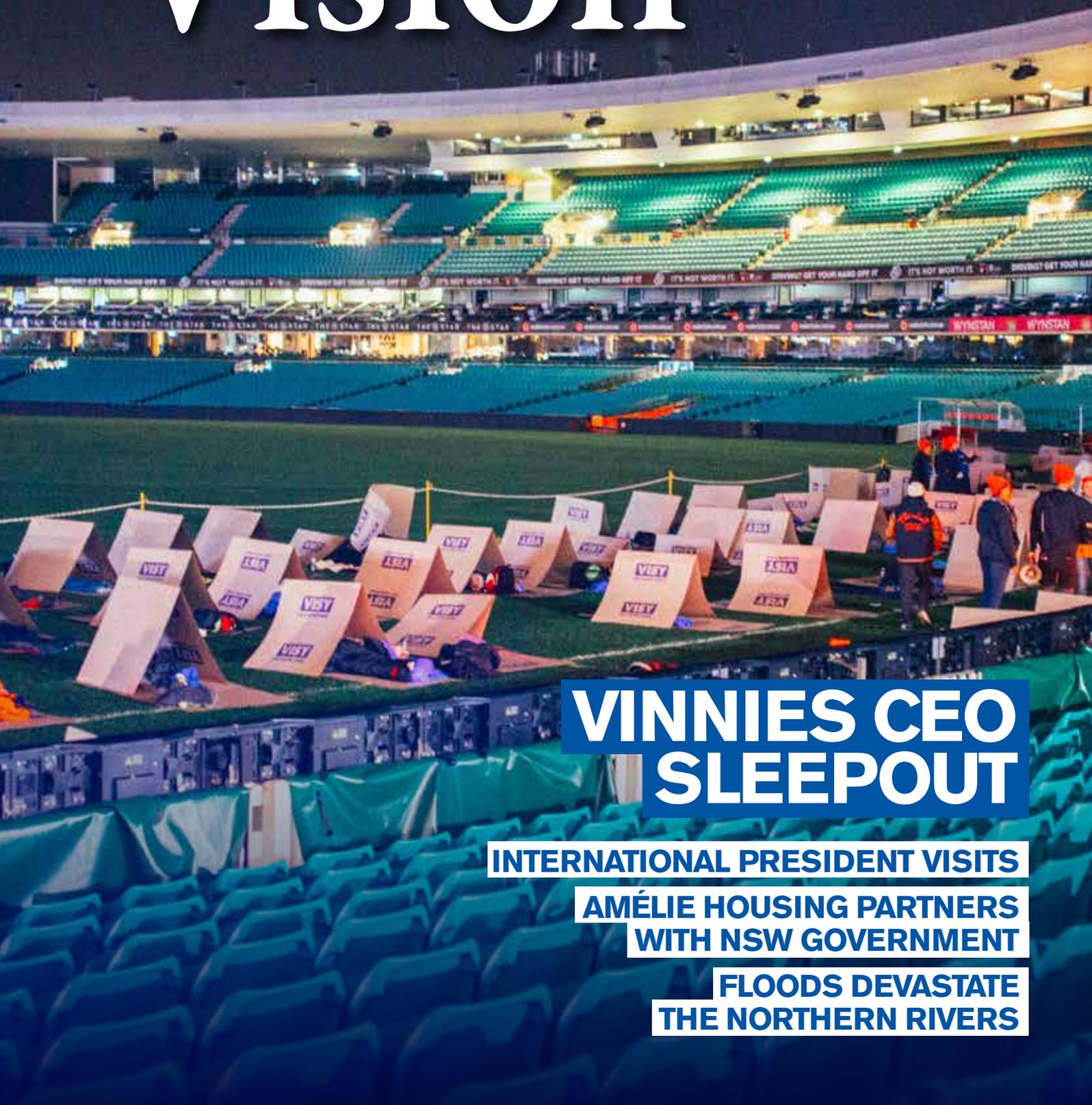




St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

WINTER 2017
ISSUE NO. 81

Vision



**VINNIES CEO
SLEEPOUT**

INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT VISITS

**AMÉLIE HOUSING PARTNERS
WITH NSW GOVERNMENT**

**FLOODS DEVASTATE
THE NORTHERN RIVERS**



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We'd love to hear what the Society is doing in your area.

Send us an email, or call with an idea for a story or news piece:
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(02) 9568 0293.

Please DO NOT send original photographs. Photos should be emailed as high resolution.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear friends

Regeneration has been at the centre of the Society this year, with many new initiatives being introduced across the state. WE CARE has been piloted in three regions with outstanding success. It is a new approach enabling our members to

identify and respond to the underlying needs of the people we assist. Conferences in Blacktown, Coffs Harbour and Bathurst have used the new approach in different ways: read more on p. 12.

Valuing Youth is our initiative to attract and utilise the potential of young people. Five groups have come up with ideas to trial and share with other Conferences. You can read about Valuing Youth on p. 14.

Both these initiatives are about renewal and re-ignoration, with a particular focus on engaging with young people. With children and young people front of mind, the Society has begun implementing its new Safeguarding Children policy. By now, members, volunteers and employees will have received information; for more on this, go to p. 14.

The Society's National Congress will be held in October in Adelaide—the first gathering of its kind in over 60 years. It is the chance for members, especially those in regional leadership positions, to come together to imagine the future of the Society, based on our collective experience of belonging to a spiritual movement for social change.

We hope attendees will return home with a refreshed view on navigating the changing nature of social injustice, emerging manifestations of poverty, inequality, loneliness and exclusion.

Hot off the press – I'd like to congratulate John Donnelly on his recent appointment as President of Broken Bay Central Council.

And finally, a thank you to everyone who has supported the Winter Appeal. Without your efforts raising funds, we would not be able to offer our support and services to those in our communities most in need.

Yours faithfully

Denis Walsh
State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW



CEO'S MESSAGE

It's been 12 months since I commenced as CEO of the Society. While on the one hand it feels like I've never been anywhere else, on the other I don't know where the time has gone.

I am still visiting services and Conferences – no doubt meeting everyone will be an ongoing activity I look forward to with pleasure.

This last year has been one of growth and change and, with that, the challenges that go with an evolving environment.

I had a long night in the cold where I was able to reflect on 2016-17, sleeping out at the Vinnies CEO Sleepout, lying alongside 350+ other CEOs. It wasn't a restful night for any of us, but it did bring home to us a fragment of the reality facing those who didn't have a shower and hot breakfast to look forward to. The evening's program reinforced for me the vital work we do assisting those less fortunate and my pride in leading this organisation, particularly listening to the stories of those who had been homeless and were on the track to housing security. Read more on pp. 16-17.

The announcement that Amélie Housing has been

selected by the NSW Government to be a partner in Social and Affordable Housing Fund is hugely significant. For more, read p. 4.

Our members have almost achieved the unachievable. In October last year they launched a petition calling on the State Government to change planning laws so that at least 15 per cent of new residential developments are set aside for affordable housing. Vincentians galvanised the support of their friends, families and colleagues. They held public forums and arranged meetings with their local MPs and mayors and in the end over 16,000 people signed up, resulting in a debate in Parliament in August. But a real shift occurred in May when the State Opposition outlined their policy on affordable housing—a 30 per cent target on publicly owned land and a 15 per cent target on privately owned land. I believe this would not have been possible without the lobbying and advocating of our members, volunteers and employees.

With this, and so much more, happening, I'm really looking forward to my second year with the Society.

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

Government partners with Amélie Housing

Amélie Housing, the community housing company of the Trustees of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (NSW), was selected as one of five partners in the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF).

The SAHF is a key component of the NSW Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW strategy that will result in more social and affordable housing dwellings linked to tailored support, to help households gain independence.

This is the culmination of years of advocacy, meetings, and public support for a real commitment to housing people experiencing disadvantage in our society. This fund will assist those on low incomes who are finding it harder and harder to keep a roof over their heads.

Under the SAHF, Amélie Housing will be able to build 305 new properties and acquire 195 properties across NSW. There will be a mix of social (70 per cent) and affordable (30 per cent) dwellings with quality, wrap-around support services.

The new properties will be built to 7-star energy efficiency ratings, helping keep utility costs down for residents while reducing environmental impacts.



Vinnies members, volunteers and staff are seeing more and more people struggling as housing becomes totally unaffordable. This Fund will help the Society provide more housing and, along with the necessary support services, open up new opportunities for us and for those we assist. The Amélie Housing Board and our Trustees have given their full endorsement for this initiative because it aligns perfectly with our long term vision. They have allocated an investment of substantial funds and land into the program.

