

Issue no. 71



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Vision

A publication of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
AUTUMN/WINTER 2012

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

PEDAL POWER

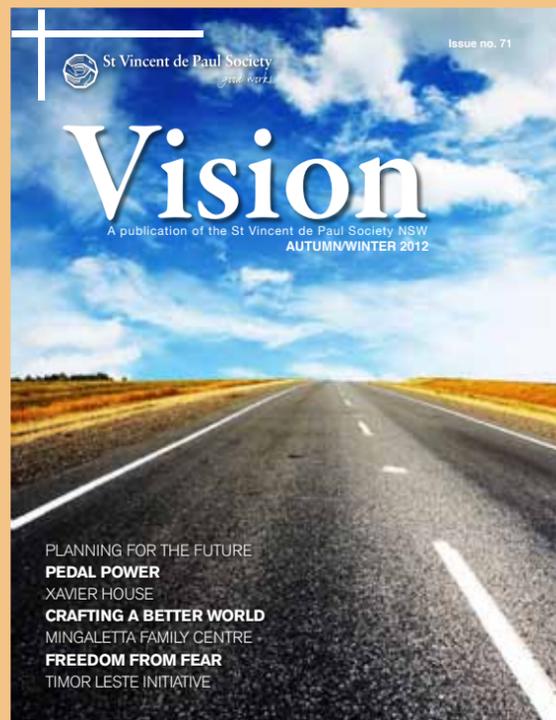
XAVIER HOUSE

CRAFTING A BETTER WORLD

MINGALETTA FAMILY CENTRE

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

TIMOR LESTE INITIATIVE



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We'd love to hear what the Society is doing in your area. Send us a letter or email, or call with an idea for a story or news piece: yolanda.saiz@vinnies.org.au or (02) 9568 0293.



- 4 VINNIES NEWS
- 8 MEMBERS NEWS
- 10 COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE GIVING
- 12 YOUTH
- 16 FEATURES
- 31 SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear friends,

It is with great pleasure that I present you with the new edition of Vision. You will read of the many good works of the St Vincent de Paul Society's members, volunteers and staff.

With Easter just gone, we reflect on a spiritual time many of us share with our family and friends. It is also important that we spare a thought for the most marginalised and disadvantaged people in our community, many who would have spent this time alone, with little hope for a better life.

Easter represents just that, the promise of a new life through Christ's resurrection. Saint Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."

On page 8 you will read an inspirational story that tells of the dedication of one of our members, a story that is repeated daily across our Conferences. And on pages 12 to 15 you will read about the very exciting work of our youngest members, Mini Vinnies and our youth groups.

You will also read some powerful stories about the hope we deliver through many of our services such as Xavier House, Freeman House and the Mingaletta Family Centre. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Mingaletta and whilst holding a new born baby of one of the mothers using the service, realised that with your good works, we are truly making a difference to lives both young and old.

As we go about our work in helping the poor through Christ, we should also think about planning for the future. On pages 16 and 17 you can read about some of our strengths, challenges and opportunities in moving forward and ensuring our long-term sustainability.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Vision, and see that through our good works, we are changing lives for the better every day.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Reynolds

President, NSW Provisional Board
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

CEO'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

As you know, devastating floods recently swept down much of southern and south western NSW, especially along the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan catchments. Many of these areas along the rivers have been declared natural disaster areas. These floods have caused damage to houses, properties and businesses and for many, the recovery will take all of their efforts and resources, and for some it may be too much.

As St Vincent de Paul Society members live and work in these communities, they will be working to assist those in need for the long term. Long after the disaster has passed, our members, volunteers and staff will be helping communities pick up the pieces. After the floods last year the St Vincent de Paul Society members worked with rural counsellors, other agencies and government to ensure that people were not forgotten when the media had moved on and the floods had receded.

Disasters often also bring out the best in people, donating money, time and resources where they can.

In recent weeks our colleagues in Western Australia have contacted us with offers of assistance from the Fortescue Metals Group Australia, who are running an appeal to assist us help people affected by the floods. In Wagga Wagga, Community CPS Australia kicked off the Wagga Wagga Mayoral Flood Appeal with a \$50,000 donation and all proceeds will go to the local St Vincent de Paul Society office. These are just two examples of Australian firms digging deep and supporting us in disaster affected communities. We thank them for their generosity.

