of the funeral providers for Peter and Philomena. I phoned them, explained who I was and that I was looking for any living relatives. It was only four days later that I received a call from Liz, the second child of Peter and Philomena. I could not believe this wonderful,



amazing news! I asked Liz on the phone if she had known about these letters; she said that her mother had talked about them when she was growing up, but that she had never seen them.

A month later, Liz and Joe (the youngest sibling) and Angela's son Augustine, with his partner Chloe, all came to Vinnies where we greeted them with the letters (Angela lives abroad). It was a surreal and beautiful day. I was still amazed that here were the family of Peter and Philomena.

They were overwhelmed that these letters still existed, having thought they had been lost or destroyed, yet were now present in front of them. They showed us photos of Peter and Philomena and shared many stories of their parents and their lives growing up. As I sat there with the family, chatting with them and other staff present, I happened to mention something that Peter had written to Philomena.

He was speaking of their love for one another saying that they would never get “tired in the least with one another, only falling deeper and deeper in love. Our children shall know that same love and so help to build a more loving and better generation.” As I said this, Liz agreed, speaking of how good and loving her parents were and how happy her childhood was.



# Colonial landmark opens its doors for drought support

**As the drought continues to devastate much of NSW, two Bathurst locals decided to act.**

Paul and Bonny Hennessey opened the doors to their historic home Macquarie Homestead to the public in order to raise funds for the Vinnies Drought Appeal.

After a five-year restoration, the 1,000-acre homestead has been returned to its former glory. During the open house weekend, Paul Hennessey gave history talks and spoke to visitors about Vinnies' ongoing support work with farming communities.

The open house raised \$35,000 for the Vinnies Drought Appeal. In addition to the generosity of the Hennesseys, the event was made possible with the help of our wonderful Vinnies team and volunteers who gave their time to promote the event, direct traffic, and kept the sandwiches and cake flowing. The Rotary Club of Bathurst East provided the manpower and BBQ for the weekend and donated the proceeds back to our Drought Appeal.



Macquarie Homestead is now considered a colonial landmark. It was a gift from Governor Lachlan Macquarie to William Lawson for his part in crossing the Blue Mountains in 1813.

The homestead is the oldest continuing residence and farm west of the Great Dividing Range. It has only changed hands twice – first when the Lawson family sold the homestead to the McKibbin family in 1889, and then in 2012 when it was purchased by the Hennesseys.

The 27-bedroom homestead was originally built with local materials by convicts. It has a main building with two wings enclosing a courtyard, cellars and two-storey convict barracks. It is estimated that over 150 convicts lived in the Macquarie homestead over a period of two decades.

# Reaching out to Ermington residents

Following regular visits to public housing units in Ermington, Rydalmere Conference members and Amelie Housing officers decided the local community would benefit from additional support, beyond important material assistance.

Residents said they felt no sense of community, were often scared to be outside, lacked communal spaces and were often victims of vandalism and poor behaviour of other residents.

In response, Vinnies formed a project team and established a trial engagement program aimed at creating opportunities for residents to interact, share and support each other; and to foster community pride in an effort to reduce vandalism.

Vinnies Conference members initially met with some residents to seek their feedback on whether they and fellow residents would embrace a community activity hosted by Vinnies members. As a result, Conference members have been taking the Vinnies Van to the units on the first and third Monday of the month since mid-February as a form of social engagement between residents and Vinnies members.

The visits are hosted at lunchtime, offering a free sausage sizzle, and now attract dozens of residents who come together to chat with each other and the Vinnies team. The initiative is helping residents and members get to know one another and encourages



residents to reach out, with referrals to services provided where there is a need.

While the six-month trial project is still in its infancy, the positive results are encouraging, and the project team is hopeful they can help the residents build a strong community culture into the future.



## Reaching out to mums in need



For most of the year, the important contributions mothers make to their families and the community can go unacknowledged.

This Mother's Day, Conferences across the Southern Highlands region decided to acknowledge and celebrate local mothers and the work they do by offering a special gift.

Mothers being assisted by the Mittagong, Bowral and Moss Vale Conferences were invited to select one of three gifts – cinema tickets and a meal for two, a beauty or hair treatment, or six nights' accommodation at the Vinnies Mollymook holiday units. The generous and thoughtful gesture was warmly welcomed by each recipient and brought great joy to the Conference members who were able to make Mother's Day even more special for those in need.

## OPERATION BACKPACK SUPPORTS LOCAL FAMILIES

More than 150 local families with primary-aged children received essential back-to-school supplies through the generosity of shoppers at Lismore Square shopping centre in the lead-up to first term 2019.

The 'Operation Backpack' initiative encouraged shoppers to buy and donate essential school items such as backpacks, pens, pencils and textas, exercise books and lunchboxes and water bottles. It was a partnership with Lismore Central Council's 'Breaking the Barriers' (BTB) program that assists school children in local areas of identified need.