Over the next decade our goal is to make Amélie Housing one of Australia's leading Community Housing Providers.

Brian Murnane, CEO, Amélie Housing

JACK DEMPSEY – GIVING FROM THE HEART

Jack has been volunteering at Marillac Housing, Albury, for 18 years. He's been a member of the St Patrick's Conference for over 50 years and when he retired he began dedicating his life to the men and women who lived in the 19 bedsits now owned by Amélie Housing. Until Homes Out West took over the management for Amélie Housing it was up to members and volunteers to look after the people who passed through, as well as maintain the buildings and grounds. For many years, he'd come every week to collect rent, before it was taken out of the residents' bank accounts by Centrelink. He'd assist them with their paperwork which could be a difficult task.

Helping the residents sort out their problems kept him awake at nights.

"But I enjoy every minute," says Jack. "When people arrive, I'd tell them: 'this is your home. Live here as long as you like'.

"I do it because I enjoy it. I've made a lot of friends here. You can't put words to it."

According to Jenni Duff, President Wagga Wagga Central Council, Jack is an intrinsic part of Vinnies Albury. "He's a legend," she says.



Members' action reaches NSW Parliament

It has taken lots of effort but our members have finally reached their goal – to have our petition for affordable housing discussed in the NSW Parliament on Thursday 3 August.

It began last year when Social Justice representatives across NSW drafted a petition calling on the Government to change the State planning rules to set aside for affordable housing a minimum 15 per cent of all new residential developments.

Through the hard work of members, volunteers and employees, we exceeded the 10,000 signatures required – in the end, we had over 16,300 signatures. This is a remarkable achievement.

One of the stalwarts behind the campaign was the late Irene Gough, Lismore's Social Justice representative. Before her tragic death in December, she was out in her community, circulating the petition far and wide to gather signatures and support.

CEO Jack de Groot delivered the huge box of petitions to the office of Damien Tudehope, Liberal Member for Epping, in May so that he could introduce it to the Parliament.

"A week later we were delighted to hear the NSW Labor Party's announcement that at least 25 per cent of new properties constructed on government-owned land will be set aside as affordable housing," says Jack.

"What Luke Foley announced was probably the most significant and ambitious plan that any state in Australia has proposed. If elected to government, the ALP would be offering a solution to housing security in our most populous state.

"We support their proposal, especially their promise that 15 per cent of privately owned land to be rezoned for housing will be designated for affordable housing.

In May and June Sydney Archdiocese Social Justice representatives held a number of public forums where Vinnies members and volunteers joined with the local community to hear from their politicians (local, state and federal) and representatives from the homelessness sector about their views on the dire shortage of affordable housing.

"With the date set for 3 August, we are now calling on all our members to please phone their local Member of Parliament, find out what their position is and encourage them to join in the debate in Parliament.

"We want this to be a bipartisan initiative. We already have the endorsement of Labor and the Greens, we just want more Liberals and Nationals to support us.

"Join us at Parliament House on the day to swell the crowd in the Public Gallery."

To find out more contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au.





INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT'S VISIT

Last year Renato Lima de Oliveira was elected the 16th President General of the International St Vincent de Paul Society at the General Meeting in Rome. This year Renato has travelled the world visiting some of the 149 countries where the St Vincent de Paul Society operates.

His purpose was to see first-hand the work carried out by the Society, meet local Vincentians, and take the knowledge of what programs are working well back to the International Council General.

His trip began in Rome where Renato met with the Pope. They had a two-minute private audience and the Pope blessed the ICG flag.

Renato touched down in Sydney on March 21. National President Graham West and NSW President Denis Walsh greeted him at the airport and so began his whirlwind tour of Sydney and Canberra.

Growing up in Brazil, Renato was involved with the Society from his early years. "I started at the Society in 1986 in Brazil when I was in high school. At that time, my only objective was to serve the poor. I found the Conference a sacred place where I could not only serve the poor, but also enhance my religious understandings. It was the best choice in my life to become a Vincentian.

"Australia has always been very important for the worldwide Vincentian family. The country has been at the front edge of the SVDP development in many ways: youth development, formation, organisational development and, above all, the enhancement of the Vincentian vocation."

Renato took the time to meet with service providers at the

Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo and the Youth Reach service in Broken Bay. He even helped with a home visitation in Newtown.

Renato was very impressed and supportive of the dedicated work carried out by his fellow Vincentians in NSW and was keen to encourage his Vincentian brothers and sisters to remember the spiritual nature of the Society.

International President visits Broken Bay

Broken Bay Youth Reach was privileged to have the International General Council President General Renato Lima de Oliveira visit its service.

Renato was warmly welcomed by staff, volunteers and participants and was given a tour of the facilities. He observed the programs and activities in place to support young people as they endeavour to find their way.

Renato engaged easily with the young people and took time to share the meaning of the international flag that had been blessed by the Pope. With the assistance of a student the Brazilian made a coffee—the barista program provides young people with a practical skill to help them transition into employment. He then took up the microphones on the DJ set-up and sang two songs, one that he had recently learnt during his stay in New Zealand.

The President's visit ended with everyone enjoying a barbecue and great conversation.

Floods devastate the heart of the Northern Rivers

Lismore was awoken in the dark of an April night by flood sirens. Pam McKeown, a member of Lismore's St Carthage's Conference, tells the story of how on the night of the flood she called Marie Gunter, Conference President, to tell her how the murky floodwater was creeping up the stairs of her Lismore home. This experience was all too common for the Northern Rivers, the most flood-prone region in Australia.

The following day Pam 'celebrated' her birthday, not with a trip to the coffee shop to catch up with her friends, but instead covered in mud cleaning her house. On the third day, Pam was back in the Centre doing Conference work, helping others get back on their feet, which speaks of the resilience of both Pam and the Conference.

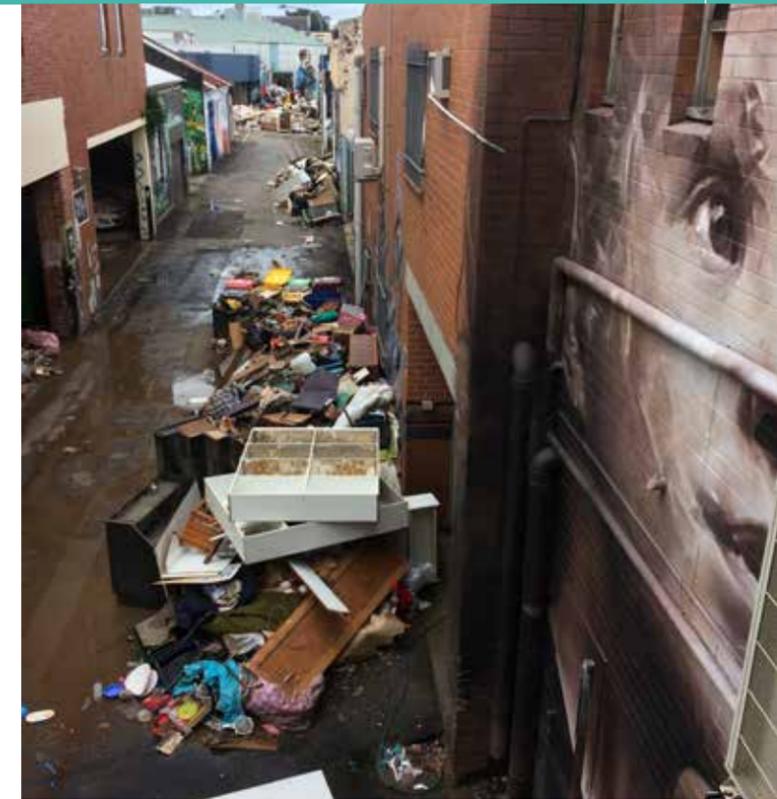
The Centre too had been devastated by the floodwaters and was closed for 24 hours while members, staff and volunteers cleared it out and re-opened it so they could assist the community.

The recovery effort was, and continues to be, enormous. This has been the worst flood the Northern Rivers region has experienced since 1974. The more than 6,000 tonnes of flood waste has resulted in a total damage bill estimated at around \$40 million. The initial impact caused 20,000 people to be evacuated from their homes. Many remain homeless or living in appalling conditions.

A special Northern Rivers Flood Appeal was launched within days and raised money across the state to assist those who had lost their homes, farms and livelihoods.

