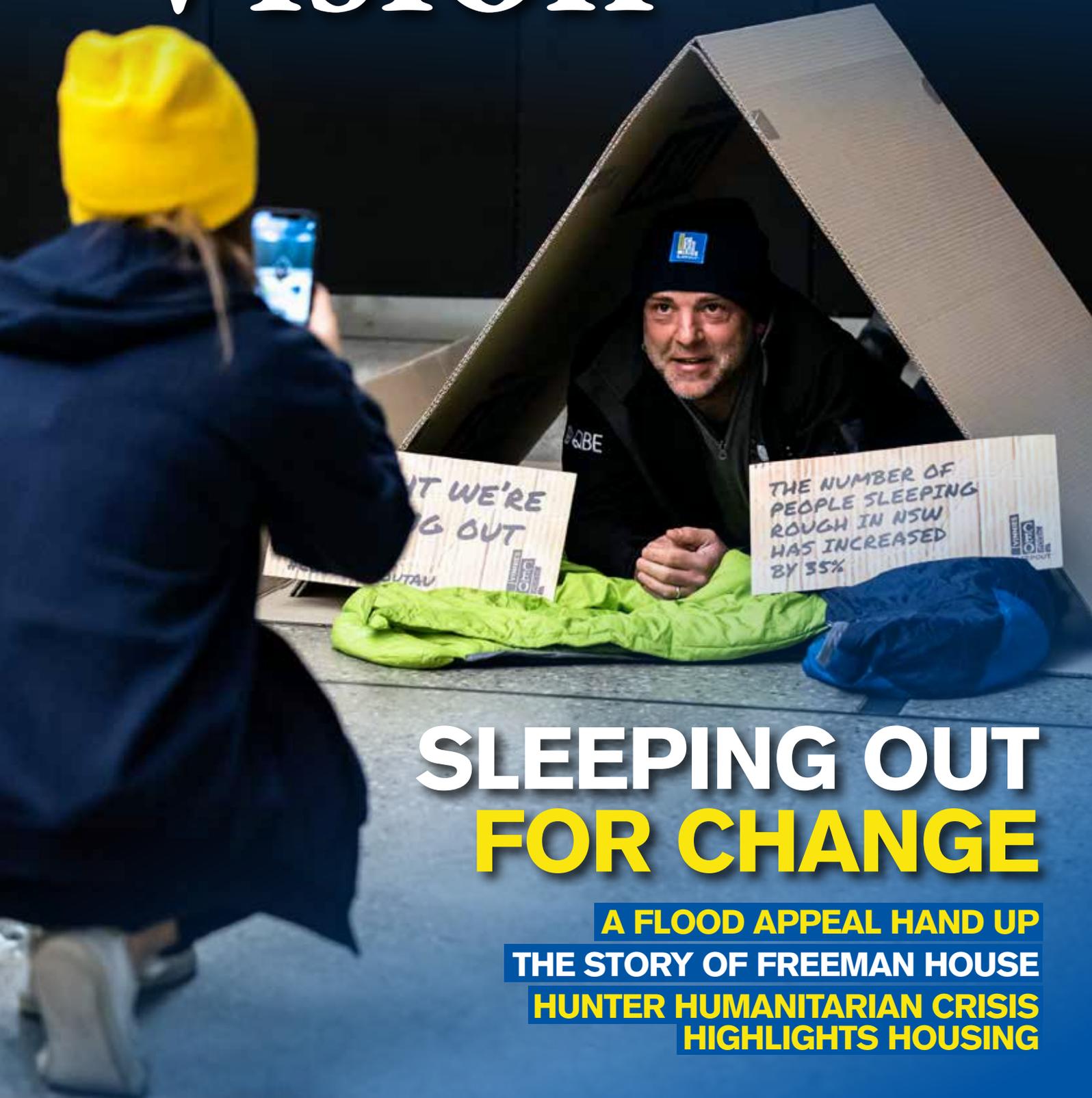




St Vincent de Paul Society  
NSW  
*good works*

WINTER 2021  
ISSUE NO. 89

# Vision



## SLEEPING OUT FOR CHANGE

**A FLOOD APPEAL HAND UP  
THE STORY OF FREEMAN HOUSE  
HUNTER HUMANITARIAN CRISIS  
HIGHLIGHTS HOUSING**



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*Vision* is produced by the Communications and Marketing department, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, and is distributed through the Society to Catholic parishes, schools and relevant entities in NSW.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear friends in Christ,  
 The challenges of the past few years have continued for us all.  
 From drought, bushfires, coronavirus, economic uncertainty, and floods, it can be difficult to see the light that shines amidst so much darkness.

In these trying times I am reminded of Christ's words as told in John (8:12) – "I am the light of the World, whosoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The challenges we currently face are great, varied and cannot be solved with simple solutions. We cannot adopt measures on mere appearances. We must judge correctly so that hardship is not further entrenched, especially when poverty can be greatly alleviated given the community will to do it.

The path to recovery is long, requiring patience and effort. As members of the Society, you know first-hand the challenges that face the most vulnerable among us. You have listened and spent time with them, provided support based on their needs and sought to restore their spirits without judgement.

Members of the Society have traditionally hidden their light under a bushel. We pride ourselves on what is done in secret to assist the needy in the name of our God.

However, the Society is made alive not just on kind words but through good works. I encourage you all to reflect on the stories in these pages. We in the Society know that in the face of darkness we are committed to being a shining light, the light of life, the light of the world. Let your light shine, that others may see your good deeds.

Peter McNamara  
 State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

## CEO'S MESSAGE



As you read this latest edition of Vision we have recently held our annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout. Running every year since 2006 as a fundraiser in support of our various homelessness services across the state, the event returned to being held in-person after the disruption

of COVID-19 saw last year's event take place virtually. Every time I brave the cold for a night, I am heartened not only by the tremendous outpouring of generosity shown by business leaders, but in the immense strength shown by people we have assisted who courageously share their stories. For all the varied work the Society does, the core of who we are and what we do remains grounded in showing compassion to people.

The recent COVID outbreak in NSW has impacted us all. As our members, volunteers and staff in the metropolitan and southern parts of the state experiencing the angst of a lockdown, it is important that we keep in mind those set to be hardest hit by the pandemic at the forefront of our work.

The Society has been active in ensuring people in need continue to be supported; whether through advocacy (pg 8), medical aid (pg 9) or in the efforts of members who selflessly give of themselves (pg 24).

Thank you for all that you do as members, volunteers and staff of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

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

# The figures and faces behind the NSW floods



The impact of flooding in Taree.  
Right: Taree, prior to the floods in March.



The Vinnies NSW Flood Appeal launched in late March 2021 following the heavy rains and subsequent flooding that devastated many low-lying areas across the east coast, including around Sydney.

Hundreds of applications for flood assistance grants were received by the time applications closed in May.

The flooding caused a loss of homes as well as extensive damage, necessitating evacuations of an estimated 18,000 residents in areas that ranged from the Mid North Coast to some suburbs of Sydney. The unexpected, and mostly unprecedented, downpours impacted communities still recovering from the Black Summer bushfires of little more than a year ago.

This had been the focus of an earlier Vinnies appeal, again, supported generously by the broader community.

Among the flood-affected were Matthew and Chrystie Williams who live in Cundletown, near Taree, in the Manning River catchment area. They have two young children and another on the way. Matthew's workplace was flooded, despite a rush to place sandbags to prevent further damage. By the afternoon the water had risen to his knees inside the shop.

Their neighbour's house and a nearby paddock with horses were flooded. They had a nervous time as the

waters rose, but the family's house survived. Outside, people were in canoes. Chrystie received a text message from the SES to prepare for an evacuation. Fortunately, they didn't need to flee their home. However a number of houses were submerged by water nearly six metres deep. Some houses were swept away, powerless in the face of weather at its wildest.

"Being a small community everyone gets in to help each other," Chrystie says. "The floods could be worse than the fires – the cost to fix businesses, some will be forced to close down."

Along with the financial losses, the emotional impact of another disaster takes a toll, yet communities remain resilient in the face of such events.

Many parts of the east coast were declared disaster areas by the Federal Government, with NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian calling the floods 'one-in-100 year' events.

The Society's Regional President of the Manning, Deacon Vince Ryan, said, 'Vinnies has a network of members living in these communities across the state who are ready to provide people with practical assistance and emotional support.'

The Society is continuing to assess applications as well as providing other forms of help to flood-affected communities through our Conferences and Members.

Gai Bradford from Kempsey's All Saints Conference, and Regional President, says the Pacific Highway was blocked off due to flooding: "Houses were being evacuated and shops sandbagged... On one of those rainy days we had in excess of 200mm in 24 hours, on another we had 195mm – that's a lot of rain in such a short period of time."

Gai recalls, "The Disaster Recovery Centre was set up for the bushfires, now we've had floods and drought. We'd been helping a client who has an Oyster Farm... the run-off from the ash went down the river and killed all their oysters – they lost their total income. Now we'll be helping them continually with the floods."

The double impact affected many, including one caravan dweller who'd suffered through the bushfires and been helped to set up again near the river. Sadly, the floods

***"These floods were  
'one-in-100 year' events"***

– NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian



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**FLOOD APPEAL**

Help us lend a hand to flood affected communities

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[vinnies.org.au/nswfloodappeal](http://vinnies.org.au/nswfloodappeal) or 13 18 12

washed away his and other caravans, rendering him homeless once more.

Christine Coorey, Regional President of Port Macquarie's St Agnes' Conference, says that while a range of support services were set up in disaster recovery centres, the problems are compounded by homelessness, which is a big issue locally.

"The park I was concerned about is across the river and was cut off without any assistance. We desperately need crisis accommodation here and we don't have any."

State President Peter McNamara says, "We are committed to standing by communities throughout NSW impacted by the 2021 floods. Our members are on the ground providing assistance with food, clothing, household items and emotional support. Every dollar donated to the Vinnies NSW Flood Appeal will be used to support affected individuals and communities during the initial response and over the longer-term recovery."