"Receiving these essential items free of charge helped reduce back-to-school stress for families known to be struggling with increasing living costs," said BTB's northern coordinator Michelle Hyde.

"The complex chose Vinnies as its distribution partner because they knew we are in regular contact with families doing it tough and could pass on the donations in an efficient and humane way."

BTB also assists identified public schools in the Northern Rivers with breakfast programs – a total of 154,000 meals



IMAGE: Launching 'Operation Backpack' were (L-R) Lismore Mayor Isaac Smith, Lismore Square's Hannah Ivan and Lismore Central Council Executive Officer Michael Timbrell.

last year - and helps out with school uniforms and vacation care for families in need. Equine-assisted therapy programs for young people suffering from early trauma or neglect is another successful engagement with local families.

In 2018 this program provided various forms of support to more than 3,000 vulnerable children.

## Light to the Nations Easter Festival

The Easter long weekend saw a contingent of staff, volunteers and Conference members from the Wollongong Central Council host an information and engagement stall at the Light to the Nations event, which attracted more than 1,000 people.

The annual event is an Easter Pilgrimage for young people and families celebrating the liturgies over the Easter Triduum, and Vinnies joined the pilgrimage along with other Catholic organisations spreading the common theme of 'A future full of hope'.

Held in Bowral, the event provided an opportunity to share information about the various ways community members can be involved with the Society, and the Central Council's Youth Representative was able to engage with young people and connect them to a range of opportunities to put their faith in action via their schools, universities and parishes.

Participants were also given the opportunity to participate in the Easter liturgies, fostering a strong presence of family and faith, and the presence of our Vinnies team was a valued component of the overall event. Light to the Nations



IMAGE (L-R): Jenny Popov (Central Council Secretary), Alex Popov (Central Council President) and Corinne Lindsell (Manager, Homelessness and Mental Health WCC).

Assistant Coordinator, Marilyn Ng, shared that "Vinnies brought a greater depth of awareness to LTTN of our social responsibility as Catholics, as the faithful laity, and gave us fantastic opportunities to live out a more Christ-centred life in love and service for the poor."

The Wollongong Central Council team found participation in Light to the Nations a rewarding and uplifting experience, and took joy from the opportunity to share how Vinnies can be such an active and engaging part of the life of the church.



## MARAYONG CONFERENCE RE-FORMS TO MEET LOCAL NEED

Following many years of service to the local community, and considerable reflection, in March 2018 the Marayong Conference (Western Sydney) went into recess. As existing members retired due to mature age, the Conference had difficulty engaging new members to maintain their services.

In the months following the decision, the parish priest and church community felt the impact of not having a Vinnies Conference in the parish. In response, the priest, supported by previous Conference President Joe Doyle, led a recruitment drive for new members.

The efforts resulted in enough interest to support the formation of a new Marayong Conference, and in early August, 15 parishioners participated in the Society

IMAGE: Facilitators and new members participate in WeCare training.

Orientation course. With the support of Parramatta Central Council President, Anne Stanfield, along with the mentorship of regional presidents and other members, 10 parishioners continued to become St Vincent de Paul Society members and officially form the new Conference. Sam Cassar has been elected President of the reformed Conference.

The new members are keen to start visiting and assisting people and have actively participated in a range of formation activities to ensure they are prepared. They will be a wonderful addition to Vinnies services in Western Sydney.

## Conference members, volunteers, students and staff working together

Penrith Community Hub provides support to people seeking assistance through material aid, help with bills, advocacy and referral. This is achieved by providing a bright, welcoming space where people can use the computer, browse the resources or drop in to chat to representatives from one of the four outreach services working in partnership with the hub – Housing NSW, Centrelink, Energy and Water Ombudsman and Salvation Army (Moneycare).

The hub currently has five Conference members and five volunteers working together to provide holistic support to those who need it the most.

Conference members bring a vast knowledge and understanding of what Vinnies does and how our organisation's vision is practically applied, particularly when connecting with the people we assist. This is particularly

evident in interviews, where people we assist are listened to, respected and encouraged to take control of their own destiny. This can be achieved through something as simple as negotiating a payment plan for a person's electricity bill, or helping someone change a phone plan they can't afford, but most importantly, by taking the time to listen.

Members and volunteers also come together on training days where experience and knowledge is shared.

The Penrith Community Hub is located at 7/308 High Street, Penrith (opposite the police station) and open Monday-Friday from 9am to 4pm. The service is available to anyone experiencing financial hardship.

Donations of non-perishable food items and toiletries are gratefully accepted.

Learn more at [www.vinnies.org.au/penrithhub](http://www.vinnies.org.au/penrithhub) or call 02 8861 9770.



Josie (Conference member) and Clare (volunteer/student) with their domestic violence workshop certificates. Josie says, "I enjoy the people that I work with at the hub. I like to help people and to see them happy and smiling when they leave the hub."



IMAGE: Kacey Blackwell, Layla Gomez-Ledger, Tiara Salmon and Quinn Gibson start the day well at Bellingen High School.