The Society also put together a project team to join St Carthage's to assist with the recovery effort. A team of caseworkers from Sydney was sent to assist the members so that they could provide support to the community at a time when they themselves were doing it tough. With the combination of case-worker experience and Conference member local know-how, the Society has already been able to assist many of those affected.

Lismore brands itself as the 'heart of the Northern Rivers', and the recovery effort has resulted in homes and businesses everywhere putting up 'Restart the Heart' posters. This encouraging sense of community along with the support being provided by the Society and various other organisations will no doubt help get the heart of the Northern Rivers beating again.



PARRAMATTA COMMISSIONING MASS

A Commissioning Mass for Anne Stanfield Parramatta Central Council President and four Regional Presidents – Melissa Topp, Pamela Nash, Ron Horne and Steve Harrison – was celebrated in March with Bishop Vincent, Father Greg Jacobs PCC Spiritual Advisor, Father George from St Patrick's parish and Deacon Tony Hoban. Members, employees, volunteers and Mini Vinnies members were part of the liturgy, along with beautiful organ music and a cantor.



Alan Ruff made the call to the candidates for the roles of President and Regional Presidents, and State President Denis Walsh led the commissioning ceremony with Bishop Vincent. Leo Tucker, the Society's State Director

of Mission, helped with the liturgy and other preparations and Susan, Janelle and other employees also contributed to make this a special occasion.

Cowra Celebrates Shining Star

Phillip Braddon, St Vincent de Paul Society care and support worker, at the tender age of 89 years young, is a "Shining Star" in the Cowra Community and he has the certificate to prove it. Phillip was awarded a NSW Seniors Local Achievement Award for his tireless work for the Society and the Cowra community.

Nominated for the award by the Cowra Conference, President Mrs Dawn Beath said: "Phil has been a member of the SVDP care and support team for over 32 years. He has held the positions of President over several trimesters and Treasurer for nearly 20 years. He also took on the responsibility to visit the sick and elderly in the Cowra Hospital and Weeroona Nursing Home. Phil has tirelessly dedicated his time to these weekly visits for over 30 years.

"Rain, hail, shine, whatever the conditions, Phil has continued to faithfully visit and bring comfort and

support to many residents of these facilities. He regularly runs errands for them often dipping into his own pocket to purchase necessities and treats," said Mrs Beath. "Phil is the only visitor some of these people ever receive."

Phil is getting on in years himself now but he has not let this deter him. When he cannot drive because of ill-health, he hops onto his gopher, knowing the residents are looking forward to his visit.

"Since 1985 you can count on one hand the number of times Phil has missed his weekly visit either by gopher or with walking stick in hand. He is always there," said Mrs Beath.

He was the guest of honour at a special lunch held to celebrate his award and thank him for his tireless work for Cowra residents.



Local citizen recognised

Anna Leschnik Shellharbour St Vincent de Paul Society President was recognised

as the Citizen of the Year for 2017 at Shellharbour's Australia Day celebrations where local citizens and heroes were honoured. She dedicated her award to her fellow volunteers whom she said made the city "a more inclusive place for people who need a hand up in their lives".

In addition to her contribution through her Conference, Anna also provides student support in the Warilla High School Support Program.



In memoriam: Irene Gough

We honour the memory of Irene Gough, who was Social Justice Representative for the Lismore Central Council. Irene passed away in a tragic accident on Christmas Day 2016.

Those who met or worked with Irene describe how they were immediately struck by her generosity of spirit and her dedication to helping those who came to Conference for assistance.

Yvonne Wynen, Lismore Central Council President, recalls: "Irene had the uncanny knack of seeing beyond the need for food vouchers; she would get right to the core of what was most pressing at that time of their lives.

"Once she got to the heart of an issue, she would never let things rest there, but get straight onto advocating on their behalf with whatever institution was involved. She truly was a champion who knew how to connect social justice and everyday conference work."

Irene's commitment and compassion reminds us all to not only give a 'hand up', but also to continue to 'speak up' for those who are not always heard, and her memory shall live on.



St Peter & Paul Conference Broken Hill

The Saint Peter and Paul Conference in Broken Hill received notification from the International Council in Paris that they are now aggregated and recognised as a Conference.

Since its formation in 2015 members have been visiting people in their homes and also at the aged care centre, spending time with residents, helping at activities, and attending their monthly Mass. They received a Certificate of Volunteering from Far West Health Services for visiting patients at the local hospital.

They attend interagency meetings with Fair Trading and FACS and participate in Homelessness Week Information Day.

To fund activities they run events and appeals and enter a float in the Broken Hill Christmas pageant.

Social justice is a priority: the Regional Social Justice Representative is from their Conference. For the feast of Sts Peter and Paul they hold a special Mass.



45 years of giving



Joy Laos received an award from Peter Fishlock, President of Maitland/ Newcastle Central Council, for 45 years of dedicated service to the New Lambton Conference.



Coniston blessing

The sun shone through the super clean windows at the old Coniston Men's Shelter as the guests arrived.

Known by locals as "Coniston", it was renamed Charles Gordon O'Neil House in April and still services the homeless in Wollongong with case managers on site.

Bishop Peter Ingham, Bishop of Wollongong Diocese, blessed the refurbished facility before 70 guests, including State President Denis Walsh, CEO Jack de Groot, clients, members, volunteers, staff and distinguished guests.

Also housed in the building is Wollongong Region Conference Support which assists the local Conferences with more complex issues.

The Wollongong Vinnies Food Van, which serves meals each night in Wollongong and Nowra, is located here, operating out of a fully functional commercial kitchen. The annual Wollongong CEO Sleepout raises funds to run this service. As well as food, the workers provide books, clothing and much-needed swags to those in need.

Guests looked around and were pleased to see, not only six beautifully equipped one-bedroom units, but also a learning centre equipped with computers, showers, toilets and a laundry for those calling in, two Conference rooms for interviews and case management offices.

Denis Walsh gave a history of the site. He spoke about how Bishop McCabe many years ago gave the land to the Society and that a house had to be moved to the site to be used as a homeless centre. Edna Wilson, Regional President of the Wollongong Region, exhibited early photos of the house and the early days of Coniston Men's Shelter.

Visitors were treated to a light lunch where many reminisced about days gone by spent volunteering at the Old Coniston Men's Shelter, now Charles Gordon O'Neil House.

Gay Mason, President Wollongong Central Council

EDUCATION CHANGES LIVES

Audrey Hill and Resitara Apa are the first two students from the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Social Justice Mt Druitt to graduate from the Clemente Mt Druitt Program.

The Clemente Program is part of the Australian Catholic University and has been running at the Centre for two years. It offers at no cost, supported, tertiary level education in the humanities for people experiencing disadvantage.

Clemente offers a chance for participants to reach their potential by studying subjects such as Ethics, Sociology, Philosophy, History, Politics and Art in an inclusive environment. Participants are able to express their ideas, feel valued and gain confidence.

Its philosophy is simple—education can change lives. Returning to study can enable some people to experience significant, positive change when they are supported to achieve their goals. Audrey and Resitara are a true testimony of this.

Edna Milag, Client Programs Coordinator, is very proud of their achievements.

"It is a massive milestone for Audrey and Resitara to have undertaken university subjects, and now are planning further study in Family Counselling and Psychology and International Study. I am very proud of all that they have accomplished," she said.



New Doors Open in Quirindi

The St Joseph's Conference was officially opened in Quirindi. The new Conference building is connected to the original St Vincent de Paul shop.

Established in 1920, the Quirindi branch was founded by 16 local members, whose descendants cut the official ribbon to mark the Conference building's opening.

Quirindi President Laurel Burrstone said: "We would like to thank the St Brigid's Catholic Church for their support and the use of their old convent building in the years leading up to the opening of the new Conference."

The official opening included a Blessing, readings and intercessions and was followed by a morning tea, where Shelia McNamara received her Life Membership.

Maitland/ Newcastle is on its pathway to mission

Pathways to Mission, a two-day gathering for regional presidents and members of the Maitland/Newcastle Central Council, was held in March. Among the 90 participants were representatives of 37 of the 45 Conferences.

Clare Van Doorn, Membership Development and Support Coordinator, said the purpose of the gathering was fourfold.

"We wanted to empower those we support to develop skills and resilience in seeking out their own pathways to better lives, by seeking out the most appropriate support they need. We also wanted to refresh and nourish our members' own commitment to doing this important work and to consider how we can attract new members to be inspired to continue this work," she said.

What impressed Clare was the readiness of attendees to participate in all the activities—interactive presentations from State Support Office and Central Council – thoughtful discussion, information sharing and Conference development.