# Helping Noah's renew its playground



Three senior representatives of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW have visited the refurbished playground at the Ulladulla facility of the regional Noah's Inclusion Services, which assists several hundred local children with special needs. Through our bushfire community recovery program, supported by public donations, Vinnies provided a grant of \$20,000 to help Noah's upgrade its backyard play area.

The work was supported by other organisations, including volunteers from the region's HMAS Albatross (816 Squadron). The upgrading includes a slide, timbered deck, climbing rope-frame and a yarning circle popular with the Aboriginal families who are an important part of Noah's clientele.

Helping community groups recover from the impact of the late 2019-2020 bushfires is the focus of the Vinnies program, ranging from the south coast to the hard-hit Kempsey area and up to Ballina and Tenterfield. Some 320 houses were lost in the Shoalhaven, with half this number of claims submitted through Vinnies' Ulladulla Conference. Shoalhaven and Kempsey were priority recipients of the Society's assistance.

CEO, Jack de Groot, was impressed by the commitment from Noah's to assisting families with kids in need, noting how triggers such as the smell of smoke, if only from a barbecue, or the sound of sirens, not necessarily from fire engines, can be particularly traumatic for children and adults experiencing disabilities.

A number of the families coming to Noah's, whether for kids' sessions or for parents and carers 'My Time' meetings, were badly affected by the bushfires, and the recovery process is both challenging and potentially lengthy. Some are reluctant to replace pets for fear they will again be lost.

(L-R, from rear) Peter Houweling, Wollongong Central Council President of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, Alice Lans, CEO of Noah's Inclusion Services, Leo Tucker, Executive Director Mission & Spirituality, Nicki Kennedy, Noah's team leader Ulladulla, and Jack de Groot, CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

'We're so pleased that Vinnies can make a practical contribution to Noah's and several other local services, as well as household grants to families and individuals who need to rebuild their lives after this terrible event,' Mr de Groot said.

Another program funded by the bushfire community recovery program involves helping small groups of children aged 5-12 years, and young adults, to process their feelings about the fire events in a safe environment.

Based at the Ulladulla Community Resource Centre, the sessions draw on the acclaimed Stormbirds program developed by Mackillop Family Services. Engaging in craft work is a key aspect, with one exercise involving children identifying parts of their bodies affected by bushfire triggers. One drew a 'frog in the throat', to show smoke irritation, another indicated getting a 'fast heart'. Older participants were involved in a program dubbed 'no scaredy cats'.

Mr de Groot said the Society has long been active in local community activities, last year assisting 1500 people in need in the Shoalhaven, providing \$244,000 to help with food, clothing, household bills and other support.

'Sad to say, 72 per cent of people sought assistance because of a shortage of food, and 64 per cent faced housing stress, meaning one-third or more of their income went on accommodation, usually rent.'

# Hello, it's Vinnies calling...

**“Hi! My name is Marissa, I’m calling on behalf of St Vincent De Paul to check in, have a chat and see if we can help you in any way; is now an ok time to talk?”**

This was my fifth and final call for the day and for the most part I had been told; “I’m all good, thanks for calling.”

As part of the ongoing collaboration between the Sydney Youth and Young Adult Conference and Vinnies’ Sydney region, I had been volunteering with the Redfern Centre to engage in welfare checks.

It would be this phone call, however, that would lead me to truly understand the value and good work that Vinnies is able to do.

The lady on the other end of the line had seemed to be holding in her story for a while, waiting for a moment just like this.

Her name was Sonya.

Sonya let me know that she was all alone, that one of her sons was in hospital and that her other son wasn’t able to check in often because he lived so far away. Sonya told me she was ill. That she had no food in her fridge. That she was too scared to leave the house because of COVID-19.

After speaking with the Regional President, we managed to contact Sonya’s son just before he was due for surgery and determined that he would be out of hospital by the end of the week, that hospice care had been organised for Sonya and that her other son was due to visit the following evening.

This all seemed promising, but Sonya would still be alone for the immediate future. Her fridge was still empty. That I could solve: “Hi Sonya, this is Marissa again from Vinnies, I was wondering, do you like spaghetti bolognese and can I get you a grocery pack?”

After picking up the groceries, Sonya would like, cooking a bulk load of bolognese, adding a bunch of flowers and a few magazines to the haul I was off.

Wearing a mask and gloves I delivered the packages to Sonya at her door. We both smiled (through our masks) and that was that. Sonya and I spoke a few times after. Her son was recovering well and able to visit more and her hospice care was helpful. Sonya was no longer alone.

One phone call. A few groceries. A home cooked meal. These solutions definitely didn’t solve all of Sonya’s problems, but they helped.

I am incredibly grateful and blessed that Sonya answered the phone. That she shared her story with me. That Vinnies was able to help her. The knowledge that Vinnies will be able to reach those in need is a constant source of hope for me.

Youth member Marissa delivering groceries to a household in need of fresh food and groceries.



# Build Homes, Build Hope Petition debated in NSW Parliament

Vinnies members from across the state gathered at NSW Parliament House to watch our Build Homes, Build Hope social housing petition be debated earlier this year.

Currently the waitlist for social housing in NSW is made up of 51,000 applicants or the equivalent of more than 100,000 people in need of a home. For many, the time spent waiting can run up to ten years.

To address this urgent need for housing throughout the state, our petition called for the NSW Government to build an additional 5,000 social housing properties each year for the next decade.

Since launching the *Build Homes, Build Hope* campaign at the Social Justice Forum two years ago, members, volunteers and staff have been hard at work meeting with local MPs and collecting the 10,000 signatures required for a petition to be debated in NSW Parliament.

Amid the challenges of the Black Summer bushfires and COVID-19, a total of more than 13,000 signatures was delivered to Alex Greenwich, Member for Sydney, to be tabled in October 2020.

On 18 February, the petition was debated in NSW Parliament where MPs from all sides of politics spoke on the importance of social housing in all parts of the state.

Alex Greenwich hosted an event in the Jubilee Room at NSW Parliament House where Gareth Ward, former Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services; Melinda Pavey, Minister for Water, Property and Housing; and Ryan Park, Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness addressed a delegation of Vinnies members. Labor MPs Chris Minns and Jodie Harrison were also in attendance on the day.

“We are in an enormously difficult time – a time where many of our children will never be able to live in the suburbs and communities where they grew up in,” said Ryan Park.

“If I could just wave a magic wand I would love nothing more than to do 5,000 homes every year for the next ten years; but let’s be realistic to the Treasury and the responsibilities we have,” said Melinda Pavey.

During the petition debate, Jenny Leong, Member for Newtown, spoke passionately on the responsibility of government to ensure residents have a safe and secure place to live.

“If we are in this place to do one thing then surely it should be to deliver safe, affordable, habitable and secure homes for the people of New South Wales,” said Jenny Leong.

Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, spoke following the conclusion of the debate with a message on the overall quality of life that comes with having a place to call home.

“Sometimes we get confused in NSW about the value of property. We forget about the fundamental value of a life that flourishes in a home – that’s what we’re about.”



# Vaccinating the most vulnerable

**The Matthew Talbot Clinic is doing its part in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, ensuring that the men who use its services have access to the vital immunisation.**

However, as with many other medical practices, its plans were significantly affected by the revised recommendations made by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) when the small risk of blood clotting side-effects from the Astra Zeneca vaccine became known.

“The first week was a really successful week and we vaccinated approximately 50 people which was great,” Health Services Manager at the Matthew Talbot Hostel, Julie Smith, says.

“The day we finished the vaccinating was the evening that the information came out about the clotting problem.

“So, the way we moved forward was that we continued with our eligible over 50s and to date we have immunised approximately 100 people with Astra Zeneca,” Ms Smith says.

Then, things changed again but, this time, for the better when the Matthew Talbot Hostel Clinic became part of a coalition of services that could offer the Pfizer vaccine.

“We joined forces with St Vincent’s Hospital’s Homeless Health Team, Kirkton Rd Centre, and the City of Sydney, to stage a bigger vaccination hub.

“This combined effort utilises the Pfizer vaccine and we are vaccinating all eligible people,” Ms Smith says.

“We’ve necessarily had to pause our own Astra Zeneca rollout to take part in the wider Pfizer vaccine program with our partners.

“We will be involved in this for the next few weeks and we will then pick up our Astra Zeneca campaign by contacting all of our clients who have already had their first dose and will need their second at the 12-week point,” Ms Smith says.

The longer time between first and second doses for the Astra Zeneca vaccine gives the Pfizer rollout room to run while the former is paused.

Ms Smith says she hopes word of mouth, advertisements, and favourable news coverage will help get word out about the collaboration between the Hostel and its partners.

The first and second vaccination clinics were very well attended with a total of 240 people receiving doses in the

Julie Smith, Health Services Manager at the Matthew Talbot Clinic.



space of a fortnight.

Going forward, Ms Smith says the challenges will revolve around ensuring the clinic manages the timing of the COVID vaccine and flu immunisation.

“If you’ve had a COVID-19 vaccination, you can’t have any vaccination within two weeks.

“From a public health perspective it is more important for people to have the COVID vaccination rather than the flu vaccination.

“However, if people categorically refuse the COVID immunisation, they can still have the flu vaccine.

“It is important that people get their flu vaccination this season – as important as any other flu season.

“However, engaging with people around the COVID vaccine and giving people the right information about the COVID vaccine is more important.

“Once someone has had the COVID vaccination we will, of course, endeavour to get people their flu vaccination.

“We’re behind in giving flu vaccine because of that,” Ms Smith says.

# Lea finds happiness at home – at last

Now aged 58, but often considered younger, Lea ('Lee') Lake is a proud Kamilaroi (or Gamilaraay) woman from the Walgett area with many stories to tell. Taken together, they end happily with where she is today, in her own home in Gilgandra with a loving partner.

Lea is healthy, financially stable, free of the hold of alcohol, and a person with a loud, infectious laugh.

But things were not always so.

Around twenty years ago Lea relocated to 'Gil' - a traditional meeting place between the Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi & Wailwan nations - with her then-partner, a farm hand whose work entailed living on local properties with his wife and their five-year-old daughter, Kelly. Although a hard worker, the man was a bad husband, subjecting Lea to years of verbal and physical abuse.