I would also like to thank all of our members, volunteers and staff who have been involved, and will continue to be so. I often get to hear the stories of those to whom you have made a difference, and I can assure you that it is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Graham West

CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

GREEN LIGHT TO A GREEN THUMB

When listing all of the St Vincent de Paul Society's good work in the community you wouldn't expect a humble vegetable garden to appear. However, after getting the go ahead to start a vegetable garden in the Parish house's backyard, Dapto Conference member Ron McManus would beg to differ.

The garden project got underway in mid-2011 and the winter planting included broccoli, lettuce, peas and cauliflower. Summer saw Ron plant tomatoes, lettuce and other seasonal vegetables.

The garden is co-located with the Society's Care and Support Centre meaning that food hampers not only include the traditional staples of bread, margarine and eggs, but also a bag of fresh vegetables grown with tender love and care by Ron and other Dapto Conference members.



KOGARAH CONFERENCE CELEBRATES ITS CENTENARY

The Kogarah Conference celebrated its centenary last year by hosting the Society's St George Region annual festival mass and meeting at St Patrick's Church Kogarah, followed by a celebratory morning tea in the parish hall.

The Kogarah Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society started its good works in August 1911 and was the first Conference established in the St George region. Originally serving the emerging residential areas scattered amidst the budding farms and market gardens in-between Botany Bay and the Cooks and Georges Rivers, it now supports a very diverse and densely populated area.

The Kogarah Parish Administrator, Monsignor Henryk Micek, who has ministered previously in his native Poland

and for many years in Papua New Guinea, congratulated the Society on its long and continued service to the poor and disadvantaged in the St George region.

Monsignor Micek paid special tribute to the many men and women who had contributed to the Society's various charitable activities over the past 100 years. He stated that since arriving in Australia he had been most impressed by the significant role played by volunteers in a wide variety of community activities.

Local residents, Barry Jones, President of the Society's Sydney Archdiocese Central Council, and Sue Vit, President of the Society's St George Regional Council, were among the many Vincentians and supporters who attended the celebration.

REACHING OUT TO PEAK HILL

When a call went out from the Parramatta Central Council and Regional Council to help those doing it tough in rural areas, Our Lady of the Rosary School, St Marys was quick to jump on the opportunity.

Eager to help their country cousins, the students set out to help the Peak Hill community with the assistance of the St Vincent de Paul Society Rural Taskforce.

With an invitation for St Joseph's School students from Peak Hill to attend a Christian music workshop and concert in Parkes free of charge, students at Our Lady of the Rosary School took up the challenge of fundraising to cover the costs of transport from Peak Hill to Parkes.

Funds were raised by the students through a lolly guessing competition, sausage sizzle and a donation cup event. A cheque for \$700 was presented to St Joseph's School, Peak Hill allowing them to travel to the music workshop and concert.

A huge thank you goes out to Our Lady of the Rosary pupils for their thoughtfulness and generosity in giving their Peak Hill friends a big 'lift'.

Thanks must also go to Barry Smith, Paul Cannon, Colleen Fuller and Andrew Chinn.



ST LUCY'S SAYS THANK YOU

St Lucy's is a school for children with disabilities from Sydney's Wahroonga and Northern Beaches. It has an enrolment of 135 students with a range of mild, moderate and complex needs.

The St Vincent de Paul Society has been generously supporting St Lucy's School for the past 6 years by providing a scholarship for students who don't qualify for government funding.

The school has a strong academic focus with most students receiving individualised literacy training. Its main focus however is the creative arts – music, drama, dance and visual arts. The classes are led by professionals in each field, building student confidence, self-expression and communication skills. Thanks to Vinnies, more children with disabilities are benefiting from these programs.

Vice President of the Broken Bay Diocesan Central Council, Winston Watts AM and his wife Jan, visited St Lucy's Morning Song last year. Here they heard the children sing, toured the school with Principal Jo Karaolis and Development Officer Gailene Keen, and learnt more about the school's educational approach and flourishing Sacramental Program.