Particularly pertinent for new housing initiatives in Maitland and Newcastle was Brian Murnane's exciting and informative presentation on the new Social and Affordable Housing Fund. Fr Dom Carrigan consolidated everyone's intent in his spiritual reflection, urging all to "Live Mercy" and to consider "...who is my neighbour" (Luke 10:29-37).

In closing, Executive Officer Denise Lucas thanked everyone for coming and sharing real life stories.

"The positive feedback and the detailed discussions we had shared are a sign that the Central Council is truly on its Pathway to Mission," she said.

OAM for Barry Finch

Barry Finch OAM was a recipient of the Queen's Birthday Awards for his service to the community.

Barry has served as President of Broken Bay Central Council, Chatswood Regional Council and Forestville Conference.

Bruno Spedalieri, President of Forestville Conference, has known Barry for 30 years. He said: "His actions are outstanding and his achievements are powerful."

That weekend Barry was out in the community doing what he loves – hosting a barbecue for new migrants at Our Lady of Dolours Parish in Chatswood. Known to many as the BBQ King, you'll be hard pressed to find him without a sanger in his hand.



Wollongong's new EO

Peter Quarmby joined Wollongong Central Council as Executive Officer in May.

His first big exposure to the community was at the Wollongong Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

Peter has an extensive background in the community sector and brings to the role a vast knowledge as well as strong and professional leadership skills, having held the positions of CEO, Managing Director and Executive Director within the sector. He was voted as one of the 25 most influential people in the Australian not-for-profit sector in 2014 in Pro Bono Australia's Impact 25 when he was Executive Director of Community Sector Banking Pty Ltd.





"We also assisted two families facing eviction orders and secured a unit for a family facing homelessness."

Recruitment Roadmap charts a successful course in Coffs

Seven people have joined Coffs Harbour's St Augustine's Conference and their homework club for refugee and migrant children, an outstanding result following WE CARE member training.

"Our Conference is innovative in how we support people doing it tough and we were delighted to participate," says Cecily Foley, Conference President.

"With WE CARE we are moving from a transactional style of providing immediate assistance – food vouchers or EAPA vouchers – to a transformational approach, where we work with people more intensively to help them get their lives back on track.

"In order to spend the additional time with them we needed to increase our member base."

Using her training, Cecily delivered a powerful pulpit appeal at St Augustine's Parish masses.

"I followed up immediately on all enquiries. Conference members also used the networking skills learned in the Recruitment Road Map to tap people on the shoulder and tell them about our work over a cup of tea."

Bathurst embraces change

St Therese's Conference Bathurst is planning its full transition to CFW under the leadership of Christine O'Mahony, Evans Regional Council President.

"Two teams completed CFW training. We feel positive about moving forward in our community service and will champion the transition to the new model," says Christine.

Christine praised her Conference President: "Bernadette Mullaney was responsible for recruiting six prospective members. I am sure CFW was part of her success.

"We are learning to engage with people to better understand their circumstances and provide assistance in a more effective and holistic way.

"What's making it work is that our members are willing to embrace change. We are addressing every challenge we meet, by focusing on making a difference in people's lives."

Three Conferences are piloting the WE CARE approach – part of the Conference Financial Wellbeing (CFW) initiative.

WE CARE builds on what members already do and further enables them to identify and respond to the deeper underlying needs of the people they assist, offering more sustainable support.

Training sessions have been held for Conference members where they enriched one another with their knowledge and experience.

Blacktown Community Hub makes a difference within a month

Positive results were already evident soon after the Blacktown Community Hub opened its doors at a new, purpose-designed space at the Blacktown Vinnies Shop. The Hub is a person-centred support and referral service operated by Parramatta Central Council working with Conferences in the Prospect region.

"People experiencing disadvantage come here for emergency relief, assessment, advocacy and referral support, in addition to the home visitations our members provide," said Anne Stanfield, President.

"We are assisting people to achieve wellbeing in all aspects of their life through an initial in-depth assessment and ongoing evaluation process."

In the first three weeks the Community Hub had assisted well over 100 individuals and families. One third were referred to other services so they can receive longer term specialised support.

Respecting dignity and sharing skills

Virginia's connection with Louise House was as a volunteer but after a few years she was offered a permanent role because of the real difference she was making to the people she met.

Louise House is an Individual and Family Care Support Centre based in Gorokan, Central Coast. It provides a hand up, while at the same time respecting an individual's dignity and providing skills and techniques that help empower them.

Louise House is an important service for many locals, offering a range of services from counselling and the No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS), to socialisation and friendship.

Virginia is the Activities Officer. Her passion and infectious positivity has helped regenerate and renew the Louise House mission. Since starting as a volunteer, Virginia has introduced many new courses and activities to help inspire and assist those in need.

Her active involvement and desire to help saw her develop really positive and meaningful relationships with the people using the services. After a few years Virginia took on a paid role to further grow the services.

There are three great courses that Virginia helped set up and which she is most excited about.

"The Craft Group is fabulous. Every week we make something different – we even made terrariums," says Virginia.

"Because there is so much diversity, we started a Multicultural Cooking Group where we get together and taste some of our members' favourite cuisine from around the world. The Rebel Queen's Walking Group is also very popular – where women connect with each other and nature as they walk a different trail each week."



St Joseph's Workshop – making furniture and friends

If you are looking for quality handmade furniture, look no further than Vinnies Shops in the Broken Bay Central Council where they stock goods made at the St Joseph's Workshop.

The 75 volunteers at the workshop build tall boys, large and small chest of drawers, children's tables and chairs, hanging rails and much more. The workshop provides a friendly space for volunteers to create and learn the art of woodworking and furniture building and, occasionally, furniture repair.

As well as making furniture for sale in the Vinnies Shops they also supply furniture for disadvantaged families. It's a team effort, from sourcing the materials (many of which are donated) to carefully cutting, gluing and painting the finished pieces.

Bob McGrath, an architect, and other team members on the Committee of Management oversee the daily running of the workshop and make sure all their equipment is in tip-top condition. The Committee also ensures the working procedures are well organised and safe for the volunteers. Bob and other volunteers were responsible for the workshop design and layout of the equipment which complies with WH&S requirements.

Much of their very good quality and brand-new equipment has been donated or bought through grants so that the workshop can produce the best quality products.

If you have any enquiries regarding volunteering at the workshop, please get in touch with Bob at StJosephWorkshop@vinnies.org.au.



Safeguarding our kids

Over the past 18 months the Society has undertaken an external review and has sought feedback on our Child Safe systems to ensure that we are doing all we can to protect the children and young people in our care.

The result is our new Safeguarding Children and Young People policy which can be found on the Vintranet and on the MAVS microsite.

We are currently working towards accreditation with Child Wise as a Child Safe Organisation. This will be a journey

involving everyone across the Society adopting a Child Safe lens in all that we do. There may be a number of changes as we move towards becoming more Child Safe and more child-focussed. The delivery of the new policy is just the first step in that journey.

Over the coming months we will be communicating regularly about the implementation of the policy across the various areas of the organisation.

We have employed a dedicated Child Safe Project Coordinator, whose role it is to support and assist members, volunteers and employees through this process. Belinda-Jayne Davis will lead the development of training, communications and support resources to ensure all parts of the Society can effectively implement the Safeguarding Children and Young People policy and procedures. You can contact her on 9568 0272 or Belinda-jayne.davis@vinnies.org.au

We look forward to continuing this journey with you to ensure that children and young people are always valued, respected and safe in the Society.

Vinnies Values Youth

Valuing Youth is a program we are running to ensure we attract and utilise the potential of young people. It reflects of our Vincentian desire to break the cycle of disadvantage.

Participating members, volunteers and employees are working together, brainstorming, planning and then implementing new initiatives. They collaborate and support one another and come together every three months. There are four key areas—Conference Models, Schools Engagement, Welcoming and Pathways, and Communication and Collaboration.

“Already Valuing Youth initiatives have made a difference,” says Margarita Rivera, Valuing Youth project manager.

We will soon be rolling these out across the state:

- A Welcoming Checklist for new members, volunteers and employees
- A piloted flexible Conference model, focussing on migrant and refugees



- Use of an online communication tool
- A checklist of strategies to help engage with schools.

“As new initiatives continue to emerge, spreading the word about these will become more and more important,” says Margarita.

Does this Valuing Youth initiative sound interesting to you? Would you like to know more? Contact Margarita on 0413 019 926 or margarita.rivera@vinnies.org.au.