"The domestic violence was terrible," Lea recalls, "and I'd wanted to leave for a long time, but I stayed on, saying it was for the good of my daughter. I started drinking heavily, and frankly I didn't know what planet I was on."

The drinking continued after Lea moved out, even though she'd found cleaning work at the hospital, police station and courthouse, and the Aboriginal Land Council. Financial problems shadowed her constantly.

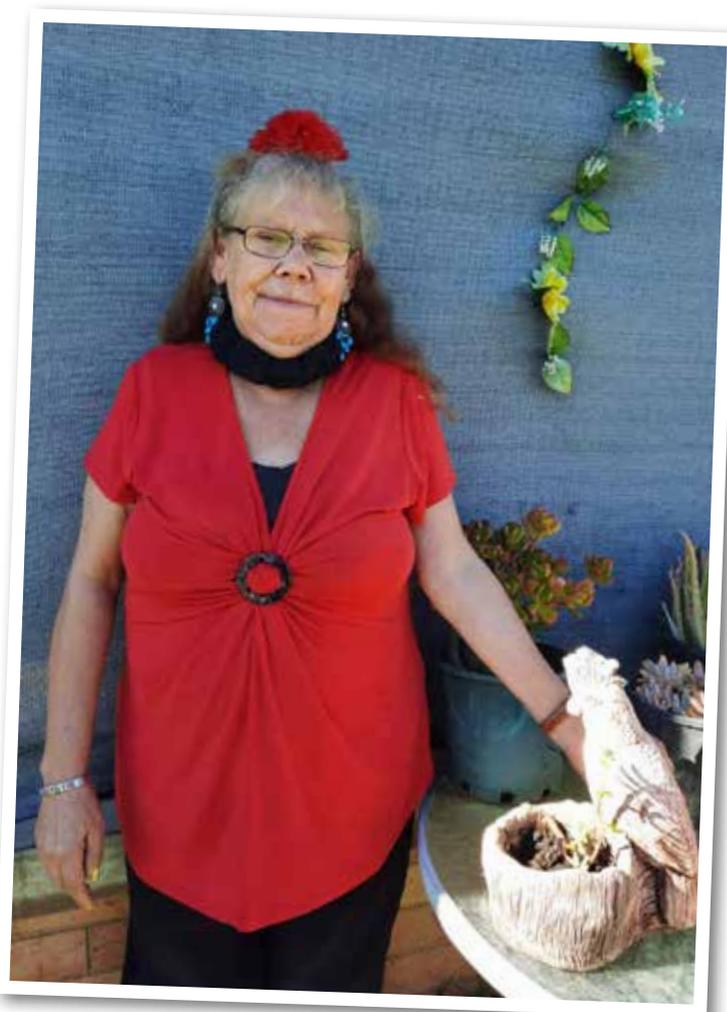
"I had trouble paying the bills, like rent and electricity, and buying enough food for us. It was terrible, and I was a real mess."

One of Lea's cleaning jobs was at a local GP practice where a doctor asked if she was feeling all right.

"I must have looked crook, so he asked to examine me, and I told him what I'd been living through. He could see how stressed I was from all the years of abuse, and then from trying to bury it through the drinking. We started to put a recovery plan in place."

The next timely intervention came when Lea sat down with a friend to discuss her problems.

"She said 'why don't you go to Vinnies, they'll help you out', and that's what I did. They [the team at St Joseph's



Conference Gilgandra] were marvellous. The Vinnies mob helped me get food vouchers, work out how to manage the electricity bills, and other things.

"They were wonderful about explaining how I could manage my money, even helped me to do a course, which is a lesson I follow to this day.

"I'm on top of things now, managing my life, off the drink, and with a loving partner for the past twelve years. I'm his carer, as he has health issues. We're happy home bodies, and I love being here.

"Of course I'm not the only person in this town, or any other place, that's had problems. I've just been talking with a lady who's very troubled, and I said 'don't lock yourself in, talk to a friend'. I'm always here to yarn with people and I'm planning on getting a group together in my house where women can just drop by and chat about things."

Lea ends the conversation in the way she's punctuated it, with a raucous laugh, a well-established habit but a sound that in the past she would seldom have uttered.

## From refugee to Vinnies volunteer

Wesam Zarrouf was born in what he describes as 'a small but beautiful place' in the middle of Syria but when conflict engulfed the region and with his hometown under threat he had no choice but to leave. Not just the local area but the country where he was born.

'With my wife and two young boys, I moved to Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan,' he recalls from his new home on the other side of the world.

Now, officially accepted as refugees, they arrived in Newcastle on 20 February 2018, a date Wesam still remembers.

Despite the catastrophic disruption, 'after a few weeks we began to fall in love with Newcastle and day after day we were becoming familiar in our new home. Eventually our feelings towards Newcastle were the same feelings we had for our hometown.'

The family's new life was not easy, however, and after a few months they went to Vinnies seeking assistance, especially with the electricity bills,

'That is the first time I met Jan Williams. She was looking very businesslike, she listened to us and organised another meeting with Basil who is a Migrant/Refugee Conference member.

'Later, I mentioned to Jan that I had started as a volunteer with Newcastle City Council. She asked if I would like to be a volunteer with Vinnies as she needed an Arabic speaker who could sit in on

interviews with the new arrivals.

'When it was approved, I became a member of the Migrant/Refugee Conference. At first, I was scared. I asked myself, 'How can I help other people when I still need help myself?', but Jan encouraged me and said don't worry, we will be with you.

'After a while I became more familiar with the tasks at hand. I was able to relax and was very happy volunteering with the people from Vinnies. Over time Jan and I have become very close, we have a deep connection with our families.'

Wesam says he has learned many things from his 'Vinnies family'.

'I have learned how to give assistance for free, how to respect all human beings, young or old, male or female, how to be useful in your life and how much pleasure you feel when you give to someone.

'I'm really proud to be a member of Vinnies. I'm happy doing my bit to assist those in need.

Today I am in full-time employment. My boys are settled in good schools, but best of all we have a beautiful little girl, Lily, who was born in Australia.'

Wesam continues to assist with doing Conference calls after work, and knows the gratitude of the people we assist. On his own behalf, he thanks everyone at Vinnies, not least Jan Williams, for helping his family and for giving him the opportunity to volunteer with the Society.

'God Bless you,' Wesam says.

## 75 YEARS OF SERVICE

Trundle Conference Member, John Kearney, recently celebrated 75 years of service with the St Vincent de Paul Society. Now aged 94, John has been a very active member and held various leadership positions since first joining the Society at the age of 19.

The Trundle Conference experienced declining membership some years ago. However John's commitment, and ability to recruit new members, ensured locals in need were able to access assistance. John continues as a Conference member, attending regular local meetings, having been awarded a Life Membership in 2015 for his dedication.



We greatly admire and appreciate John's amazing dedication to serving those in need and supporting his fellow members.

## Giving young people a kickstart

**In the current pandemic climate where the number of people seeking work outweighs available jobs, young people can be at a disadvantage due to a lack of experience.**

Last November, Anglicare released its most recent Jobs Availability Snapshot which found for each entry-level job in Australia there are 106 jobseekers.

To help prepare young people with the skills they need to enter the workforce, the Vinnies team in Deniliquin has developed the Kickstart program.

Conceived in response to youth in the area struggling with the basics of being job ready, the 12-week program has expanded thanks to funding made available by the NSW Government.

"This year we're doing RSA, white card, first aid, food handling, barista training, professional driving lessons," said Chantall Barnes, Vinnies Project Worker.

"Additionally, we're spending time with local contacts here [in Deniliquin] regarding professional job interview techniques as well as presentation, so how they need to be dressed adequately, how they actually approach businesses – that kind of thing.

"We're also having a guest speaker come in and present a mental health first aid course."

Servicing Deniliquin and surrounding areas, such as Womboota and Tooleybuc, the program aims to empower young people with confidence and resilience so that they can thrive in the workforce.

"The core around this program is always going to be valuable; it's giving so many kids an opportunity to potentially be working, studying and gaining essential skills."

Previous success stories include six high school students gaining casual or part-time work and an 18-year-old Indigenous participant securing his first full-time employment and provisional driver's licence.

So far, 23 people have participated in the program this year, while a second round of the program is set to commence soon.



## Working towards Reconciliation

Rob Cohen is the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Aboriginal Engagement Partner and is leading the formulation and implementation of our second Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The Society's first RAP covered the years 2018-2020 and Rob is now working with

stakeholders throughout the organisation to create a roadmap for the next three years.

Speaking about the RAP, he says, "The importance is that it shows that the Society is serious about reconciliation. It wants to support the process, build connections with community, and effectively just engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples. I think it's about supporting identity and supporting our people's drive towards self-determination."

One of the most important outcomes of this current RAP, he says, was developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Employing more First Nations Peoples will build capacity and understanding across the Society.

Delivering on the RAP will be very much a team effort because there will be goals and deliverables with responsibilities designated throughout the Society.

"I think the key goal is that everybody is aware, that everybody has an understanding. Ensuring that the RAP doesn't become a shelf document, that it's there as a guide that people can refer to. That there are key actions and deliverables in there that people can take away and apply to their actual workspace. And, I suppose, the key message there is that we're not asking to change the way people work too much. All we're asking is that our people give certain considerations to how we deal with communities and how we deal with Aboriginal organisations in general."



## No corners cut at the Haberfield Men's Shed



Vinnies Haberfield Men's Shed volunteers Terry Gallagher and Steven Perkatis delivered six hardwood planter boxes to Gift of Bread founder Marcel De Maria in Tempe.

A 'can do' attitude greeted the War Widows Guild of Australia when they asked Vinnies Haberfield Men's Shed to make 3000 small timber crosses for a mailout to support their fundraising and advocacy work for war widows.

The boys got to work, designing and making wooden sliding jigs that ensured each cross would be both symmetrical and identical. Once a cross was glued in the jig, a sliding action ejected it onto the worktable where another volunteer caught and stacked it while the glue dried.

Another project was crafting hardwood planter boxes for the Gift of Bread's depot in Tempe. The local not-for-profit wanted to brighten up the workspace for the volunteers who handle six tons of donated bread each day from this small facility.