ANNUAL CELEBRATION MASS

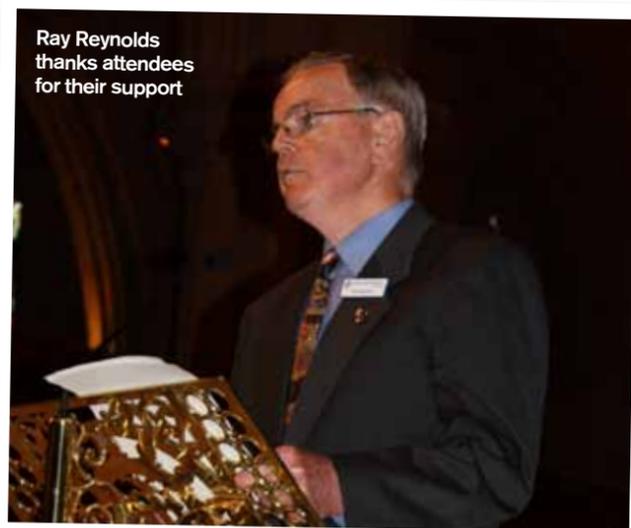
The Annual Mass, held at St Mary's Cathedral last November, was attended by close to 800 members, volunteers, benefactors and supporters of the St Vincent de Paul Society and Matthew Talbot Homeless Services.

The Mass, celebrated by Bishop Terence Brady, was an opportunity to reflect on the events of the past year and ask for blessings for the year ahead for all of the Society's supporters and friends, and especially for the people the Society helps.

Bishop Brady spoke about the impact helping the homeless had on him as a young student, before speaking about all of the 'good works' carried out by the St Vincent de Paul Society in helping the poor and marginalised.

The event was well supported by Mini Vinnies groups from St Therese's Primary School, Mascot; St Michael's Primary School, Meadowbank; St Ambrose's Primary School, Concord West; St Mary's Primary School, Concord; and St Vincent's College, Potts Point.

The Mass was followed by a light lunch and the unveiling of two Honour Boards recognising the generous benefactors of the St Vincent de Paul Society and Matthew Talbot Homeless Services.



Ray Reynolds thanks attendees for their support



Members of the Lithgow Conference



Students from St Vincent's College came out in support



L to R: Bishop Terence Brady, Brian Goodall, Ray Reynolds and Graham West

FOCUSING ON MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

In late 2011 the State Support Office implemented a number of changes agreed to by the State Council. One major change was the formation of a Member and Volunteer Engagement Team. The team is headed up by Suzie Stollznow and comprises Kate Scholl (membership), Jedi Karanja (volunteering), Sarah Lentern and Claire Mercer (youth), and two currently vacant positions for social justice and corporate volunteering.

The new team will offer a united approach to the issues that face members and volunteers. The team will aim to turn your issues into action. Members and volunteers will be encouraged to share information, resources and stories, and learn about each other. Linking youth and membership renews momentum to make changes needed to embrace youth membership in meaningful ways. The inclusion of corporate volunteering enables us to support the work already done in this area and to build a corporate volunteering program to better engage our already supportive corporate networks.

In many ways it is business as usual for the individuals in the team but its formation will enable us to improve the way we support you.



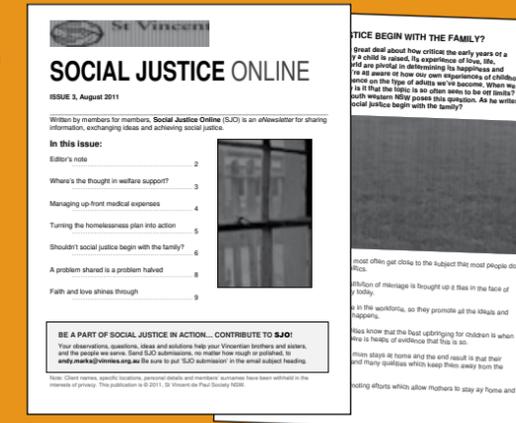
If you have any suggested initiatives, or would like to benefit from the corporate volunteering program, the Member and Volunteer Engagement team would love to hear from you. Please contact the team through the State Support Office on 02 9568 0262.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ONLINE

Social Justice Online (SJO) is an e-newsletter written by members and volunteers to share ideas, stories, solutions and observations. SJO is now compiled by the Member and Volunteer Engagement Team at the State Support Office.