Energy savings for the environment and household budgets

Earth Hour celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. Launched in Sydney in 2007, Earth Hour has become a global movement with an estimated 100 million people and businesses in 172 countries now taking part. It was designed to bring attention to the effects of climate change by asking people to switch off lights at their homes and businesses for one hour.

The No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS), is a microfinance loan scheme coordinated by Good Shepherd Microfinance for people on low incomes to purchase new, energy efficient appliances without fees, interest and charges. The Society provide NILS in 10 locations across NSW.

During Earth Hour Jack de Groot explained how NILS loans are used to replace appliances that are often energy guzzlers with better performing and more efficient items.

“We have significantly reduced the energy consumption of people who come to us for a NILS loan,” said Jack.

“Since we joined the program in August 2016, we have loaned our clients over \$3 million.

“People can buy essential white goods without sinking into debt by borrowing from pay-day lenders and lower their energy bills simultaneously. In a small way we’re helping to provide part of the solution to reduce the impact climate change.”

NILS is part of the NSW Government’s Home Energy Action Program which aims to reduce energy bills for low income households by \$2.8 million per year— avoiding around 11,500 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year.

Please join us at the

SOCIAL JUSTICE FORUM 2017

Saturday 5 August 2017

To register go to <http://bit.ly/SJforum>

For more info contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au or (02) 4032 3545

Have your say!

The Society is reviewing its social justice statement and would like to hear from you.

To have your say on our next campaigns for social justice, please complete this survey and return it to

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
PO Box 5, Petersham NSW 2049

or fill out the survey online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SJS2000>

Which of these issues are most important to you and the people you assist in your local community? Please tick up to 5 boxes.

- Inclusion of people living with disabilities
- Mental health
- A fair go for refugees and people seeking asylum
- Reducing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable people
- Preventing domestic violence
- Reducing poverty
- Vulnerability of older Australians
- Reducing incarceration
- Employment opportunities for all
- Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Making housing more affordable and reducing homelessness
- Alcohol and other drugs addictions
- Reducing inequalities
- Reducing the cost of energy
- Other (please specify): _____

What is your role in the Society? Please tick one box.

- Member
- Volunteer
- Employee
- Supporter

What is your postcode? _____

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you would like any further information please contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au



CEO Sleepout hits home again

The number of CEOs participating in the Vinnies CEO Sleepouts in NSW is continuing to grow, ensuring the event remains the biggest annual fundraiser for the Society.

On a Thursday night in late June, where temperatures dropped to 7 degrees, 357 CEOs and community leaders slept out on the iconic Sydney Cricket Ground, with a further 36 at Wollongong's St Mary Star of the Sea College. It was slightly warmer (9 degrees) at Newcastle's McDonald Jones Stadium where 56 people slept under the stadium with only two sheets of cardboard between them and a concrete floor.

Over \$1.951 million was raised in NSW and more than \$5.5 million across Australia.

The smooth running of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout relies on the support of volunteers – employees, members and existing volunteers – as well as corporate partners. They work hard setting up and making sure that everything runs like clockwork. A big thank you goes to the 160 volunteers in Sydney, 15 in Wollongong and 25 in Newcastle.

It was CEO Jack de Groot's first exposure to a Sleepout.

"The event was organised and run with utter precision so my thanks go to everyone who was involved who worked so hard to ensure it ran without a hitch," he said.

"At all the events people who had experienced homelessness spoke from the heart about their journeys. Their stories illustrated to the CEOs how personal circumstances can shift like quicksand.

"I saw how much of an impact the night had on the CEOs, turning around their preconceived ideas; homelessness can happen to anyone, regardless of their age, gender, education level!"

Another first timer was Greg Taylor, CEO of Abergeldie Complex Infrastructure. He was Sydney's top fundraiser with \$58,480 raised.

"Abergeldie's motto is 'building better communities' and my fundraising was largely made up of donations by our staff and management who have been helping to build better communities by supporting this event for over 10 years," said Greg.

"The thing that struck me most was the noise of 356 CEOs snoring in disharmony – which if I was sleeping rough would be the noise of traffic or passers-by. That, combined with the damp, cold night air made it a brutally effective experience. I was glad to be back in my own bed the next night."

Mamamia founder Mia Freedman also attended for the first time. "Participating in the Sleepout with the Mamamia leadership team helped open my eyes, my heart and my mind to homelessness. It is an incredible initiative organised by an army of tireless volunteers. What they do not just for the Sleepout but every day and night of the year is extraordinary," she said.

Matt, one of the speakers at the Sydney event, said: "The work that Vinnies does all around the country is truly remarkable."

He valued the fundraising and knowledge-sharing of the event because it facilitated a positive change.

"And what an opportunity for all of us to never walk past another homeless person, drug addict, or any broken human being for that matter, and assume there is no hope. Because thanks to organisations like Vinnies, there is always hope."

There were regular interviews with CEOs during the lead-up on the Sky News Business, our long term National Partner and they were there on the night hosting a live outdoor broadcast. Again, *The Australian*, another long standing National Partner, ran advertisements in the months preceding the CEO Sleepout.

Thanks to all of the sponsors who assisted us nationally and locally to keep event costs to a minimum. To see who they are visit www.ceosleepout.org.au.



CEO Sleepout Newcastle



CEO Sleepout Wollongong



Team Vinnies COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

Team Vinnies does it again

A Community Fundraising program was recently launched to help make supporting Vinnies even more accessible and fun. Fundraisers can now join Team Vinnies across a wide range of exciting activities including sleepouts, fitness challenges, personal challenges, celebrations, do it yourself and Learn to Give.



Great Wall Challenge

Five incredible supporters challenged themselves to an adventure-of-a-lifetime raising funds for Vinnies and trekked the Great Wall of China in April. Their inspiring efforts have raised awareness and over \$25,000 for Vinnies homelessness services.

Learn to Give

Seven students from University of Notre Dame and Australian Catholic University are using their course work to do good in the community with Vinnies. As part of the brand new Vinnies Learn to Give program, these students are learning professional not-for-profit skills as well as how to be innovative and resourceful community organisers by organising their very own fundraising events.

CONTACT US

Want to get involved? Contact our Community Fundraising Coordinator at (02) 9568 0211 or events@vinnies.org.au or look online at www.vinnies.org.au/getinvolvednsw

Vinnies IGA Christmas Appeal taps into local communities

Last year the IGA Christmas Appeal partnering with Vinnies for the fourth time and raised \$346,851 nationally through the sale of IGA Community Chest products and Christmas baubles. It is a powerful partnership because both organisations have deep roots in their local communities. A huge thank-you to IGA for partnering with Vinnies for the Christmas Appeal.



CITY2SURF

Don't miss Sydney's favourite fun run. This is your chance to join Team Vinnies and change lives for people experiencing homelessness.

Grab one of our limited Charity Superstar spots to raise \$1,000 for Vinnies and enjoy free registration and a premium race day start zone.

Hilton Hotel Sydney serves up meals at the Talbot

The Hilton Sydney supports the Vinnies Sydney Night Patrol service through regular donations, food deliveries, and by providing regular volunteers. Hilton also provides a monthly meat donation to the Matthew Talbot Hostel.

Their Executive team, including General Manager Ronald Van Weezel, hosted a barbecue on the rooftop of the Hostel in March. They served over 200 men who come there daily for lunch. Director of Human Resources Kim Arnold found the tour of the Hostel and the adjacent Ozanam Learning centre eye opening. "I gained greater insight and understanding of the support that is offered at MTH and OLC," she said. A big thanks to them all!



ASF CHARITY LUNCH

The Australian Stockbrokers Foundation (ASF) held their annual charity lunch in February where they presented



Deputy CEO Diane Lucas and Brother Dan Stafford OAM with a cheque for \$25,000 for the Matthew Talbot Hostel. The ASF is the Hostel's longest running supporter and have raised almost \$2.3 million since 1994. They have supported everything from the health clinic and food program to a major refurbishment undertaken in 2008. Danny Dreyfus and Geoff Wilson have been involved right from the beginning so a special thank you goes to them and to all past and present ASF members.

The Rollout of KEEP continues thanks to Sydney Airport

Since being recruited to expand the Kids Engaged in Education Program (KEEP), NSW Project Manager Kelsie Hedge has been busy developing the modules of the youth early intervention program. This, along with expanding partnerships within and beyond the Society, is thanks to the Sydney Airport charity auction grant we received in 2016. Thank you Sydney Airport for helping us land another great program.