## BREAKFAST HELPS STUDENTS GET UP AND GO

Students start the day well at Bellingen High School. Staffer Haridian Ramirez is realistic about teenagers' breakfast habits.

"As most parents know, they prefer not to eat first thing in the morning. Their bodies are more inclined to stay asleep than to get up and get going."

This may be frustrating for parents but it runs deeper for teachers who know that empty tummies lead to lower concentration, a reduced ability to engage with class work, and in some cases, disruptive behaviour.

"It's a well-known connection," the librarian adds, "but not so much anymore, thanks to this wonderful brekkie program."

A new program sponsored by Vinnies is helping students get a good start to the school day.

"It's a real investment in the students' future," says Sarah

Mason, a social worker who coordinates the southern sector of Vinnies' Breaking the Barriers program.

"While some kids come from homes we'd think of as disadvantaged, many students prefer a breakfast at 8.15, when they're already here, than an hour or more earlier when they're shaking off sleep."

"We're running breakfast programs in various North Coast primary and high schools, and teachers invariably say how a bowl of cereal or a few slices of toast can make all the difference to how students handle the first periods of the day."

The breakfasting students also pull their weight. They fry their own eggs, mostly from the school's own chook pen, where the vegie scraps are tipped, serve themselves and each other, and engage in what teachers agree is valuable pre-class socialising.

Students needing personal assistance can also speak with youth workers from the Bellingen Youth Hub who come along regularly.



# Our biggest Vinnies CEO Sleepout ever

**This year's Vinnies CEO Sleepout raised over \$7.8 million, with an unprecedented number of participants setting a new fundraising record.**

More than 460 CEOs and business leaders spent a night in the cold in Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong on 20 June for the annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout, raising over \$2.4 million in NSW.

The money goes towards Vinnies' services for people experiencing homelessness, including accommodation, food, healthcare, education and other relief to assist those in need.

"We've been running this event for 14 years and it gives us such hope to see more and more business leaders taking part every year," said Vinnies NSW CEO Jack de Groot, who participated in his third Sleepout.

With the rising cost of living and a lack of affordable housing across NSW, Jack hoped the success of the event would encourage government and business leaders to take action.

"Every dollar counts, but the Vinnies CEO Sleepout is about more than money. It's about acknowledging that both governments and businesses need to do more for people doing it tough."

A massive thanks to everyone involved in making this event possible, not only to the participants but to the sponsors

and volunteers who assisted throughout, along with the 150+ people who gave up their time on the night.

Donations remain open until 31 August for anyone wishing to contribute, either through sponsoring a participating CEO, or by giving directly to the event at [www.ceosleepout.org.au](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au). And don't forget about Community Sleepouts happening during August – find out more over the page.

## SYDNEY

Participants at the Sydney event at White Bay Cruise Terminal, Rozelle, experienced a glimpse into the harsh reality faced by over 37,000 people every night across NSW. Sleeping on concrete in single-digit weather conditions, the 370-odd CEOs and business leaders braved the cold to hear from people with lived experiences of homelessness.

Taking part in face-to-face 'Speak Up' sessions, participants heard from people including a former politician from Burundi who lived between refugee camps and on the streets after seeking political asylum, and a Sydney woman who was assisted by Vinnies after fleeing with her children from domestic violence.

For Sydney's top fundraiser – Robert Kelly of the Steadfast Group, who brought in over \$67,000 – the experience of seeing his grandfather pass away as a result of homelessness hit close to home. "I have a history of people sleeping on the streets so this is the least I can do." Tom Brady of Brefni, an infrastructure specialist, and Scott Leney of Marsh, an insurance broker and risk management specialist, each raised over \$50,000.

## NEWCASTLE

At Newcastle's seventh Vinnies CEO Sleepout, around

50 participants surpassed the city's fundraising goal to raise more than \$172,000 at McDonald Jones Stadium, Broadmeadow. John Kell of Hicksons Lawyers topped the fundraising total for the third consecutive year with a personal total in excess of \$15,000.

Participants on the night slept on makeshift cardboard beds to raise awareness of groups impacted by homelessness, including women aged over 55 – the fastest growing demographic in Australia, along with the 36% increase in 12-24 year olds without stable, secure and appropriate housing in NSW.

The funds raised will help the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service provide ongoing supported accommodation and outreach housing to single men and men with children.

## WOLLONGONG

At the University of Wollongong's Innovation Campus, more than 30 CEOs came together for an evening of reflection after hearing from people with lived experience of homelessness and housing stress.

Vinnies' Wollongong Executive Officer Peter Quarmby highlighted how the experience helped to open the community up to the harsh reality of homelessness. "It's an experience they would never normally go through," he said. "The Sleepout helps everyone to realise that some people don't have the choice to go home each night."

The event generated \$138,000 for Wollongong's eighth year participating in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout, with the funds helping to support services throughout the Macarthur, Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern Highlands regions, including the Vinnies Van, the Jim da Silva Farm and the Nagle Centre family care and support service.