Again, mission accomplished.

Haberfield Men's Shed is a safe and inclusive space for men experiencing challenges and marginalisation, including men with a disability or mental illness, war veterans and retirees.

One-third are living with a disability and eighty per cent of participants self-reported poor mental health before attending. The Shed provides many and varied hands-on activities, including woodwork, manual arts, upholstery, gardening programs and social interaction opportunities.

The programs and activities are semi-structured and utilise the principles of community development, so that men can connect with each other in addition to developing practical skills.

It also provides woodwork and upholstery programs for people with disabilities in partnership with the St Vincent de Paul Society's Mary Mackillop Outreach.

Participants are keen to speak of their involvement.

'It gives me great pleasure and pride when walking through our local suburbs to identify community items that I and others from the Shed have been involved in constructing,' says David Cole.

"Many are the times when I have felt useless and fed up. But if I make the effort to go and take part at the Haberfield Men's Shed I will return from it a more resilient and cheerful person."

Vince Spiteri adds, "The shed has given me a real focus, as I have transitioned out of full-time work... the impact on my mental health cannot be underestimated. I have been able to learn new skills, which has kept me active.

"Some of my favourite experiences were working with a local school and building a friendship bench for the children. We also took some classes at the school and showed them some of the tools that are used in woodworking and their names."



## FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTRE RE-OPENS IN KATOOMBA

**Our Katoomba-Blackheath Conferences have recently re-opened their Family Assistance Centre in Waratah Street, Katoomba, opposite the Vinnies Shop.**

After the outbreak of COVID-19 in March last year, the Katoomba-Blackheath Conferences, regrettably had to temporarily close their Katoomba Family Assistance Centre.

Despite this closure, assistance to vulnerable individuals and families located throughout the Upper Blue Mountains did not cease. Conference members continued to respond to requests for assistance by delivering food hampers, supermarket vouchers and clothing in a COVID-safe way to the people we assist. Blackheath Conference members were also able to offer assistance from their Parish hall.

While church services were delivered in different ways during the pandemic, both Winter and Christmas Appeals went ahead undeterred. Through the generosity of students at St Canice's Katoomba, OLN Lawson and St Columba's, Springwood our combined Conferences were able to distribute over 40 festive hampers to needy families during Christmas. Despite the Federal Government offering support through JobSeeker and Jobkeeper, many throughout the Mountains community relied upon the Society to get by during the pandemic.

## Forming Members in Pastoral Ministry

Recently, the Ulladulla Conference had the opportunity to immerse themselves in a reflective learning forum on pastoral care. The Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral team, joined the Conference sharing their experiences and insights.

The ministry of pastoral care is essentially a ministry of being actively present with the people we meet, especially those we serve. The relationships are formed around empathy and compassion; this is the key to pastoral care.

The forum provided a reflective opportunity for members to learn about deeper avenues of communication, listening and responding to what is heard. The group also learnt of boundaries and why they are essential, and how we use them in our work for the Society and in other relationships.

A session was held on Trauma and Complex Trauma, and how language is not always accessible, which enabled members to develop new understandings and appreciation of trauma.

The Mission team learned about the Ulladulla Conference's energy, passion, and commitment with every person they meet and noticed that everyone who came to the centre was welcomed and seen as valuable individuals and provided with empathy, compassion, hospitality, love, and care.

The Mission and Spirituality team continues to offer this forum to all Conferences and Regions. If your members are interested, please contact the team, Joy Bowen [joy.bowen@vinnies.org.au](mailto:joy.bowen@vinnies.org.au), or Peter Gormly [peter.gormly@vinnies.org.au](mailto:peter.gormly@vinnies.org.au), or Greg Ryan [greg.ryan@vinnies.org.au](mailto:greg.ryan@vinnies.org.au) for any enquiries and a chat.



# DRIVEN TO SUPPORT THOSE IN NEED

**Hernan Vergara has been with Vinnies since 2005 and for about half of that time, he's been a driver delivering people and all manner of goods to wherever they need to go.**

He's part chauffeur, part tour operator, part courier, and he even helps on reception at the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Sydney.

Despite this being his main place of employment, he provides logistical support to a broad range of Vinnies services.

He began working at Vinnies as a crisis support worker, before making the switch to his current role about eight years ago.

Hernan says taking the men staying at the hostel on outings is a fun part of the job.

"Pre-COVID I used to do excursions once a week.

We used to take our people mover and we'd go to Balmoral Beach, we'd go ten-pin bowling, dog-walking at Monica's doggy rescue at Ingleside, all kinds of little places like that – Centennial Park...

"We'd go out there and take part in what they do," he said.

There has been a pandemic-enforced break in the outings operated by the Hostel but, just recently, they've started to make a return as conditions have eased.

"The good news I just got the other day, the first outing for a while, we're going to Balmoral. Balmoral Sailing – they're doing a sailing class.

Hernan also drives the men who stay at the Hostel to important medical appointments or, more regularly, the emergency department.

"There's no booking. Sometimes I just get the odd call when I'm on a job and I have to slot someone in on my schedule," he said.

He estimates he gets a call like this about three times a week.

When he's not transporting people, one of the most common things Hernan says he couriers around the city is food.

"Regularly, every Friday, I go to take sandwiches to St Peter's Church, which are prepared from Maria Gordon House Lewisham, then pick up hot meals from the CBD on my way there."

"When COVID was full on, I used to deliver these every day down there," he said.

The church then distributes the sandwiches and meals to people in need in the area.

To supplement disruption to services during the pandemic, Hernan also found himself delivering food as far away from the Woolloomooloo hostel as Liverpool Men's Centre.

But it's not the farthest he's ever driven for the Society.

"One that I used to like doing was the hamper run at Christmas time. We'd load up the truck, we'd do the north first.

"We would go to Port Macquarie, to McCosker House, and then from McCosker House, we'd go to Freeman House at Armidale.

"The second half of the week, after I'd come back from the north I'd take a day off and then on the the Friday I'd deliver the stuff on the one day to Edel Quinn at Wagga," he said.

Hernan also brings clothes from Vinnies Distribution Centre at Auburn back to the Matthew Talbot Hostel so they can be provided to the men there.

Over the time he's been with Vinnies, he's driven a minibus and a truck and he's now got a small fleet in the form of a small car, a people mover, and a refrigerated van at his disposal.

If the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW needs someone or something transported, there's a good chance it will be Hernan doing the driving.



## Thank you to our Corporate Partners

The support shown by our corporate partners helps to make our good works a reality.

Businesses and the corporate world wield a significant level of wealth and influence that can be used to greatly improve the lives of people experiencing hardship every day. We are so thankful for their support which has enabled initiatives such as aiding struggling families, preparing students heading back to school and supporting women and children escaping domestic violence.



### IGA

With many families struggling to put food on the table and keep the lights on during the festive season, IGA stepped up with a Christmas Appeal last December to assist locals in need. Donating funds from \$2 Christmas Gift Tokens and specially marked Community Chest products, the campaign raised close to \$350,000 across Australia. Thanks to IGA, Vinnies members were able to ensure those doing it tough were supported with food, accommodation, transport, household goods and expenses.

Going above and beyond a few months later following heavy rains and flooding throughout NSW, the funds raised from the IGA Flood Appeal will help those affected with necessities during the recovery stage.

### AMAZON AUSTRALIA

To help disadvantaged students head back to school with the tools they need to succeed, Vinnies partnered with Amazon Australia to provide more than 1,000 gift cards to families in need. Gift cards worth \$100 each were distributed through our network of conferences and services to equip students with new backpacks, notepads, stationary, lunchboxes and more.



Amazon, in collaboration with Harris Technology, also facilitated a generous donation of hand sanitiser valued at over \$775,000 to ensure people remain COVID-safe.

### SUPRE FOUNDATION

Coming on board as a corporate partner last year, the Supre Foundation have extended their relationship to help Vinnies continue supporting women and children escaping domestic violence. We are immensely appreciative to the Supre Foundation who have so far raised \$153,000 which has been used to provide food, clothing, counselling, health care, crisis accommodation, refuge and much more to people in need.



### CRI

The Carbon Reduction Institute (CRI) is a profit for purpose business committed to helping Australian businesses and individuals take real and effective action on climate change. CRI has committed to a three-year major partnership to support the Sydney Night Patrol Service which provides companionship, a warm drink and meal and referrals to other relevant services for people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage.



## Family Winter Sleepout @Home

**Amidst the challenges faced by the community fundraising and events sector throughout 2020, we were so fortunate to see our School Sleepout activity evolve into a brand new event – The Family Winter Sleepout @Home.**

When Sydney Catholic Schools came to us with an idea to hold an event for all schools within their Diocese to “sleepout” at home to raise funds and awareness for homelessness, we were excited by its potential. Navigating the restrictions placed on us by COVID, it was a fantastic opportunity to maintain engagement with our Catholic School community and ensure that we could continue raising vital funds.

Families were invited to join in and share a simple meal and prayer, sit or sleep outside in the cold for a period of time and donate what they could via an online fundraising page.

Inviting all families to be advocates for those experiencing disadvantage, the success of the event was evident through the involvement of family members and fostering a spirit of community. Over \$70,000 was raised for Vinnies, and the feedback we received from students, teachers and families encouraged us to continue this event again for 2021.

Based on its success, we decided to grow this year’s event across NSW, inviting Dioceses to get their schools involved. We are excited to work with Dioceses in Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Broken Bay, Wilcannia Forbes, Bathurst and Armidale to welcome new schools to this event and see where these conversations can take us in the future.

We look forward to the ongoing success of this event over the coming years. If you have any questions or would like to get involved, contact [olivia.andrews@vinnies.org.au](mailto:olivia.andrews@vinnies.org.au).

## NSW Vinnies Community Sleepouts shine the light on homelessness

**For the fourth year in a row, the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepouts will take place in a state-wide effort to shine a light on homelessness in regional NSW.** The Sleepouts will revert back to in-person events following last year’s online virtual delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sleepouts give local community groups and individuals the opportunity to come together in solidarity to raise vital funds to support people experiencing hardship in their local area and gain a deeper understanding of homelessness.