Be a part of Social Justice in action by contributing to SJO. We would love to hear from you!

Your contributions help your Vincentian brothers and sisters, and the people we serve. Send SJO submissions to socialjusticeonline@vinnies.org.au



NINETY TWO AND STILL GOING STRONG

At the age of 92, Gayus Donoghue doesn't look a day older than 75. A sprightly man, he reads without glasses, still drives and continues to undertake home visitations to help people in need in his local parish.

Gayus was born in 1919 on the Feast of St Anthony. Raised in the small seaside town of Corindi on the New South Wales North Coast, he left school in the middle of the depression in 1934 to undertake a carpenter's apprenticeship.

He married a few years later and has now been married for 74 years. "The Irish either marry young or not at all," he says.

He and his wife Billie had three children and now have eight grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

About 50 years ago, Gayus received a tap on the shoulder – he was invited to join the St Vincent de Paul Society. He said he decided to become a Vincentian for the sanctification of his soul, and has been working tirelessly in his local Conference ever since.

When he joined there was only one vehicle in the Conference – a truck they bought for £20 – and they used to walk to most of their home visitations. He

remembers collecting bottles as a method of fundraising (receiving two shillings and two pence per corn bag), and he remembers the purchase of the first St Vincent de Paul Society store at Seven Hills.

What stands out most in his memory are some of the thousands of home visitations he's done. He said he often thinks of the people he has visited and what became of them.

He went to visit a young man who'd appeared in court, and found him working under a car in the backyard. When asked what he wanted, Gayus said he'd like to find him a job.

"The only people who work are fools and horses," said the man.

"We found him a job," says Gayus with a smile.

He recalls visiting a terminally ill man and asking "What can we do for you?"

"Give me a decent funeral," was all he said, and so we did," recalls Gayus.

During his time as a Vincentian, Gayus has seen many things but the most difficult thing is seeing young children crying from hunger.

"Some of the cases I go to I can't stand to see the children hungry. The most common form of assistance given is simply to provide food," he says.

"The biggest problem in this city now is the rents; many people can't afford to buy food."

If you have an inspiring story about someone who has dedicated their life to being a Vincentian, please email yolanda.saiz@vinnies.org.au

DIGITAL TV: HELPING PEOPLE SWITCH ON

Many people will soon experience a switch over to digital TV transmission. For many people in need, this transition may be both confusing and unaffordable. This is where the Government's Household Assistance Scheme comes into play.

The first areas to switch over this year will be Southern NSW, Northern NSW and the ACT. To keep receiving free-to-air TV people will need a TV that can receive digital signals. People may convert their analogue TV to digital by using a set top box or a digital recording device, or you can buy a TV with a built-in digital tuner.

Assistance via the Household Assistance Scheme may

be provided to people receiving the maximum rate of the Age Pension, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment, Department of Veterans' Affairs Service Pension or Income Support Supplement, and who own a functioning TV.

The package may include digital equipment designed to meet the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities, free installation and free antenna upgrades. Demonstrations and instructions on using the new equipment will also be provided.

To apply for or enquire about the scheme people must phone Centrelink on 1800 556 443 or go to a Centrelink Customer Centre before 5 July 2012.

THANKS TO A FAITHFUL VINCENTIAN

As a young boy, Jim Vogt would watch in awe as his father led Conference meetings in the back pews of the parish church after Mass. Now in his eighties, the highly-respected Kingscliff parishioner and Vincentian retired from Conference work last year.

Over the past 21 years, he has worked steadfastly in all Conference positions, while being admired and respected for his unfailing kindness and concern for others.



Some of the members of St Anthony's Conference, Kingscliff, farewelling Jim Vogt at a testimonial lunch

SENDING OFF JOHN AND PATRICIA KELLY

Vincentians gathered last year to give thanks and a rousing send off to John and Patricia Kelly after years of dedicated service to the St Vincent de Paul Society.