## Turning bottles and cans into helping hands

The Vinnies Container Deposit Scheme is a winner on two fronts. By collecting drink containers for recycling, we reduce the amount of waste going to landfill and we raise funds for our work.

It's been a big few months for the scheme, celebrating its 20-million container milestone in early March, followed by the opening of the fifth bulk container deposit centre in Wagga Wagga in April.

The initiative had humble beginnings as an over-the-counter bottle collection program at selected Vinnies Shops, but it's quickly growing to become a key source of revenue for Vinnies NSW, allowing us to continue our work with people experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

Our bulk container deposit centres provide a fast, drive-through alternative for community members and businesses to claim the 10-cent refund for eligible bottles, cans and cartons as part of the State Government's container deposit scheme.

The centres in Penrith, Cardiff, Unanderra, South Nowra and Wagga Wagga boast automated sorting and counting at up to 100 containers per minute, and the capacity to process up to 100,000 containers per day. This helps residents, schools, community organisations and businesses alike to take advantage of the Return and Earn scheme.

Businesses and organisations interested in exploring partnership options can contact Vinnies NSW CDS project manager Jon D'Astoli on 0427 952 730 or Jon.DAstoli@vinnies.org.au to learn more about working with Vinnies to create a socially and environmentally sustainable future.

For more information on the Vinnies Bulk Container Deposit Scheme, visit [vinnies.org.au/cds](http://vinnies.org.au/cds) or [fb.com/vinniesnswcds](https://fb.com/vinniesnswcds).

## Community Sleepouts shine the light on homelessness

For the second year in a row, Vinnies Community Sleepouts will run a state-wide effort to shine a light on homelessness.

The Sleepouts give local community groups and individuals the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of homelessness and raise funds to support people experiencing hardship.

Community members will brave the cold in seven locations across NSW, aiming to raise more than \$200,000 for local Vinnies homelessness services. The events are set to surpass the results of 2018, when 150 participants state-wide raised over \$146,000.

Please register to sleep out at one of the upcoming events, or sponsor a family member or friend to take part:

- Deniliquin: Thursday 8 August
- Maitland: Thursday 29 August
- Tweed Heads: Thursday 29 August
- Western Sydney: Friday 30 August
- Wagga Wagga: Friday 30 August

Thank you to everyone who participated or donated for the Community Sleepouts that have already taken place:

- Dubbo: 22 June
- Varroville: Saturday 29 June

You can register or donate at [communitysleepout.org.au](http://communitysleepout.org.au).



## CHANNEL NINE TODAY SHOW AND GUZMAN Y GOMEZ

The Today Show joined forces with Guzman y Gomez, providing a generous donation of 1,000 kids' meal vouchers for Vinnies. These meals were provided to families experiencing disadvantage. Steven Marks, (CEO of Guzman y Gomez), Jack de Groot (CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW) and the Mini Vinnies group at St Brigid's, Marrickville were very grateful to receive such a generous donation.



## Groupon gets behind our farmers

Groupon demonstrated their compassion to support families severely affected by drought by donating \$26,000 to the NSW Vinnies Drought Appeal.

Steve Traplin, CEO of Groupon said "Groupon is extremely proud to do our part to support Australia's farmers by partnering with the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. The response we received from our valued customers was fantastic, and they really stepped up to help us raise these vital funds in support of the farmers through the Vinnies Drought Appeal".

We are so thankful to Groupon and its customers for digging deep and supporting people struggling through drought.

## Back to school made easier

Box for Monkeys worked with Vinnies NSW to encourage members of the public and Vinnies donors to purchase back to school backpacks for the children Vinnies assists.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Box for Monkeys CEO Sarah Donges, 500 children experiencing hardship and disadvantage across NSW went back to school in early 2019 with a fantastic new Box for Monkeys school backpack.

Thank you for helping these children begin the school year ready to learn and feeling confident amongst their peers!



## DRESSED FOR SUCCESS!

A team of passionate staff at Johnson & Johnson have taken it upon themselves to raise the funds for 'Project Dressmaker' – a program to support women accessing Vinnies services who have escaped domestic and family violence.

Project Dressmaker has been designed to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and to motivate and empower women rebuilding their lives by providing opportunities to connect, be mentored and learn dressmaking.

In May, Project Dressmaker donated ball gowns and hosted a makeover session for the women to attend a Gala Dinner hosted by Johnson & Johnson which included guest motivational speakers, Vinnies services and Johnson & Johnson speakers.

The following week, the women attended the first of a number of workshops that will be hosted by Johnson & Johnson over the coming year. The feedback received from the women has been extremely positive. We are so grateful to Johnson & Johnson for providing this opportunity to the women we assist. It has put a new spring in their step and they are looking forward to attending the workshops planned in 2019.