The event intends to attract over 550 participants state-wide where community members will brave the cold in 12 locations across NSW, aiming to raise more than \$250,000 for local Vinnies homelessness services and programs.

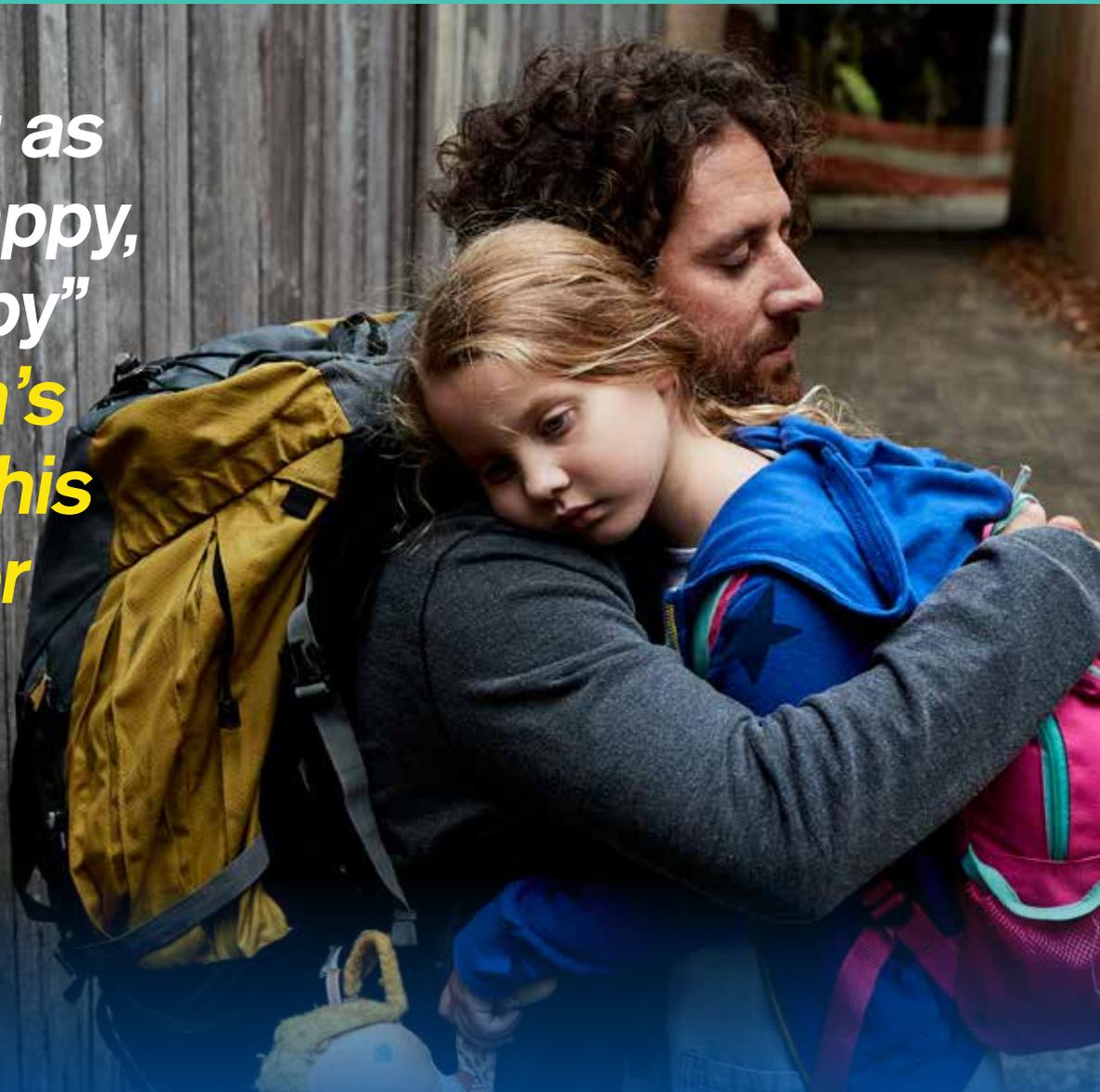
Join as a team with your local sports club, business, community group or sign up as an individual and let’s rally together to make a difference in your patch of NSW! Register or give now at [www.vinnies.org.au/communitysleepout](http://www.vinnies.org.au/communitysleepout)

Events will all take place Friday 27 August 2021 in the following locations:

- Albury
- Armidale
- Bathurst
- Central Coast
- Deniliquin
- Fred’s Place, Tweed Heads
- Maitland
- Murrumbidgee Region
- Southern Highlands
- Tamworth
- Wagga Wagga
- Western Sydney



**“As long as she’s happy, I’m happy”  
– Darren’s love for his daughter**



## **Vinnies** Winter Appeal

**Our Winter Appeal shared the story of Darren and his daughter, Olivia, who now have a secure place to live thanks to the support of Vinnies.**

Darren vividly remembers the heartbreak of having his daughter Olivia taken away by child protection authorities. “She needed my love and my support, it destroyed everything that I believed in,” reflects Darren.

Needing to find a stable place to live in order to be reunited with his daughter, the support of Vinnies helped Darren to move forward with his life.

Having separated from his previous partner due to unsafe living conditions, Darren nomadically moved wherever he

could find shelter for his young daughter.

Out of work, couch surfing and without a rental history to call upon, the lack of stability affected his mental wellbeing along with depriving Olivia of a much-needed routine.

“I’d pretty much cry myself to sleep because I couldn’t give my daughter what she needed to live.”

“She always used to ask ‘where are we going today?’, ‘what are we going to have for dinner, dad?’ – I could see that it was affecting her.”

Already struggling without a permanent place to call home, Olivia’s health suffered due to a poor diet of takeaway and quick meals stemming from a lack of available cooking



facilities, while during the harsh winter months the father and daughter were stretched in their ability to manage the cold.

“We had to huddle up together with blankets, and I had a little stove cooker that I used to get going; I’d open the door up on it so we could get the heat from it.”

Reaching a crisis point after child protection authorities deemed the living situation to be untenable, Darren turned to Vinnies where he was introduced to Danielle, one of our homeless support workers.

“When Darren first came to us he was very concerned about his daughter going in to foster care. To have any child taken off you would be a very emotional thing,” recalls Danielle.

Undertaking parenting courses, financial counselling and re-establishing communication with Olivia’s mother, Darren’s determination to be reunited with his daughter left an impression that resonated with Danielle.

“He was participating the whole way, and that’s why it worked so well, because he wanted it. He wanted Olivia back; he wanted a home, he wanted his family,” says Danielle.

Continuing to see Olivia on visitations made possible by Vinnies, who provided assistance with transport, a major breakthrough occurred

when Danielle helped secure permanent accommodation for Darren.

With a place to call his own and Vinnies advocating to child protection authorities, it wasn’t long before Darren felt renewed by the love of having his daughter back in his life.

“When I got that place, she came and visited me for the first weekend, and her face was just priceless. She just ran around the house, jumping up and down saying, ‘this is ours, this is ours!’”, recalls Darren.

“It’s given me and Olivia so much freedom. It’s made me feel a lot better inside myself knowing that I have a house, and I can lock that door, and it’s mine.

“Giving her that security of knowing that’s our home; it’s improved with her school, the teachers always tell me how much she improves every year.”

With Olivia back in his life and his prospects looking up, Darren is looking forward to getting back into work while balancing the responsibilities of raising his daughter.

“I just want Olivia to be happy and have a safe and healthy life.”

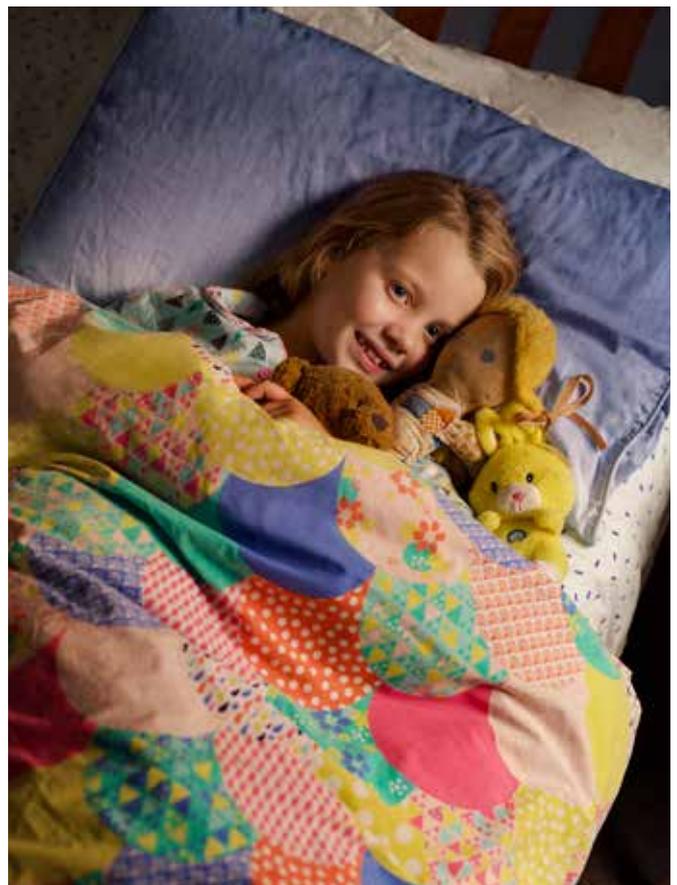
“[Without Vinnies] I wouldn’t have a house and I wouldn’t have my daughter back.

“As long as she’s happy, I’m happy, at the end of the day.”

Darren and Olivia have a bright future ahead now that they have a roof over their head, but many more people are facing uncertain futures.

With more than 37,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in NSW, social support payments being stripped back below the poverty line and the expiration of the rental moratorium leaving many vulnerable to evictions and backdated debts, Vinnies is needed more than ever to ensure people are protected in their times of need.

The 2021 Vinnies Winter Appeal has met its target, raising crucial funds for our good works.