John held various positions over the years including Conference Vice President and President and Diocesan Disaster Recovery Advisor, whilst Pat held the role of Spiritual Advisor. They were both involved with the Regional Training team, and worked at their local Vinnies Centre.

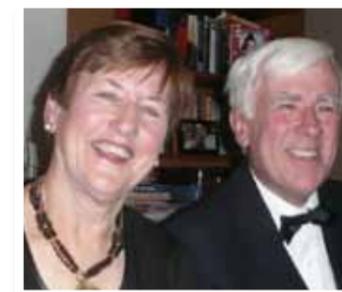
Speaking at the farewell, Margaret Francis, Tweed Byron Regional President said, "John and Patricia we wish you every happiness and blessing as you move on to the next phase of your lives at Bribie Island. Our thoughts and prayers are with you."



Left: Jon and Pat Kelly

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS LIST 2011

Congratulations to Tony and Carmel Smith who were amongst the 376 recipients of the Queen's Birthday honours. Both Tony and Carmel were recognised for their service to the community through the St Vincent de Paul Society.



Carmel and Tony have greatly contributed to the spiritual growth and development of the Society so that they and their colleagues can continue to help many of Christ's marginalised.

REST IN PEACE: RON MCCUDDEN

Ron was born on 21 September 1928 in Macksville on the NSW North Coast and was the youngest of ten children. Joining the PMG (now Australia Post) as a messenger boy and postman, he was eventually appointed to the Coffs Harbour Post Office, where he met and courted Noreen Murphy whom he married in 1949.

Ron's next appointment was to Thirroul where he advanced through the grades eventually becoming Deputy Post Master Wollongong. During this time Ron joined the St Vincent de Paul Society and was a dedicated member for more than 50 years.

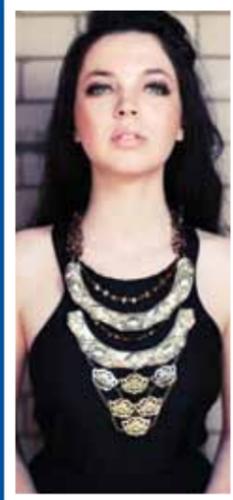
RAY AND MARIA REYNOLDS CELEBRATE THEIR GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Ray Reynolds, NSW Provisional Board President, and his wife Maria celebrated 50 years of marriage in September last year. The couple were overjoyed to receive letters and certificates to mark the occasion from the Governor General and the Prime Minister. Ray and Maria have three children and five grandchildren.

If you have any interesting news, have celebrated a milestone or been recognised for your service, please send an email to yolanda.saiz@vinnies.org.au

THINKING OUTSIDE THE JEWELLERY BOX

College of Fine Arts design graduate Sophia Davison created a unique eco-friendly necklace range to encourage fashionistas to 'Think Outside the Jewellery Box' and see and preserve the beauty in preloved jewellery. The one-off handmade pieces were made with 95% recycled items, including materials from Vinnies such as broken chains, brooches, jewels, beads and even ornamental plates.



The stunning range was auctioned on eBay to help raise money for the Vinnies Christmas Appeal and raised more than \$300, with one necklace selling for over \$100!

For more information on Sophia's designs visit sophiajocelyndesigns.com

RUN, VINNIES, RUN!

We were very lucky to have an army of fundraisers run for Vinnies in the City 2 Surf and the Sydney Running Festival in August and September 2011 respectively.

A special thanks goes out to the City 2 Surf teams, especially Gary and the Hilton Sydney's 'Blue Energy' Brigade, plus Emily Goldsmith and her parents Lesley Robertson and Robert Goldsmith who made it a family affair.

We'd also like to thank the awesome Ouffer Team, Amanda Appleby, Harriet Artes and Kelly Robinson who tackled the Sydney Running Festival with flying colours.