## GENWORTH FINANCIAL Christmas Appeal and KEEP funding

A huge thank you to Genworth Financial who have been a long term partner of the KEEP program at Vincentian House since 2013. Genworth renewed their support for KEEP for 2019 providing an annual donation of \$40,000 in addition to a \$10,000 donation to support the Vinnies Christmas Appeal in 2018. Additionally, Genworth staff purchased Christmas gifts for the Vincentian House parents to gift to their children on Christmas day. This act of kindness really helps to relieve the burden for these families during a difficult time.



## Small change makes a huge difference to Vinnies Christmas Appeal

Lagardere Travel Retail once again supported the Vinnies Christmas Appeal in December and January by collecting gold coins across their Newlink and Relay Bookstore retail outlets at international and domestic airports across Australia.

Their collection provided a donation of more than \$5,000 which helped Vinnies provide food and support to families and individuals experiencing disadvantage over the festive season. Since forming a partnership with Vinnies in 2015, Lagardere Travel Retail has generously donated over \$100,000 to Vinnies through the Vinnies CEO Sleepout, and the Winter and Christmas Appeals. We look forward to working with Lagardere Travel Retail to support the Vinnies Christmas Appeal in 2019.



## IGA GETS BEHIND VINNIES CHRISTMAS APPEAL

IGA once again extended its support for our 2018 Christmas Appeal, selling \$2 baubles and donating 1c from every Community Chest product sold across its supermarkets in December.

The campaign raised just under \$280,000 nationally to support the work Vinnies undertakes in local communities. Since 2012, IGA has raised over \$1.7 million to provide food and vital support to thousands of people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage across Australia.



## Corporate partners step up to spread Christmas cheer



Claude Group staff hosting a BBQ for Eastern Suburbs Refuges



IGA BBQ hosted at Matthew Talbot Hostel

More than 50 corporate volunteers hosted Christmas gatherings across Sydney to celebrate the holidays with our service centres. From special BBQs and parties to putting together hampers and sharing gifts, the volunteers brought smiles, cheer and hope to many during this special time.

Last December, staff from IGA/Metcash hosted a BBQ at the Matthew Talbot Hostel and Our Lady of the Way and provided volunteers for the Christmas party hosted at Mary MacKillop Outreach. Together with Johnson & Johnson, staff also attended a gift wrapping session at Mary MacKillop Outreach, preparing gifts and hampers for the centre's clients.

Staff from Hilton Sydney hosted a Christmas BBQ at the Liverpool Men's Centre and Claude Outdoor Group hosted a Christmas BBQ for women and children residing in Vinnies Eastern Suburbs refuges at Maroubra Beach, providing a delicious lunch and gifts for the women and children attending.

These corporate volunteer activities brought Christmas joy to men, women and children alike, so we thank everyone for their generosity and ongoing support!

# Our amazing volunteers at work!

National Volunteer Week took place from 20 - 26 May. Vinnies NSW CEO Jack de Groot took the opportunity to say a heartfelt "thank you" to the 14,000 individuals across NSW who support their local communities by volunteering for Vinnies.

"Vinnies members and volunteers are the heart and soul of the organisation," Jack said.

"Because of the generous contribution of our volunteers, Vinnies is able to provide vital services to people in need.

"On behalf of all of us at St Vincent de Paul Society, we thank our selfless members and volunteers for their dedication to good works. We couldn't do it without you.

"As social problems such as homelessness and poverty continue to increase, our people help alleviate the pain and despair of financial hardship, loneliness and social isolation," Jack said.

Between them, Margaret Smith and Brigette Williams have dedicated almost 60 years to their local community through volunteering with Vinnies in the Blue Mountains. This commitment was acknowledged with Margaret being the recipient of a Volunteer of the Year award in 2018 and 95-year-old Brigette earning the honour in 2019.

"My greatest joy has always been working with our wonderful Vinnies volunteers," Margaret said.

Kathy Bowe has been volunteering with Vinnies in the Hunter for five years.

"People wave and smile when I arrive. Life has not been kind to most people I visit, however they still find pleasure amongst the chaos," Kathy said.



To all those members and volunteers who make a difference in their community, thank you for your wonderful contribution. Vinnies looks forward to working with you to offer a hand-up to those experiencing disadvantage and poverty in our communities.

Make a difference in someone's life - become a member or volunteer with Vinnies! Visit [www.vinnies.org.au/NSWvolunteer](http://www.vinnies.org.au/NSWvolunteer) or [www.vinnies.org.au/membership](http://www.vinnies.org.au/membership)

## Antonia Walsh

teaches a weekly cooking class at our crisis accommodation and case management service, Vincentian House. Volunteering with Vinnies for nine years, Antonia combines her passion with the opportunity to give back to the community.

"I volunteer with Vinnies because I am passionate about cooking and enjoy interacting with people. The combination of the two, plus a little spare time led me to become a volunteer," Antonia said.

"I smile when I see the people interact during the class, then eating together what we have made around a table," Antonia said.



**Don McShane** has been volunteering for Vinnies for 30 years, his friendly face welcoming Vinnies customers in our shops. As a Shop Day Coordinator in Fairy Meadow, Don displays donated clothing to catch the eye of our shoppers. Don respects the personality of each customer, and socialising with them puts a smile on his face.