## VINNIES CEO SLEEPOUT ACHIEVES RECORD RESULT

**The Vinnies CEO Sleepout has set a record total raising more than \$9.3 million nationally to support our homelessness services.**

Across Australia more than 1,500 business and community leaders braved the cold on Thursday 17 June as part of a hybrid Vinnies CEO Sleepout, with NSW raising \$3 million through the efforts of 550 participants.

CEOs slept out at in-person events held in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, along with participants who took part virtually in regional and remote areas.

Deborah Knight, 2GB and Channel 9 Presenter, acted as Master of Ceremonies for the night, while Jane de Graaf, Channel 9 Presenter, hosted the pre-event live-stream.

The funds raised will allow Vinnies to assist people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with accommodation, food, healthcare and individualised support designed with the ultimate goal of providing a safe and permanent home.

For Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, the night served as an opportunity to highlight the struggles faced by more than 116,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in Australia.

“While rough-sleeping represents a very small proportion of overall homelessness, it is the pointiest end of a very sharp edge,” Mr de Groot said.

“I’m proud that Vinnies provides support to people experiencing homelessness and domestic violence and you’d probably be surprised how often someone experiences both.”

Peter McNamara, Vinnies NSW President, reflected on the significance of living out the Society’s ethos of offering a hand-up to people in need.

“The Vinnies CEO Sleepout is a prime example of Christ’s message in action that it is more blessed to give than to receive, along with the importance of serving rather than expecting to be served,” Mr McNamara said.

The night also saw NSW Treasurer Dominic Perrottet make an announcement of \$4.9 million to develop two Vinnies sites in Sydney’s southern and western suburbs into specialist accommodation for women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

“This is an investment and a testament to the work that Vinnies does,” Mr Perrottet said.

## SYDNEY

Over 450 participants braved the cold at the White Bay Cruise Terminal in Rozelle as part of the Sydney event.

Business leaders and representatives from all sides of politics heard from people with lived experience of homelessness, including women escaping domestic violence, rough sleepers and men who now have a place to call home thanks to the support of Vinnies.

Robert Kelly, Steadfast Group CEO, finished as the leading fundraiser in Sydney – and NSW overall – with a phenomenal total of \$135,000. “The Vinnies CEO Sleepout is a great rallying point to focus people’s attention on the issues at hand and ensure that when people need help, it’s available to them,” said Robert, who took part in his fourth sleepout.

## NEWCASTLE

At McDonald Jones Stadium in Newcastle more than 50 participants raised \$172,000 which will enable local services to assist struggling households and individuals.

With the rising cost of rental properties throughout Newcastle pricing many people on low incomes out of their communities, beneficiaries of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout, such as the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service, will be able to help people find temporary accommodation and assist them with permanent housing. “The bulk of the money that gets donated goes to setting up people’s new homes – cleaning products, kitchenware, beds, furniture, we get the kids involved with picking what kind of bedspread or toys they want,” said Karen Soper, Matthew Talbot Homeless Service Manager,

Adam Boyle, Pegasus CEO, topped the Newcastle tally with his personal best total of \$18,000. Having taken part in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout each year since 2011, the local businessman has brought in close to \$84,000 in total.



More than 50 business and community leaders slept out at McDonald Jones Stadium in Newcastle.



Chris Minns (NSW Labor Leader) and Dominic Perrottet (NSW Liberal Treasurer) put aside politics to sleep out in Sydney.



WAVE FM listeners donated more than 6,000 hoodies to Vinnies in Wollongong.

## WOLLONGONG

A small, but hearty, group of business leaders slept out at the University of Wollongong – Innovation Campus on a windy night in Wollongong.

The event raised more than \$85,000 in support of local Vinnies services such as the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Vinnies Van and the drop-in support hub located in Coniston.

Long-time Vinnies CEO Sleepout participant Daniel Munk, Aster Group CEO, topped the local tally with almost \$31,000; bringing his overall total from seven sleepouts to in excess of \$175,000!

Local radio station Wave FM also partnered with the Society for “Hoodies for the Homeless” – an initiative to provide locals facing hardship with warm clothing to combat the cooler winter weather. A huge outpouring of support from the Wollongong community resulted in over 6,000 hoodies being donated!

**Thanks to the work of our staff, volunteers, sponsors and participants, the Vinnies CEO Sleepout achieved a record result in 2021! More than ever people experiencing hardship and disadvantage are in need of a hand up – with the funds raised we will be there to make a difference in their times of need.**

**Register to take part in the 2022 Vinnies CEO Sleepout at [www.ceosleepout.org.au](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au).**



## VANESSA'S JOURNEY WITH VINNIES

**“The smallest thing that we can do is a huge thing for them,” says Vanessa Taylor, speaking with 20 years of experience working with the men who come to the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service in Newcastle.**

During that time she's seen a lot of change.

One thing that is immediately clear is that she loves her job and she loves helping people who come to Vinnies for assistance.

Vanessa started at the Matthew Talbot as a cook, when it was still a hostel, and worked in that position for about five years.

“And then that position was made redundant. Instead of

paying me a redundancy, Vinnies actually retrained me and I went to TAFE and did my further education there and here I am. I went to being a support worker and now a case worker.”

The focus has shifted from hostel to assertive outreach during the two decades that Vanessa has been there and she says she thinks the change has been for the better.

“We're more pushing for the long-term, helping them to sustain their tenancies and stay in their houses longer, attend their appointments with mental health, drug and alcohol, all those support services that we wrap around them.”

But even with the change of focus, Matthew Talbot Newcastle is still equipped to provide short-term accommodation for men – and men with children – in need.

A less common feature of that accommodation is that it's animal-friendly.

“It was always an area that was missed. People either would have to surrender their animal or they wouldn't get the support. And then we had two villas with little courtyards that have been approved that we can have animals onsite. We have a few guys come through with dogs or cats.”

Vanessa says the animals are great not just for the men and their families who stay at the Matthew Talbot but also for the staff.

“We've had some fantastic animals come through. Very friendly dogs. It's just been great. Just to go out and be able to pat a dog. You might have had a stressful meeting and just to walk out and see the dog playing.

“Dogs bring that calmness to all the guys.”

Vanessa says the best thing about the job is helping men in need – and their children – find long-term housing.

“You know that warm feeling you get that you've been able to help someone who's been totally down and out to where they are when they're in their house. It's unbelievable that people can change from old habits into a new habit where they're so houseproud and they're being able to sustain the tenancy.

“We actually support men and men with children. And having a house set up by another service, they come in and they deck the whole house out with brand new stuff, and seeing their faces when they walk in. These people knew they couldn't afford to buy beds and fridges and stuff like that and to have a service come in and do that and then seeing the client's face, that's one of the highlights, it's one of the biggest you could ever get.”



## Hunter Humanitarian Crisis highlights the need for housing

**Vinnies Services staff from the Matthew Talbot Homelessness Service in Newcastle united with fellow social service providers as part of the Hunter Humanitarian Crisis on Monday 29 March.**

Meeting on the Newcastle foreshore amidst a backdrop of tents bearing the gut-wrenching stories of homeless men, women and children, the rally sought to highlight the dire situation facing people in need of housing throughout the local area.

According to figures released by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, more than 51,000 applicants are currently on the waitlist for social housing across the state.

Last year, the Hunter experienced a 6.1 per cent increase in demand with 3,850 applicants.

With many people on low incomes unable to enter the rental market due to rising prices resulting from the pandemic, along with a shortage of available social housing properties, staff working on the ground have been stretched in their capacity to meet demand.

As team leader of Newcastle's Matthew Talbot Homelessness Service - one of our services offering assistance to homeless men and men with children - Ryan

Pryor has witnessed first-hand the pronounced impacts of COVID-19.

"We're seeing a lot more families who are presenting to our service who are homeless or at risk of homelessness," explains Ryan.

"Families sleeping in cars - we have single dads with children who are staying on lounges or caravans in the backs of people's properties just because they can't afford to enter the rental market at this time.

"Since August last year, we've seen about a five per cent increase each month in our referrals - last month we had about 120 referrals."

"[At the start of the pandemic] there were some quicker outcomes for people, whereas now those outcomes have slowed down and we're

keeping people on our caseloads much longer which means people who are waiting on our referrals list aren't being allocated as quickly."

"One of the big issues we've noticed, since COVID, is a lot of people have moved back into their rental properties or are renting those properties out to families or friends, or perhaps they're selling those rental properties to be in a better financial position.

"People who have lost their jobs due to COVID, their chances of getting back into the rental market at this time with 40-50, sometimes up to 70 people at a rental inspection; if you haven't got a dual income, earning a good wage, and don't have a good rental history you're really going to struggle in securing one of those properties."

Speaking on the day alongside representatives from Nova For Women and Children, Hunter Tenants, Homelessness NSW, Our Backyard and traditional custodians of the land, Ryan pondered the long-term effects of the current housing crisis.

"We're in a really tricky situation at the moment; if we don't start getting into this early we'll have a really big crisis on our hands."

# A voice for the community

**“We really do need as a community to support the most needy in our population.”**

These are the words Peter Burgess used during his first media interview shortly after becoming Wagga Wagga Central Council President in 2019.

Speaking with a local radio station to promote the Vinnies Community Sleepout, the opportunity to advocate on issues related to poverty and hardship sparked a fire inside the 71-year-old that has seen him become a respected voice on social justice matters within Wagga Wagga.

“We want people not to just recognise Vinnies as a shop,” explains Peter.

“I want people to understand that we’re actively out there in the community looking after the most needy and that we are there to support them.”

Appearing regularly in the local media to raise awareness of causes such as Christmas hampers and back-to-school drives, the events of COVID-19 have seen his commentary shift towards two key issues – housing (“there isn’t the social and affordable housing around Wagga that we badly need”) and income support (“we now have people who have never been jobless before reaching out for our support”).

Recognising the influence of the media to raise awareness of the Society’s good works, Peter’s public profile has grown from being recognised in mass and on the street to receiving calls from MPs eager to collaborate on community projects.

First joining Vinnies in the 1980s, while working at a company manufacturing chlorine tablets for swimming pools, the competing responsibilities of raising a family and serving as an alderman on Kogarah Council saw him drift away for several years.