CBA STRUTS THEIR STUFF FOR CHARITY

The lovely IB&M graduates at the Commonwealth Bank put their best fashion foot forward last October with a Vinnies Vintage Fundraiser. The graduates auctioned off items to raise funds and also signed up colleagues in pairs to model fashion from Vinnies. Fellow staffers could pay for the chance to vote for their favourite model couples.

The night was full of laughs, blue steel moments and fabulous Vinnies ensembles. To top off the success, the graduates raised almost \$20,000 for Sydney Night Patrol – a phenomenal amount, which will help to provide food and friendship to the homeless.

STYLING WITH GRANT THORNTON

Grant Thornton accounting approached Vinnies after having seen media coverage of the 'Styled by Vinnies' fashion events that were held in Vinnies Centres across NSW last autumn. They were inspired to hold a similar event to raise money for the St Vincent de Paul Society. In December, staff and clients of Grant Thornton were invited along to the fundraiser held at Fairfax and Robertson jewellers in Sydney.

Attendees were invited to bring along clothing donations that were given to Vinnies. Stylist Karmyn Pembridge dressed models in donations, as well as other garments sourced from Vinnies, to demonstrate how they could be put together to create stylish outfits that are suitable for the office and also highlight which garments are more flattering to particular body shapes. In addition to a clothing bin full of donations, a raffle was held raising over \$1300.

VINNIES JOINS SOCIAL CHANGERROOM

Vinnies joined Jennifer Barton, founder of ethical lifestyle website, www.socialchangeroom.com, for her first Sydney fashion market last December. Aptly called, Social Changeroom, the market was about encouraging people to shop ethically. Jennifer invited people to sell their good quality, unwanted clothes at the market and fashionistas flocked to purchase their wares. Jennifer collected masses of good quality donations and kindly donated two carloads worth to Vinnies. Keep your eyes peeled for upcoming events at visitvinnies.org.au



SWINGING INTO ACTION

The City of Canada Bay Council held a 'Mayor's Golf Day' to raise funds for five local Conferences of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The Mayor of Canada Bay Council, Angelo Tsirekas, joined local residents for a round of golf at Massey Park Golf Club. The funds will help deliver vital services including home visits which provide not only friendship but also assistance with food, bills and clothing.

REINSW NOVICE AUCTIONEER COMPETITION

Each year the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales holds a statewide Novice Auctioneer competition to raise money for charity. Last



year's unique fundraiser generated around \$100,000, of which a third went to the St Vincent de Paul Society. The money will go to Vinnies services including Youth Reach Brookvale which is the largest provider of specialist youth services for young people on the Northern Beaches, and Matthew Talbot Homeless Services. The Society thanks the REINSW for their generous support.

THANKS TO LG LIFE'S GOOD AT YOUTH REACH BROOKVALE

Youth Reach Brookvale is delighted to have received the generous support of LG who recently donated ten brand new computers and two servers for their computer room. This means that clients will now have better access to these ever popular facilities. In addition to improving information technology access, LG has also supplied a new \$3500 data projector with electronic drop-down screen and a 60 inch plasma TV for the service.

VINTAGE VINNIES

Vinnies teamed up with Kelly Doust, author of Minxy Vintage to challenge fashion mavens to shop at stores like Vinnies and turn preloved items into new and wonderful creations.

The response was amazing and goes to show that there are countless items in Vinnies just waiting to be turned into masterpieces. To see more, visit Thecraftyminx.com.au



SANTA CLAUS CAME TO TOWN

Vinnies was overwhelmed with the generous support of organisations who helped make Christmas a happier time for around 2000 people in need. Our very sincere thanks go out to:

Accor Greater Sydney Hotels, Aerokids Early Learning Centre, Australian Institute of Company Directors, BSA, Burwood Council, Catholic Education Office, Catholic Superannuation & Retirement Fund, Claude Group, Converg, Daley International, FIL Asia Services, Gazal Corporation, GlaxoSmithKline, Honner Media, JP Morgan, Julie Fitzpatrick, Little Treasures Preschool, Luna Park, McGrath Real Estate Cronulla, Nudie Juices, Pepsico, Qantas Foundation, Roche Diagnostic, The Joey Club – Sydney, The Original Pretzel Company, Thinking Ergonomix, ThyssenKrupp Elevator Australia, Towers Transport, Visy, Walsh Bay Precinct Association, Woolworths and ZenithOptiMedia.