## Rebecca Muir and Ciara Marchant

Rebecca Muir is President of the Macarthur St Jeromes Conference and has been volunteering with Vinnies for seven years. Ciara Marchant is a St Jeromes Conference Member and has been with Vinnies for nine years. This dynamic team organises our "Buddies Days" for children from disadvantaged families.

"I love working with children and helping families in need. Hearing and seeing the appreciation from parents when they see their child enjoying themselves and socialising with others puts a smile on my face," Rebecca said.

"I love working with children and enjoy planning fun events and activities for them! Seeing the children experience something for the first time that they otherwise would never get to experience – such as going on the light rail, going to the farm or going to a museum – is amazing," Ciara said.

Thanks to Rebecca and Ciara, families can find the extra help they need.

**Maureen Buchanan** has been volunteering at the Vinnies Shop at Oak Flats for more than four years and is President of the Albion Park Conference. Maureen helps people facing financial hardship.

"I find it very satisfying to interact with the people we assist and help them when I can. It is wonderful to receive a lot of support from Conference members and shop employees. I am happy giving back to the community," Maureen said.

The positive feedback from the people we assist puts a smile on her face and makes volunteering worth it.



## MONDAYS WITH ANNIE



**Annie Snoeys has been volunteering with Vinnies for the past 18 years.**

Staff, volunteers and customers at the Wyong Shop look forward to Annie's warm, happy greeting every Monday, when she works on the cash register and around the shop.

Annie may be 94 years old, but she's certainly not slowing down, and loves her work with Vinnies and the local community. Her fellow Wyong volunteers wanted to thank her during National Volunteer Week by sharing the following feedback:

- "Annie is an inspiration to us all, the perfect volunteer!"
- "A great role model to all new volunteers, especially the younger volunteers."
- "A reliable, funny, lovely lady."
- "Fun to work with, loves to crack a joke!"
- "A beautiful lady who always brightens mine and everyone else's day with her smile and happy approach to life."
- "An absolute treasure for Vinnies."

Thank you to Annie and to all our volunteers who brighten the lives of the people we assist and customers.



## Switch on to more affordable energy

**Each day, our members see the very real impact that lack of energy affordability has on the people we assist.**

We see people who struggle to pay their bills, and who sacrifice a trip to the doctor, or the weekly groceries, in order to make ends meet. We also see the people who – in desperate attempts to lower their bills – eat cold dinners, go to bed when it gets dark, rarely take hot showers, and avoid having visitors.

The energy affordability problem is widespread. Last financial year, our members distributed almost \$7 million worth of assistance towards helping households pay their energy bills. Though more and more people are reaching out for assistance, each year approximately 30,000 households across NSW still reach the point where they are disconnected from their energy supply.

There is much governments and regulators could do to improve energy affordability for people on low incomes, and the Vinnies Social Justice Team is always on the look-out for opportunities to shape a fairer system. Between now and the end of 2019, we will see at least three important changes to the energy market. Combined, these changes have the potential to result in significant improvements for some vulnerable customers:

**1.** The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) issued a new Hardship Guideline in March. This Guideline outlines the ways in which retailers must support customers experiencing difficulty paying their bills. Many energy advocates will be glad to hear that the new Guideline prevents retailers from placing unreasonable conditions around entry or re-entry to their hardship program. The Guideline also asks that retailers ensure they have steps in place to help customers prevent and manage debt. Retailers should have submitted updated hardship policies to the AER for approval by the end of May.

**2.** From 1 July, a new Default Market Offer (DMO) will come into play. Determined by the Australian Energy Regulator, the DMO will effectively serve

as a price cap for electricity and will automatically apply to customers currently on a standing offer (i.e. customers who have not shopped around for a market offer). The AER claims that the 15% of NSW customers now on standing offers should see savings of between \$129-\$181. While this is an improvement, customers who are moved to the DMO will still be paying more than they should; the NSW Government's Energy Switch service (available at <https://energyswitch.service.nsw.gov.au>) can help people find a better deal.

**3.** Version 6 of the NSW Government's Social Code for Energy Programs will come into force in November. This Code sets out how retailers must assist the NSW Government in delivering its energy assistance measures. Significantly, the most recent update requires that retailers "must use all reasonable endeavours to inform and assist the customer to identify the most appropriate market offer for that customer".

At the same time as we are seeing positive steps forward, the energy market is fast evolving and it can be hard for rule-makers to keep pace. Recently, we've been looking into the challenges faced by people who receive their energy via an embedded network – an increasingly common practice in new multi-storey developments. If you encounter a newly emerging energy issue, please don't hesitate to contact our Social Justice Team at [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au)

## Davidson Conference: a slice of history

**Davidson Conference has been blessed over the years with countless people volunteering their time and skills to Vinnies.**

The Davidson Conference was formed in 1976. In the early days, members were invited to become involved in home visitation in the Darlinghurst area.