Retraining as a high school maths teacher and later as a psychologist employed by the Department of Education, a move to Wagga Wagga in the 2000s saw him reconnect with the Society on the eve of retirement.

Joining Koorngal’s Sacred Heart Conference in 2014 at

the encouragement of a member speaking on the Winter Appeal during mass, Peter’s road to becoming Central Council President came about in unusual circumstances. Nominating for the position after the incumbent holder stepped down for family reasons, his election campaign was largely absent due to a pre-existing holiday to visit his son overseas.

“I put my nomination in on the Tuesday and I flew out on the Wednesday. When I came back about three days after I landed in Australia, there was the election – and I won!”

Spending his time engaging with Conferences throughout the Riverina while serving on the NSW State Council, Peter sees his work influenced by a strong Catholic faith along with a caring mentality cemented from his time as a teacher.

“When I was teaching in the state system, they made me year advisor for a group of Year 7 kids. My eldest son was going into Year 7 at the same time; every time a kid came up, I’d think ‘if this was my child how would I want him or her treated?’

“That’s not so different to what we do now when we have that idea of ‘when we see the poor, we see the face of Christ’ – in a lot of ways it’s very similar.

“As an organisation we’re not judgemental. We’ve always got to be mindful that we’re dealing with human dignity.”





## 2021 SOCIAL JUSTICE FORUM

Later this year, our Social Justice Forum will bring Vinnies members, volunteers, staff and supporters together to learn more about our social justice priorities, shape our advocacy agenda, and strengthen the relationships, knowledge and skills needed to achieve positive change.

Over the last year, members of our social justice network have actively campaigned for more social housing – collecting thousands of petition signatures, engaging with MPs on dozens of occasions and raising public awareness of the level of unmet need. We've supported the campaign to raise the rate of unemployment payments, and we've worked alongside a multitude of partners to advocate for the fairer treatment of people on temporary visas, including people seeking asylum. While we've had some wins along the way, there is still much to do.

If you are already an active social justice advocate, or if you are keen to get involved, you can express interest in attending the Social Justice Forum by emailing [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au). It will be an opportunity to:

- Connect with other advocates and plan collaborative local actions
- Build your advocacy skillset and ability to influence decision-makers to achieve positive change
- Discuss current and emerging social justice issues, including climate equity

The Forum will take place in October, at a date to be confirmed.

## Vinnies celebrates National Reconciliation Week

Vinnies members and staff came together during a virtual morning tea to mark National Reconciliation Week (27 May – 3 June).

Taking place nearly three decades on from the landmark Mabo decision, which recognised the enduring land rights of Australia's First Nations

Peoples, the morning tea acted as an opportunity to share a dialogue on the meaning of reconciliation.

Leah Byrne, Tenancy Facilitator at Vincentian House, opened with an Acknowledgement of Country before discussing what reconciliation means to her as a Kamilaroi woman.

"Reconciliation isn't just a word; it's an action that every person can put into practice. It is the cornerstone of any relationship – be that between people, nations, culture and language – it is what should unite us, not divide us."

Rob Cohen, Vinnies Aboriginal Engagement Partner, spoke on the 60,000+ years of connection Indigenous people have to the land and the importance of sharing knowledge with all Australians, saying "I believe everybody owes it to themselves to learn more about the history of this country – both good and bad – if we are to move forward towards reconciliation."

Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, led a discussion where staff and members shared their thoughts on reconciliation and offered insights on how Vinnies can strengthen ties with First Nations communities.

During National Reconciliation Week, the Society also acknowledged the Uluru Statement from the Heart receiving the Sydney Peace Prize.

"We urge the Commonwealth to embrace the Statement's recommendations in full by providing a constitutionally recognised First Nations Voice in Parliament and establishing a Makarrata Commission," said Jack de Groot.

"The Society is committed to supporting the Uluru Statement from the Heart and calls on the Prime Minister and Australian Parliament to respect and enact the Statement in its entirety."



# THE HOUSE DON HELPED BUILD

**The 14th of February 1966 is known as the day Australia introduced decimal currency. The day also marked a significant moment in the life of Don Hewitt who began an association with the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW that has lasted 55 years.**

Joining Vinnies as a 27-year-old as a means of living out his faith – “I’m not much good at prayer, but I’m pretty good at action” – Don was nominated earlier this year alongside more than 5,500 people for an Australian of the Year award in recognition of his lifetime of community work.

Among Don’s greatest achievements during his time with the Society was helping to establish Freeman House in Armidale, a service designed to support regional people struggling with addiction.

Spending his early years as a member of St Joseph’s Conference in Armidale, supporting people through home visitations, Don identified a cohort of older homeless men who spent their time in local parks accompanied by flagons hidden under a brown paper bag.

“The police used to come around and they had no option but to put them in a jail cell for the night until they dried out, then put them on the street again,” recalls Don.

Making the decision, as then incoming Regional President in 1979, to purchase the nearby Crescent Guest House for \$25,000, a new Special Work – St Augustine’s – was formed specifically to support people struggling with addiction. The site was also designated as a proclaimed place which provided the police with a legal alternative where people in need could take a shower, enjoy a meal and find comfort in a new set of clothes.

“People found the comfort of the Society members and wanted to stay. Some of the best people who helped us were the people that we’d helped.”

Over time, the service was redeveloped with two adjoining properties purchased to offer additional programs, while funds provided by Vinnies and state and federal governments in the 2000s saw it transformed into a leading residential rehabilitation facility named after Cardinal James Freeman.

Today, Freeman House performs a vital role as the largest



residential rehabilitation service in northern NSW. With the closest service offering withdrawal facilities located four hours away in Lismore and Newcastle, Freeman House acts as a haven offering long-term drug and alcohol rehabilitation, crisis accommodation, inpatient treatment, aftercare support and programs to accommodate patients with young children.

Continuing to be involved with St Augustine’s by facilitating recreational trips for patients designed to complement the treatment provided by professional staff at Freeman House, Don continues to find purpose in the principals laid down years earlier in the Rule.

“When we face difficult decisions we go back and say ‘how would Frederic [Ozanam] or St Vincent de Paul handle this tricky situation?’ – so we still go back to the basics of the Rule.”

While much has changed at Freeman House over the past four decades, Don’s original intent of providing a supportive environment for people struggling with addiction remains as strong as ever.

“Whenever people set foot in Freeman House for the very first time, they’re on the road for success. Their efforts to get into Freeman House is a step in the right direction.”



## VINCENTIANS BECOME HONOURED AUSTRALIANS

A strong commitment to the wellbeing of fellow Australians was the common thread running through the citations for Vincentians honoured in the annual awards announced on Australia Day this year, both Orders of Australia and other local recognitions of service.

Those brought to our attention are mentioned below. If readers are aware of other members, volunteers or staff who were awarded under the Australian Honours system, or recognised by their local communities, we would appreciate your contacting Vision editorial.

The Society congratulates all awardees and thanks them for their service to the community. The full list of Australia Day Honours can be viewed at the Governor-General's website.

Supporter of drought-affected families and other locals in need, as well as an ardent golfer at the age of 81, Michael Lynch (centre) received the 2021 Parkes Citizen of the Year award. He is pictured with his wife Peg Lynch (also a staunch Society member) and Mayor Ken Keith.

Acknowledging Michael Lynch's contributions to the local community, Regional Director West, Kelly Morgan,

says has known him for a decade and never met a more deserving person of such recognition: 'Michael has worked as a Parkes Conference member providing support to those in need of assistance within Parkes and further afield. He has also held roles representing the entire West Region in the areas of Social Justice and Spirituality.'

The summary read at the Australia Day ceremony noted, 'In this role he has been particularly active in drought assistance. Since 2018 he has visited over 1000 farms in the Parkes Shire and beyond, offering both financial assistance and a listening ear. Michael is also extremely active with the Prostate Cancer Support Group, Parkes Veterans Golf Club and his church community. Michael looks for every opportunity to support his fellow citizens.'

Kelly Morgan adds, 'Michael was concerned by the lack of farmers contacting us, as he knew so many were in need. As a result, he and his wife Peg drove from farm to farm, delivering our brochure and sitting and talking with farmers and hearing their stories.

'Michael visited well over 1000 farms undertaking this role... as far out as Broken Hill. Michael has made an even higher number of calls to farmers in offering assistance, coordinating payments of bills and just to check how some were going, when he has identified greater needs for support.

'He is also currently working with the Cootamundra Ladies Group in delivering hampers that they prepare to farmers.

'Whenever he hears of one of our Vinnies members or volunteers who are unwell, he asks me "what can we do to help?" This extends to any member of the community in need, whether it be making a social visit or to drive them somewhere or to organize other forms of assistance.'

### AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS RECIPIENTS

**Dr Michael Joseph (Gerroa - OAM)**

**John Kearns (Portland - OAM)**

**Shirley Miller (Cremorne - OAM)**

**Denise Merle Bannon (Milperra - OAM)**

**Bernadette Sinclair (Bathurst - Australia Day Achievement Medallion)**

**Tom Matthews (Kyogle - Posthumous Special Community Achievement Award)**

**Laurence (Larry) Jennett OAM (Wollongong - Senior Citizen of the Year)**

**Gail Copeland (Condobolin - Lachlan Shire Community Service Award)**

**Pat Hayllar (Narrandera - Senior Citizen of the Year)**

## AT LAST, YOUTH LEADERSHIP GETS AWAY

Unable to meet last year, youth representatives from around the state gathered in March 2021 in the Blue Mountains to hold their long-awaited retreat. The group spent the weekend upskilling in communication, marketing and self-care skills, hearing from older leaders in the Society and discussing the challenges young people are facing today.

These youth leaders (pictured) represent the passion, creativity and unique voices of the young adults of the Society. They're committed, thoughtful and flexible - a necessary trait for young students and professionals who want to volunteer.

Congratulations to Vice President for Youth, Maddie Sirris who put the whole thing together in less than eight weeks, once pandemic conditions gave us the go-ahead.



## Buddies days are back on hold



Our youth and young adult conferences were devastated by being unable to meet face-to-face with their young companions whilst COVID-19 restrictions were on and off. They continued to support their 'kiddos' with do-at-home activities sent in the mail, and messages of hope and care.