THE 'GOODIES RAISER'

Inspired by the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society Night Patrol Van, the St Brendan's Catholic Primary School Mini Vinnies team worked tirelessly to create a school wide plan to support people living without food and shelter. This was the beginning of the St Brendan's Goodies Raiser. A large quantity of goodies were collected such as chips, snacks, muesli bars, canned food, long life milk and blankets. Mini Vinnies grade leaders promoted, monitored and managed the collection of goods. The support from the school community was amazing as parents and carers played a big role in helping their children become active participants in caring for others.

SYDNEY MINI VINNIES GATHERING



The 2nd Annual Mini Vinnies Gathering for schools in the Sydney Archdiocese Central Council was held at the Australian Catholic University, Strathfield. The event attracted 134 children from 25 schools.

The theme of the day was inspired by Rosalie Rendu who said, "Be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor." Two Mini Vinnies groups spoke about the work they do in their schools, before groups broke off to discuss a range of topics including refugees, disability, Vinnies Centres, Overseas Partnership & Development, homelessness and Vincentian spirituality. After a delicious BBQ lunch, the day ended with a liturgy in the chapel where the group prayed together as a community for their work, the people they serve, and the wider Vincentian Family.

SAN CLEMENTE AND ST MARY'S ACTS OF KINDNESS

Narelle McInnes and Anne-Marie Kelly from San Clemente High School, Mayfield made a surprise delivery of a 4WD full of food and household necessities to the Maitland/Newcastle Central Council as part of Random Act of Kindness Day last September.

In addition, Mini Vinnies members from St Mary's High School Gateshead loaded up the Vinnies Van with winter clothing and blankets for their Winter Appeal contribution. The 2011 group was a real strength and support for those in need and supported the Breakfast Club, Winter and Christmas Appeals, and the coin trail for Assist-a-Student.

Vinnies would like to thank Pat Beisler for her many years of service with St Mary's Mini Vinnies Conference and wishes her the best of luck in her retirement!



ST JOSEPH'S GLOUCESTER SUPPORT EAST AFRICA

In response to the East Africa crisis the Mini Vinnies team at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Gloucester organised a gold coin donation fundraising day. During the afternoon Mini Vinnies organised a liturgy and a range of fun activities to help students learn about Africa.



NEVER TOO YOUNG TO ADVOCATE

Mini Vinnies members from St James' Catholic Primary School, Banora Point decided to advocate for the rights of homeless people in their community. As passionate young Vincentians the group decided to contact the local Mayor and Member of Parliament requesting homeless facilities in the Tweed region. In her letter, nine year old Ashley wrote, "I would like to make a difference in these people's lives....And think about how cold it gets in the night time and you turn on your fire or heater, now imagine how cold it would be if you had to sleep in your backyard..."



The students were particularly excited about the response from the Tweed Mayor who was inspired by the work the Mini Vinnies group was doing and said he would take the issue to Parliament. "I have been working to get a place in Tweed Heads that will not only provide a safe place to sleep and somewhere to have a shower, but will also help people to get the skills and tools they need to make a better life for themselves in the future....Thank you for caring about the homeless and for writing to me on their behalf," he wrote.



Photo by Vanessa Chisholm

ST LUKE'S AT REVESBY: PROVIDING WARMTH TO THE HOMELESS

The community of St Luke's Catholic Primary School, Revesby unleashed the power of knitting needles, in an effort to comfort the homeless last winter.

Students, parents, grandparents and friends of St Luke's busily knitted woollen squares that were joined together to create beautiful warm blankets in their 'Knit for Charity' project. The blankets were then distributed by students from Mount St Joseph Milperra during their Vinnies Night Patrol volunteering.

CONGRATULATIONS to the Lismore Vinnies Youth Team who were awarded the Northern Rivers Volunteer Team of the Year 2011 from the NSW Centre for Volunteering. Lismore Vinnies Youth were very active throughout 2011 running Buddies Days, Immersion Programs, Kids Camps and Teen Camps. The team consists of Matthew Kirkham, Tamara Hamshaw, Simone Attard, Dan Howell, Dakota Parker, Meg Collins, Charlotte Herridge and Eliza Metz.