Genworth supports KEEP's expansion



Genworth Financial also supports KEEP which was developed at Vincentian House. This year Genworth has increased its contribution to over \$41,000 so that the KEEP can expand the program model and be replicated at other Sydney services. Without the help of organisations like Genworth this important work could not be achieved.



LAGARDÉRE TRAVEL RETAIL SUPPORT CONTINUES

Lagardère Travel Retail supports the Vinnies Winter and Christmas Appeals across their Newslink retail spaces in Australian airports. Last Christmas they raised over \$7,000 which takes their total support over the last year to almost \$22,000. Lagardère CEO Matthieu Mercier is also a Vinnies CEO Sleepout Ambassador assisting us to recruit CEOs and encourage fundraising.



New Learning Centre Opens in Armidale

Our new learning centre opened in Armidale to meet the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. The Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC) offers a series of courses on living skills, work preparation and job searching skills and how to access local support services.

A preview was attended by many community partners including Member for Armidale Adam Marshall.

Deborah Putlueng, Interim Program Manager, spoke about the real need for skills and education programs for disadvantaged and marginalised adults.

"We know that over 200 people are sleeping rough every night in Armidale. That is just the tip of the iceberg—there are many others who are unemployed, chronically ill, who could be escaping domestic violence, or living with addiction or mental health issues," says Deborah.

"Vinnies identified the real need to develop support systems to help these people to build confidence, gain literacy skills and to support them on an employment pathway to build a sustainable future. We are well known because of our long history in Armidale."

Madan Narayanamurthy, OLC Project Officer, has been connecting with other community service providers in the region and found that skills programs like anger management, tenancy care and budgeting, and job skills training were the most requested programs.

OLC PROGRAMS

- Cooking on a budget
- Tenancy and budgeting living skills workshops
- Resume writing
- Literacy skills
- Rent It Keep It
- TAFE basic computer 12-week program
- Breakfast Club
- Yoga and meditation
- Barista course
- Health activities and excursions

DAY REHAB SERVICE TO OPEN IN TAMWORTH

The Society's drug and alcohol treatment services in the New England and North West got a boost thanks to new Commonwealth funding commissioned by the Primary Health Network.



Dianne Lucas Society Deputy CEO attended the announcement in Tamworth in February.

"The Society has a long and well established track record in providing drug and alcohol treatment services in this region," says Dianne.

"Through our service at Freeman House Armidale we are already helping people in this region tackle addiction issues. At the new day rehabilitation service opening in Tamworth soon we can start to make a difference to the lives of people there."

In June the Society received an additional \$573,000 through the Primary Health Network to provide before and after care as well as outreach drug and alcohol programs in South Western Sydney, based from the Rendu House program in Campbelltown.

OUTSIDE PANTRY OFFERS THE BASICS

The Outside Pantry is a new 24/7 initiative at Edel Quinn Wagga Wagga providing non-perishable tinned and packet food, small personal items and fresh produce to those in need.

It is a discreet way to help disadvantaged local people who are struggling to afford the basics.

Outside Pantry has been active for several months and feedback has been great. A VinniesNSW Facebook post was picked up by the local Prime TV News. They filmed staff at the Pantry, promoting the good work of Edel Quinn and the Society.

As well as providing some basic items, there is also a feedback form for pantry users to say what they would like to have next time. Several heart-warming comments have been left by appreciative Pantry users.



New Sydney Vinnies Van gets rolling

The Sydney Vinnies Van was finally replaced after 17 years with a new bus in February, thanks to the generous support of DOOLEYS Lidcombe Catholic Club.

The brand new, purpose-fit vehicle is delivering the Sydney Night Patrol and Brekky Van programs.

In addition to enjoying the company of our volunteers, regular patrons also say they like the reliability of our service. Having a new vehicle will ensure mechanical problems can no longer hamper the schedule.

The fit-out was designed by volunteers from the service. This is crucial because their years of experience ensured the new design is practical and will improve the Workplace Health and Safety of our volunteers.

DOOLEYS Lidcombe Catholic Club supported the purchase through the ClubGrants Scheme. DOOLEYS is a longstanding supporter of Sydney Vinnies Van Services, with volunteers supporting the Society behind the scenes at our Lewisham base for many years. They joined the roster in 2017 and their team went out in February. We are very excited to be strengthening our relationship with them.



HELPING HANDS FUND HUB

Through the generosity of the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation (NPCF) a new Resource Centre opened at the Hastings Accommodation Solutions (HAS) in Port Macquarie in March.

The centre offers access to caseworkers, resources and educational programs to people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage.

Denis Walsh, State President, officially opened the centre and expressed the Society's gratitude towards the NPCF.

"Their grant of \$57,000 has allowed us to deliver more programs and services to help people build their resilience and find long-term accommodation and employment," he says.

"Our case managers help individuals and families secure stable housing and enhance their opportunities for educational, economic and social participation."

It is estimated that currently of the nearly 500 people experiencing homelessness every night across the Port Macquarie Hastings area as many as 150 are young people. As this figure grows each year, it points to an urgent need for an expanded and coordinated service to help support the region's homeless and at-risk

population, before they lose their homes.

NPCF Executive Officer Graham Batten, also at the opening, spoke of how the centre would provide a hub.

"There was no central access point in the Port Macquarie area where people receive a range of support, resources or referrals to appropriate services, material aid, tenancy education or information," says Graham.

"By accessing the programs and facilities offered people have the opportunity to build a new life, which would be a fantastic outcome."

HAS also provides families and single people short term housing in seven self-contained units at McCosker House. Last year HAS helped more than 300 adults and children.



Report highlights Ability Links' success

Ability Links has taken community support to a new level, according to a recent Urbis report.

Urbis found that Ability Links NSW is achieving "remarkable outcomes" within a short space of time and having a "profound effect" on people's lives.

43,500 people engage with Ability Links NSW each year. Its whole-of-life approach helps people with disability overcome social isolation, lack of confidence and skills and other barriers to community life.

The report says that linked-in people report feeling safer, happier and more socially connected.

Belinda McDaid, Society Special Works Manager in Newcastle, said the program is part of a seismic shift in the way people are being supported to participate in the community.

"This report shows that where people with disability are given the opportunity to be included, they demonstrate that they can make a valuable contribution, and are changing attitudes."

A crucial factor contributing to Ability Links' success is the value and impact of Linkers, their local knowledge and capacity to work effectively in their communities.

FUN AND LEARNING WITH KIDS

The Sutherland Shire team took part in the Sutherland Police Expo.

Linker Mark brought participant Scott along. A great communicator with the kids, he helped with the games—a giant snakes and ladders, Jenga and noughts and crosses.

A ball dribbling gave everyone the experience of living with blindness. As well as all the fun were lots of constructive conversations with parents and carers of children living with a disability.



FUN AND FACTS IN THE RAIN

Ability Links East team hosted an event at Pacific Square Maroubra to promote community awareness about access and inclusion.

They invited Guide Dogs NSW, the Bowen Library, Anglicare, the Junction Neighbourhood Centre (JNC) and Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA) along for the day. Even in the rain around 70 shoppers joined in the activities – arts and crafts, face painting and a pop-up library.



Wheelchair table tennis a big hit

On International Wheelchair Day, Ability Links NSW partnered with the City of Sydney and Wheelchair Sports NSW to put on a 'come and try' wheelchair table tennis event to promote social inclusion.

Table tennis is popular at Ultimo Community Centre, a social hub for the local Chinese Australian community. Linkers encouraged the 50 centre-users to try their hand at playing using a sports wheelchair.

A regular said that in 20 years of playing table tennis, he had never seen a wheelchair-user join in. Through activities like this people learn how to be inclusive of people with disability.



Ozanam Industries is a Special Work of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW with the three work centres (Stanmore, West Ryde and Coonamble) that employ over 100 Australians with disability.

EASTER SHOWBAGS

In March the Ozanam team at West Ryde was under the media spotlight while they packed Bertie Beetle showbags for the Sydney Royal Easter Show. They were visited by Peter Overton from Nine News and appeared on the Saturday night news bulletin. The Bertie Beetle Showbag is the most popular at the show and many people watching the segment had no idea who packs their favourite bag.



OZANAM INDUSTRIES LOSES GREAT FRIEND

Castlereagh Industries in Coonamble is the second largest employer in the town.

Peter Finn, who joined Castlereagh Industries in October 2014, passed away last year. Peter was an integral and vibrant member of the team and was a role model for many of the employees. He loved cooking the team barbecues, bringing everyone together over a hot sausage.