Most of the calls involved those on the margins. A boarding house in Palmer Street became the hub of



the Conference. Members often worked with people with drug, alcohol and gambling problems, and treated everyone with equal dignity. Barbeques were held at Easter and Christmas and much loved by locals and Conference members alike.

While most work has always been local, some members became involved with Vinnies services at Charles O'Neill House in the inner city.

When "Charlie" closed to make way for the Ozanam Learning Centre and Vincentian House, the people we assist were invited to remain friends of the Society for social visits.

These men are still being visited by some Conference members on a regular basis. The members have supported them in their ups and downs, celebrating birthdays and Christmases with them.

Today the Conference has 10 active members meeting fortnightly, many of whom are involved in other works of the Society, including Matthew Talbot Hostel, the Compeer program and Maternal Heart of Mary Conference.

If you would like to receive the latest information on Vinnies' campaigns for a more equitable NSW, sign up to our monthly Social Justice e-Newsletter at <http://bit.ly/VinniesSJnews> or contact [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au)

## ST CANICE'S RECORD DONATIONS

Students at St. Canice's Catholic School in Katoomba have raised the bar in fundraising. Their truly remarkable contribution of \$4,300 to our Katoomba Conference has set a record.

Students, teachers and parents have combined forces to battle poverty through the St Canice's Mini Vinnies Group. With an extraordinary \$20,000 contribution over the last five years, major funds have been donated to our Katoomba Conference.

Their dedication doesn't stop there. St. Canice's Catholic School also contributes a substantial amount of goods and gifts to the Katoomba Conference Christmas hamper program, setting an example to other community members in the area.

Their undeniable dedication to our just cause has been inspiring to us all. We would like to thank everyone at St. Canice's Catholic School. Keep up the great work!



## Supporting children, youth and families – Vinnies is there for you!

V4You (Vinnies for You) is the new name of our well-established Kids Engaged in Education program (KEEP). The new name reflects an expanded focus on providing child-centred support to children and young people and their families who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

The safety and wellbeing of children is paramount, and children, young people and families experiencing homelessness and adversity benefit in the immediate and long term from targeted support.

V4You applies principles of child-centred and child safe practices to increase the quality and impact of Vinnies homelessness services. This includes enhancing supported accommodation, developing child and youth case management, and designing and implementing activities and programs specifically for children and young people and their families.

From KEEP's early beginnings at Vincentian House in 2009, V4You has expanded over the past two years to Deniliquin, Bowral, Campbelltown, inner city Sydney, Armidale and Port Macquarie. By providing child-centred practices across our services in these areas, we are demonstrating our commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

Special thanks to our corporate partners Genworth for helping us with the renaming process. V4You reflects the expansion of KEEP into a holistic approach to caring for our most vulnerable citizens.



## Remembering MATT TALBOT

We marked the Feast Day of the Venerable Matt Talbot on 19 June. The following is a reflection on his life, adapted from an article by Meg Hunter-Kilmer:

Matt Talbot was a drunk. His father was a drunk. Nearly every one of his brothers was a drunk. He was uneducated and unskilled and died in obscurity. Talbot (1856-1925) was the second of 12 children born to a working class Dublin family at a time when work and food were scarce and hope scarcer still. His first job was for a wine seller, and the occasional taste he took of the merchandise soon turned into a lifetime of struggle. By the time he was 13, Matt's life was driven by his need to drink.

For 15 years, Matt begged, borrowed, and stole whatever he needed to feed his addiction, once stealing the fiddle from a blind beggar to sell it for liquor. Matt was a lost cause—so everybody said. But one day, when he was 28, he suddenly saw how false his happiness was, how false his friendships. He had been out of work for a few days and had drunk all his wages, so he stood outside a pub waiting for one of his many drinking buddies to offer to buy him a drink. But as one old friend after another passed him by, Talbot began to realise the emptiness of his life.

He announced his intention to "take the pledge," to vow that he would abstain from all alcohol. He promised sobriety for three months, then six, then for all his life. He worked hard and gave the money he would have spent on beer to the poor. He repaid all his debts scrupulously. Having searched for the fiddler whose instrument he had stolen, and failed to find him, he gave the money to the church to have Mass said for him. He became a Third Order Franciscan and taught himself to read so that he could study the Bible and the lives of the Saints.

On Trinity Sunday, at the age of 69, Matt Talbot was making his way slowly through the streets of Dublin on his way to Mass. His body weakened by decades of hard labor, he collapsed of heart failure and was discovered later, an unidentified elderly man found dead in the street. He died as he had lived, in simple obscurity.



## Facilitating faith in action

Did you know we employ a number of Spiritual Advisers to guide our members in their Vincentian values?

In March, we held a formation and training program for 53 Spiritual Advisers and members who expressed interest in taking on this important role. Under this new initiative of the NSW Spirituality Committee, we aim to create a state-wide network of Spiritual Advisers, with one for every Conference and Council. It's all part of strengthening of the spirituality of the St Vincent de Paul Society as a whole.