The break between lockdowns gave everyone reason to cheer in the youth team, as Buddies Days were started up again. First in Maitland-Newcastle, then in Wollongong, and Wagga Wagga, and later Sydney.

In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak across the state, Buddies Days have been put on hold; we look forward to getting out and about once again as restrictions ease.

**TO GET INVOLVED WITH VINNIES' YOUTH INITIATIVES OR FIND OUT MORE,** please contact Courtney Deighton, State Youth Engagement Coordinator at [courtney.deighton@vinnies.org.au](mailto:courtney.deighton@vinnies.org.au).

## MEET HELEN:

Helen has volunteered as a shop manager with Vinnies in Coffs Harbour for more than a decade.

As part of her role, she oversees the day-to-day running of the shop while working collaboratively with a dedicated team of volunteers in an open and supportive environment.

First coming into contact with the Society on the eve of her retirement, a job agency informed Helen she needed to work 15 hours a week for six weeks to be eligible for the age pension.

"My six weeks went by really quickly and I was able to retire, so the question to me was do I leave or carry on," recalls Helen.

"I really enjoyed what I was doing and felt like what we were achieving together as a team was meaningful and helping people in our community.

"That was in 2008 and I'm still here and still loving it!"

Forming close bonds with her fellow volunteers from all walks of life, Helen finds great satisfaction in the camaraderie and collective spirit of volunteering where everyone has the opportunity to voice how the shop can improve.

"We have welcomed quite a few ladies who have come to us from different ethnic backgrounds; their life stories are amazing and their triumphs are very heart-warming to hear about."

**Helen (L) with one of the volunteers, Nancy, at the Vinnies Shop in Coffs Harbour.**



## Vinnies Shop Squad recruits retail volunteers

**Last year we launched the Shop Squad campaign to attract new volunteers to our Vinnies Shops.**

We received a solid response from across the state with expressions of interest coming far and wide from Sydney to Wagga Wagga, Armidale to Forbes, Newcastle to Dubbo.

As a result, over 100 people have come on board to give a few hours of their time each week to help with customer services, sorting donations and maintaining the day-to-day running of shops.

Vinnies Shops are found in 227 locations throughout NSW and provide invaluable income to fund services and programs which assist people experiencing hardship and disadvantage.

Our shops also play an important role in growing the circular fashion movement where textile and clothing waste is reduced from landfill and given a life beyond a single use.

We are so thankful to our retail volunteers who help Vinnies shape a more just and compassionate society for all.



# FRATELLI TUTTI – Restoring Relationships

Recently I opened the pages of Pope Francis' recent social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* on fraternal and social friendship. This encyclical, like his previously published *Laudato Si*, was strongly influenced by the words and actions of a thirteenth century monk. For Pope Francis, St Francis of Assisi offers the very essence of fraternal openness, "that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives."

This encyclical expresses Pope Francis' aspirations for a fraternity that transcends and crosses all boundaries of distance, culture, and that, like St Francis, sows "seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his sisters and brothers".

An aspect, which I believe grounds this document, is the reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan, especially with its emphasis on practical friendship for the wounded stranger. The Pope emphasises that, in an unhealthy society that turns its back on suffering and that is "illiterate" in caring for the vulnerable, we are all called, like the Good Samaritan, to become neighbours to others, opened to the radical inclusivity of the ministry of Jesus. We are all co-responsible in co-creating a society that is able to "include, integrate and lift up those who have fallen". Love builds bridges, "we were made for love" and in this, the Pope encourages Christians to recognise Christ in the face of every excluded person. Pope Francis describes this bridge of fraternity in terms of the central principles of Catholic Social Teaching,

respect for human beings for their intrinsic value and not for their use, solidarity based on their social nature and the primacy of the common good.

There is an urgency in the tone and expression of this encyclical, which I feel is similar to the urgency expressed in the revolutionary writings of Frederic Ozanam. Frederic wrote in a letter to his friend Ernest Falconnet in 1834, "I believe in authority as a means, in liberty as a means, and in love as the end." Our Vincentian tradition is echoed in the words of *Fratelli Tutti* each day in our service of fraternal and social friendship with those we serve. This, unknown to many of us, "holy" pursuit, is I believe, our dialogue of action and advocacy in alleviating poverty and homelessness. This dialogue may also seem at times too lofty an aim but in each of our members, our staff and many of our volunteers, it is an aim worth continuing and addressing.

To this, I would encourage a thoughtful read of this encyclical as this reflection has only touched on the depths of this document.

The Pope concluded this document with the following prayer:

*Lord, may our hearts be open to all peoples and nations of the earth. May we recognise the goodness and beauty that you have sown in each of us, and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects and shared dreams. Amen*

*Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth.*

## Bob Lowe (1940-2020) helps the Society achieve goals

**'Go the Reds!' wrote Carl Musker in a farewell message to his close mate Robert (Bob) Lowe in the Liverpool Echo in late 2020, and as if in response, Bob was buried in his Liverpool (England) FC t-shirt.**

Despite living on the opposite side of the world, commuting on a regular basis between Indonesia's capital of Jakarta and Kingscliff in the far north of NSW, Bob remained a passionate fan of the soccer club headquartered in the city where he was born in 1940, near the start of WW2.

Before long, the family was having to race to the safety of bunkers during the Blitz. Later they would move to Canada where their father, also named Bob, had been posted with the RAF. After completing his schooling back in England the younger Bob continued his studies and became an industrial chemist, migrating to Australia in 1969 where Sylvia, one of his four siblings, had happily settled.

'We were and still are a very close-knit family,' Sylvia recalls. 'My children adored him as he was a very naughty uncle and made them laugh all the time.'

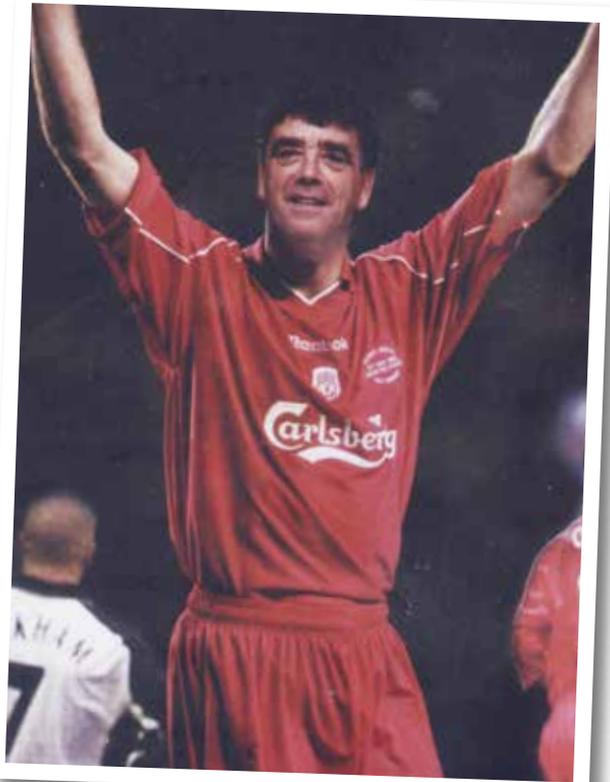
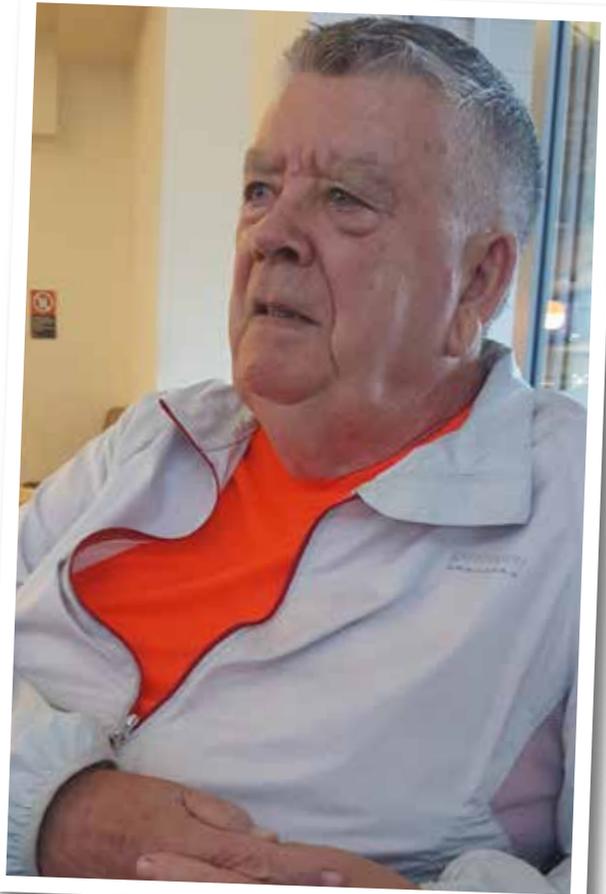
Living in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland, Bob worked for Croda on both sides of the Tasman before settling in Sydney where he signed with the Quest Group, later acquired by Unilever and then ICI. Soon he would again cast his eyes abroad, covering Indonesia and subsequently returning there in the early 1990s as Managing Director of Quest Indonesia.

In Australia's large neighbor he also found personal happiness, meeting and eventually marrying a successful businesswoman named Yanti who accompanied him on trips to Australia but preferred to continue living in her own country because of her large family.

The couple was well known for helping those less fortunate, including building schools and water infrastructure in poor villages.

While Bob Lowe had wanted to live out his retirement in Australia, playing golf, which he loved almost as much as Liverpool FC, this was not to be. He died in Jakarta with Yanti by his side, his family members unable to travel to Indonesia because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Not long after Bob's death the Society was informed that he had left a generous bequest in his Will. Bob had previously helped the St Vincent de Paul Society through donations to our Vinnies CEO Sleepouts. We are deeply grateful for the kindness of Bob and his family, and extend our sympathy for their loss.



Will you help  
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somewhere  
safe  
to sleep  
tonight?



You can help rescue a  
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Please give by calling 13 18 12  
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**Vinnies**  
good works

Images have been changed to protect the privacy of the people we assist.