Peter was diagnosed with cancer in 2015 but his battle took a turn for the worse in January 2016 and so he resigned his position. He passed away peacefully on 30 July 2016 in Coonamble, his home town. Peter was 58 years old.

His passing was a huge loss to his family, his friends, his work mates and the greater community of Coonamble as he was respected and loved by all. At Peter's funeral, the staff and employees performed a guard of honour.

The community pulled together and organised a fundraiser to assist his family. A function was organised and virtually every community member attended. A staggering amount was raised to help his family.

To assist with the grieving process counsellors came to Castlereagh Industries so employees could talk about their loss. During a Worker's Committee meeting it was suggested Peter be honoured with a plaque in his memory.

The decision was unanimous—the plaque would go in the outdoor area where Pete cooked his barbecues. The area is called Pete's Place in honour of their beloved mate.



Ozanam Industries gives Clean Up Australia a helping hand

February was a busy month at Ozanam Industries in Stanmore when 25 employees packed over 8000 bags for Clean Up Australia Day.

Inside the sturdy sacks were gloves, a sharps container, and all the materials the vollies would need to clean up our parks, beaches, rivers, and roads on the day across Australia.



WELCOMING NEW ARRIVALS



In summer Western Sydney and Blue Mountains members co-hosted a picnic welcoming newly arrived Syrian refugees.

It was held at Alpha Park in Blacktown and more than 80 people attended with their families along with Mayor Bali and Crs Collins, Benjamin and Gillies. The highlights were Drum Beats interactive performance, the fashion show and traditional music and dancing performances. A wonderful moment was when a guest at the event asked for the microphone and made a beautiful speech.

The picnic was a shining example of how communities and organisations can work together—also represented were Blacktown Area Community Centres, Western Sydney University and SydWest Multicultural Services.

REFUGEE SCOOTS ALONG

Mohammad Rasool moved to Wagga Wagga from Pakistan in September last year. He has polio and was really struggling with mobility and was in a lot of pain which made every day a struggle.

Deirdre Moulden Wagga Wagga's Manager - Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) Program, realised over the last few months that the only solution would be to get him a scooter.

"They cost a lot of money and about a month ago I emailed the team and said literally 'we need a miracle,'" says Deirdre.

"You would not believe the very next day I literally bumped into another volunteer on HSS program and she asked me if I knew of anyone that wanted to buy a scooter! Of course I said yes but it was for a man from a refugee background and he did not have any money to buy it."



Picture: Nicolas Jungfer, Daily Advertiser Wagga Wagga

After a discussion with her family they were happy to give it to Mohammad.

"We're just so excited for Mohammad. The scooter has completely changed his life and he is enjoying everything so much more having the scooter. He does the shopping and goes to TAFE on a regular basis which is great. He had trouble leaving the house before but now it's like he's got wings. He now has the freedom we all take for granted."

Friendship combats isolation

Nearly one quarter of Australians experience mental illness every year but, despite big improvements in community awareness, shame and stigma still result in many people feeling isolated and lonely. Sadly, social isolation is one of the problems facing people living with a mental illness.

The Compeer program uses formal and supported friendship to alleviate social isolation and combat the stigma surrounding mental illness. This is done by matching people living with mental illness with a volunteer who shares similar interests to meet up together for four hours every month for social outings. The Society has been operating Compeer in NSW for 21 years and has seen genuine, mutually rewarding friendships develop.

Kevin began volunteering for Compeer in 2015 and has thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"My match was a really good one; we visited places and discussed topics we are both genuinely interested in. Knowing that my friend is getting a benefit from sharing a coffee or visiting a gallery is a great reward," says Kevin. Cassandra Masters, Western Sydney Area Coordinator of Compeer, understands Compeer's value.

"Research shows that one of the best ways of combatting stigma is for more people to have personal contact with someone who is living with mental illness. This typically leads to a greater understanding of mental health issues and then reduces stigma. Ultimately we create a more inclusive community where everyone is valued as a unique individual," says Cassandra.

Kevin acknowledges there is still a lot of misunderstanding, although he says things are improving.

"Stigmatisation may stem from a lack of awareness, often reinforced the portrayal of mental health in the media. Programs like Compeer go a long way to highlight that people may have a mental health condition but like everyone else they are just trying to get along. It has helped me dispel some of the myths and by sharing my experiences with my friends, their awareness and understanding has increased."



Over 90 per cent of friends surveyed said Compeer has helped them feel less lonely.

Compeer operates in Sydney, the Hunter, Illawarra Shoalhaven, and Macarthur Wingecarribee. With the opening of the Central Coast program last September, Compeer is offered all the way from the South Coast up to the North Hunter coast.

In Sydney there are over 320 friendships, 12 per cent up from last year. These people may not have had any social outlet but now have regular contact with a caring friend, and the opportunity to attend regular Compeer social events.

The new Central Coast Compeer program is actively seeking volunteers. There are two active friendships, a number in progress and six people on a waiting list.

Kevin strongly encourages others to volunteer.

"The commitment is really small compared to the benefits. Doing something that is a normal part of your daily gives someone else some gentle support and encouragement," he says.

Anyone interested in making a new friend and offering their compassion and social support is encouraged to volunteer by emailing compeer@vinnies.org.au.



A WEEK OF RECOGNITION FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS



Vinnies had such a great time celebrating National Volunteer Week and capped it off with a big thank you to the Compeer program volunteers. They were treated to lunch and yummy thank you cake in Lewisham on Saturday.

The turnout was beyond expectations and it was lovely to see how naturally the volunteers mingled with other volunteers, new and old-timers.

The Rozelle Region

celebrated as a team when the Retail and Client Support staff provided a delicious lunch for members and volunteers to show their appreciation.



Wilcannia Forbes lives happy

Celebrations were held across Wilcannia Forbes Central Council. Lunches and teas were held at Trundle, Condobolin, Parkes, Broken Hill and Deniliquin.



Liverpool Men's Refuge

Alex Varley has volunteered his services of free in-house counselling to the refuge and transitional clients at Liverpool Men's Refuge since April 2016. The clientele group are single men and couples without children and Alex makes himself available for them every Monday and sometimes other days to suit the client. Between April and December 2016 Alex gave a total of 86 counselling sessions to 19 clients – a total of 120 hours of volunteer time.

He has made a real and significant difference to the service. They are able to offer his services to clients at, or shortly after, the assessment process and while they do not all make it to his sessions we know that the need is high and the impact is real. The compassion and respect he shows to the people we serve is an inspiration for us all.

We are so thankful for his professionalism and presence here at the refuge. The value that he has added to Liverpool Men's refuge is remarkable. So for National Volunteer Week myself and the staff acknowledged Alex's ongoing contribution to helping us help those that need it most, by giving him a letter outlining our immense gratitude and also a framed Certificate of Appreciation.

Nofa Winterstein, Senior Team Leader, Specialist Homelessness Service, South West Sydney



New shops open

New Vinnies Shops are springing up across the state. A new Vinnies Shop opened in Jordan Springs, near Penrith, in April.

The first 50 lucky shoppers each received a free Vinnies goodie bag. Susan Goldie, Executive Officer Parramatta Central Council, was very pleased to be opening a Shop in the heart of Jordan Springs.

"In Western Sydney Vinnies provided over \$1.5 million worth of assistance to the local community and assisted over 14,000 people last year, thanks in a big way to the shops."

Another Shop opened in Gymea in May, replacing the existing Miranda shop.

George Blakeley, Sydney Archdiocese Retail Operations Manager, looked forward to meeting the locals when they visit the new shop, especially those who have loyally supported the Miranda store.

"Our customers can be assured that by shopping with us, they are supporting Sydney Vinnies services such as our Community Support Centres and local refuges. We provided over \$3 million worth of assistance to the local community in the Shire, assisting over 31,000 people."

The Shops are looking for more volunteers, so anyone with an interest in Vinnies and retail should enquire at our Shops about volunteering opportunities.



Sutherland style

Stylist nights are becoming a fixture at Vinnies Shops. In March the third event was held at the Sutherland Shop.

Vinnies stylist Tara Castellan divulged some of her trade secrets and unlocked the mysteries of inspired op-shopping.

The night was well attended by close to 40 local fashion conscious shoppers who had plenty of time to browse the racks after the show and discover treasures to suit their unique personal style.

They watched a fashion parade with models dressed head-to-toe by Vinnies and shared drinks and nibbles with fellow Vinnies devotees

Every guest received a goodie bag with a copy of The Styling Handbook, a guide to styling the Vinnies way.