"We want to broaden people's understanding of the role of the Spiritual Adviser from one who simply leads the meeting's spiritual reflection, to a person who is a resource to the Conference in all aspects of our meeting, service and interactions," explained Leo Tucker, State Spiritual Adviser and Director of Mission and Spirituality.

Participants received a draft copy of a the newly created Spiritual Adviser Handbook. If you'd like a copy of the final version, please contact your Central Council or Kate Scholl at the State Support Office at [kate.scholl@vinnies.org.au](mailto:kate.scholl@vinnies.org.au) or (02) 9568 0209.



that a bloke by the name of Les Murray was coming to college to read poetry for us I felt the yawning of my sleepy soul!

But Les Murray was different! He held an extraordinary presence in the room. He was not elegant or even what I stereotyped as poetic. He was larger than life with an untucked shirt and some missing teeth. There was something deeply spiritual about Les Murray. He was grassroots, a social advocate, a person of deep faith, understanding the needs of people and the land, which he loved deeply. He thought of himself as the voice of people whose voice otherwise was suppressed and who were otherwise unseen or looked down on (tribute from writer and friend David Malouf).

His poetry and stories are, I guess, "Vincentian". Without knowing, they seem to embrace humility, inclusivity, empathy and compassion. As the "Bard of Bunyah", Murray was a person of the Beatitudes for he shared a gentleness and a purity of heart in beautiful and sometimes

harsh practical expressions, even to capturing my "sleepy soul" that evening at Manly College.

There are many deep reflections left by Les Murray but one of my simple favourites is the following, known as The Meaning of Existence:

*Everything except language  
knows the meaning of existence.  
Trees, planets, rivers, time  
know nothing else. They express it  
moment by moment as the universe.  
Even this fool of a body  
lives it in part, and would  
have full dignity within it  
but for the ignorant freedom  
of my talking mind.*

– Les Murray, 2002, Poems the Size of Photographs

I recommend a reflective stroll through the works of this extraordinary Australian to warm the cockles of your hearts in the coming winter months and offer a prayer of thanks for a life shared in serving the poor in spirits: <http://www.lesmurray.org>.

May Les Murray rest in peace.

Painting by David Naseby, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. (Reproduced here with permission from D. Naseby)

## The Beatitudes and Les Murray

By Leo Tucker, State Director of Mission and Spirituality

Brief reading from Matthew's gospel:

**"Happy the gentle, the poor in spirit...those who hunger and thirst for what is right...the pure in heart...the peacemakers..."**

Hopefulness about life and people is an essential symbol for a Christian and a Vincentian to wear. The deep-down conviction that love is more powerful than hatred, that life is more precious than death, that darkness does not triumph over the light of goodness and, above all, that the loving presence of God in us can enable us to do things beyond our ordinary imagining. In many ways, this is the message of the Beatitudes in both the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Recently I was saddened to hear of the death of the Australian poet Les Murray. I must admit a weakness in my personal literary consciousness is that I just do not get poetry! I struggle with the esoteric ways of thoughtful reflection and a way of viewing life, the universe and everything. Therefore, when I was told



## Florence Mary Verga Smith

### A special morning for Mary

Florence Mary Verga Smith, affectionately known as Mary, was born on the first day of spring 1932 in Melbourne to Florence and Thomas Smith.

In February this year, Mary's family and friends attended a special morning tea at Vincentian House at Surry Hills for a service to remember Mary, as she passed away on 25th September 2017.

Mary's loved ones came from across Australia including Bathurst and Western Australia. Leo Tucker,

State Director of Mission, dedicated a spiritual reflection for Mary.

Niamh Mannion, Executive Director Support Services, unveiled a memorial plaque to honour Mary's generous bequest to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

Loved ones, staff and volunteers joined in

sharing stories about Mary on the rooftop at Vincentian House. Mary's life was guided by her strong faith, which was evident as

she genuinely cared for family, friends, neighbours or anyone who needed a hand up. The plaque honouring her bequest is displayed at the Matthew Talbot Hostel Medical Clinic. The plaque reflects her career as a pharmacist and Honorary Life Member of the Pharmacy Guild and her dedication to caring for her community.

Mary is fondly remembered by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW for her generosity and compassion for over 20 years and the positive difference her gift will make to future generations. Mary's name has been recorded in our "Book of Gratitude" and the book was presented for prayers at the Annual Mass, December 2018 at St Patrick's Church, Sydney.



# If you've ever felt lonely,

you know the  
pain of Ruby's  
poverty.

## YOU CAN HELP

This winter, thousands of Australians like Ruby will struggle to make ends meet. After paying for food, Ruby cannot even afford to leave the house and faces days of complete isolation. Your donation will help provide food, housing and support to people in need.



**Donate to the Vinnies Winter Appeal today.  
HELP END THE PAIN OF POVERTY.**

Please give through your parish, call 13 18 12 or visit [vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au)



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*