Shop manager Susan Clowser was delighted with the response to this first for Sutherland.

"Sales from the night were around \$2,000, with an average spend of \$80, which is excellent," she said.

"We want people to get the most out of shopping at Vinnies and Tara helped inspire and get the creative juices flowing. What was important was that the attendees learnt that the proceeds from sales go to helping disadvantaged people in our area. This is something not all of our shoppers are aware of".

Sydney young adults ready to lead

Young volunteers who have proved their leadership skills have received advanced training so they can step up to the demanding role of volunteer coordinators leading Buddies Days and Teen Days.

The 11 Sydney Archdiocese volunteers were selected because of ongoing commitment to the Society, their skills working with children and their strength in running programs.

This advanced training drew on their experience of our Code of Conduct, child protection, effective planning, risk management and briefing/debriefing capacities.

Their trainers included several current coordinators, further enhancing their development as top class young adult leaders.



Kids Camp volunteers make a difference

Kids Camps are 2-5 day residential programs for children from families experiencing hardship or disadvantage. Aged between five and 12, they are given the chance to have fun by participating in recreational and educational activities.

The Broken Bay Volunteer Team made this very special work of the Society possible in January. Volunteer Lisa Scott spoke about her experience, "Volunteering on each camp brings new experiences that stay with me. Often it is giving a child the opportunity to overcome a fear or having a child come up and say a heartfelt thank you and, 'Camp is the best!'"

"I began volunteering on Vinnies Kids Camps in 2010 and since then have had many opportunities to be involved in the planning and running of camps each year. As a primary school teacher camp provides me with an opportunity to give back in a way that I can use my own personal strengths. Over the years I have been lucky enough to see a number of children grow and mature as they came back to each camp and gone onto train as volunteers themselves."



Coming together

Tweed/Byron Regional President Brian Donaghy addressed the Murwillumbah Mini Vinnies Gathering, attended by eight schools from across the region. Brian shared stories of hardship faced by local families and how Conferences assist them in various ways. To get the kids really thinking, he asked them to think about their morning routine getting to school. They then explored how they would manage if they were sleeping rough.

Mini Vinnies starts in Forestville

A new Mini Vinnies has been established at Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Primary School and Bruno Spedalieri, President of Forestville Conference, paid the 35 new Mini Vinnies a visit.

Mrs Meredith Tomkins, school principal, encouraged the formation of the group.

"Right now the children are generously collecting money for the Assist A Student program. It provides funding for an education scholarship to train and educate a student in one of our partner countries for one year," she said.



SPARK'S BUSY BILINGUAL BOOK CLUB

The SPARK program has been busy this past year growing its library of books for the popular Bilingual Book Club. The free, mobile library runs in six schools in Fairfield, Parramatta and Liverpool local government areas and is part of the broader Vinnies SPARK program that works with newly arrived parents and carers from refugee, migrant and asylum seeker backgrounds.

Access to a range of high quality bilingual books means families can engage in reading at home, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. Parents from the entire school community are able to borrow books free of charge and take them home to read with their children in both English and their home language. For newly arrived parents and their children this has meant retaining and encouraging bilingualism as they begin to settle in and thrive in their communities.

To date over 600 books have been borrowed by close to 200 parents in over 30 languages including Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Somali, and Hindi.



SPIRITUALITY AT SCHOOLS

Vincentian spirituality and its impact on staff, members and volunteers was the topic for discussion at a recent State Spirituality Advisory Council meeting.

Enlightening, valuable and fruitful discussion and ideas were offered. It was also expressed that, the reality in some areas of our Society, the spiritual nature of our Mission seems to be taking second place to mere 'handouts' of financial support to people whom we journey with (our clients). Whilst it was agreed that this work was important, it begs the question of our foundational motives. It was agreed that we need to re-emphasise the vitally important spiritual underpinnings that provide nourishment and encouragement to all we do as Vincentians. This article is not about defining our Vincentian Spirituality—which Leo Tucker discusses on p.31—but I will say that our starting point must be to look at Jesus and His Gospel (Good News) message.

In my role as a school chaplain on the Mid North Coast I am involved with Mini Vinnies in a Catholic primary school and a Senior Student Conference in a Catholic secondary school, I have given thought to how Vincentian spirituality 'looks' in Catholic schools.

In essence, I believe that Catholic schools live and teach the Catholic principles that are based firmly on the life and teachings of Jesus found in the gospels. A big component in the student education is about learning about Jesus and then living the kind of life that reflects that, using the gifts and talents that each child is blessed with.

In my experience, Catholic schools get this right. Each school may look a little different depending on its history and culture, but the Holy Spirit is active and present when

students learn about the many social justice issues faced by those living in poverty and marginalisation.

Social justice networks then grow out of that environment. Student Vinnies Conferences are just one of a multitude of groups that blossom as an expression of our young people wanting to get involved. So, how then do these young people get their understanding of Vincentian spirituality?

One of our responsibilities is to plant, nourish and grow Vincentian spirituality with our young people. It is in credible relationships with senior Vinnies staff, members and volunteers that these young people grow accustomed to living as Vincentians. Engaging our young in activities within the Society expands their experience of getting their hands dirty.

They yearn for that. I have run Social Justice immersion trips to Sydney for many years and I see the result of their working with support agencies like Vinnies, being exposed to the life and struggles of the marginalised. It changes their thinking and their values and, most importantly, their attitudes and post-school life.

Frederic Ozanam, in establishing the Society, was emphasising the importance of relationships coming out of our own faith. Our young people are looking for us as Vincentians to share our personal spirituality with them. When that happens the Holy Spirit can do marvellous things.

Deacon Vince Ryan

Maitland/Newcastle Central Council and member of the Valuing Youth schools engagement circle.



Grasping Vincentian Spirituality

At a recent National Spirituality Advisory Committee meeting we reflected on some profound and simple words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Near the end of Frederic's life he expressed that "the chief work of the Society is the saving of souls!"...an extraordinary statement. However – in terms of a contemporary vision – we could say that the chief work of the Society is aspiring to live the gospel message or to live the call of our mission by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. Or, that the heart of our spirituality is striving to shape a more just and compassionate society.

When I think of spirituality, I think of what brings life to my spirit or my soul; what raises me up beyond myself, to be more than I can be. Author and motivational speaker Matthew Kelly is a great exponent of understanding that the pathway of spirituality is a journey to be the best version of ourselves. Through this Kelly reflects that God invites us to "see our unrealized potential..." and that "God knows who we are but God also knows who we can be". For Kelly, a deepened spiritual path is to not only realise this within us but to also realise this in how we respond to others and assist others to this realised potential.

Through both of these reflections a Vincentian spirituality requires a Society grounded in faith. Faith transforms lives through a hope which animates our work and enables us to respond in a service of love to all we meet. I believe it is a practical spirituality which is engaging and relational. We are able to respond to others in a love which embraces the intimate relationship of Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples as an example of true love.

The whole of the Vincentian tradition is based on this premise. It is inspired in the scripture and the word and actions of our founders. They believed in a dignity expressed by the presence of God in every human being.

They saw all people as sacred, with rights, including the right to food, clothing and shelter; the right to freedom and self-determination; and the right to participate in society, to thrive and contribute as individuals with dignity. This is also some of the basic principles of our Catholic Social Teachings espoused by Pope Francis.

The vision of our founders enabled them to go beyond merely offering immediate material assistance. To go beyond was to offer human relationship and a commitment to more just systems of social justice and community support. That is why the hallmark of the way the Society operates is through a direct relationship with people in need, respecting their dignity, sharing their hopes, and encouraging them in their dreams. It is a spirituality of advocacy responding in love. Together these are elements of a spirituality that is distinctly Christian, distinctly Catholic, and distinctly ordinary. Transformation of the ordinary to extraordinary.

In gathering these thoughts together I firmly believe that our spirituality draws strength from the fact that all people inherently hold a goodness which is of God and hence we are radically inclusive of every person. In this way we are constantly challenged by our own spirituality to share the fullness of life with all people, all races, all creeds and all faiths.

Finally, our spirituality is compelled in prayer and reflection because they are the source of our inspirations and purpose. They are also the conduit which calls and draws us to the higher purpose expressed by our founders and ripostes how we live the call of the gospel message.

Indeed, we have a deeply rich, nourishing and, at times, challenging charism. This charism gives life to our mission, uniquely of the people and for the people, and it is from this point that all of our good works – Centres, Support Services, Conferences, Special Works or simply our charity—begins.

Leo Tucker
State Director of Mission



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