CONGRATULATIONS also go to Camille Palunco (Broken Bay Central Council) and Susan Ihar (Sydney Archdiocese Central Council) who received the Order of Australia Association Youth Community Service Award 2011.

ST AMBROSE CONCORD ASSISTING STUDENTS IN NEED

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School, Concord West had a very special celebration as they recognised 60 years of dedication from Sr Judith Clark, who leads their Mini Vinnies group. Sr Judith has served God and others as a Sister of Charity and is a much loved member of the community. The children shared food, cards and their special thoughts about Sr Judith.

The group consists of about thirty Year 4 and 5 children who meet regularly to work on projects such as the Assist-a-Student program. After learning about the program, students and staff looked at ways of raising funds in support without burdening parents.

To educate children in the school, Mini Vinnies prepared a PowerPoint, a puppet and a presentation of pictures. Charts shaped like thermometers were also prepared for each class to record each \$70 amount raised, which would signal that one more student would be able to be educated as a result of the fundraising.



MERCY CATHOLIC COLLEGE STYLED BY VINNIES

Mercy Catholic College students walked down the catwalk showing off their wardrobes styled by Vinnies! The results were amazing, showing just what you can find for a fraction of the price. Shopping at Vinnies not only saves you money but also supports people in need and helps the environment.

A huge thank you to Mrs Thomas and Ms Dorey who helped organise the event. A special mention for all the models and other volunteers: Liz, Eloise, Pippa, Natalie, Claire, Stephanie, Taylor, Eugenie, Rebecca, Kathleen, Linley, Olivia, Annabelle, Emerald, Julia, and Mr Cuttler.



MINI VINNIES GATHERING AT CONDOBOLIN

In October 2011, four of the Wilcannia-Forbes Mini Vinnies groups came together at Condobolin for the inaugural Mini Vinnies gathering. 120 students from Cobar, Condobolin, Forbes and Parkes had a wonderful day discussing social justice issues and sharing news with one another about what they do in their Mini Vinnies groups.

The day began with an inspiring presentation by Kate Hazleton, the Wilcannia-Forbes representative on the St Vincent de Paul World Youth Day pilgrimage. Kate shared her inspiring experience with the students. The students then broke into groups to participate in workshops covering various social justice issues including homelessness, migrants and refugees, bullying, drought, disaster recovery, mental health and overseas partnerships and development.

The day ended with a lovely liturgy which included prayers written by the students. It was beautiful to see the Mini Vinnies students from different schools coming together to learn, share ideas, celebrate their work and make new friends.

Wilcannia-Forbes has five Mini Vinnies groups made up of Holy Family, Parkes; St Laurence's, Forbes; St Joseph's, Condobolin; St John's, Cobar; and St Michael's, Deniliquin. They also have a Youth Conference from Red Bend College in Forbes.

SHARE YOUR LOCAL VINNIES YOUTH NEWS

If you are involved in a Mini Vinnies, High School or Young Adult Conference or volunteer with a Vinnies Youth program, we would love to hear your news and stories and share them in Vision. Please contact your local Youth Coordinator or email youth@vinnies.org.au

WEEKEND WALKABOUT

Twenty-five student volunteer collectors from Emmaus Catholic College, Kemps Creek raised a record amount of over \$1500 for last year's Vinnies Winter Appeal. The students from years 8 to 12 came from diverse areas to doorknock in the St Clair Holy Spirit parish which coordinated the local appeal. Most people were familiar with the work of Vinnies and were pleased to know that the funds raised are used for the relief of local families and homeless people. "The work has to keep going, because the need is still there," said the group, which meets regularly to discuss plans and develop strategies for the works of their Conference.

ST BENEDICT'S PRIMARY BRING AND BUY

Mini Vinnies members at St Benedict's Catholic Primary School at Edgeworth brought in toys they no longer played with and lots of yummy cakes to sell at a great price for Bring and Buy Day as pictured (below) with Sr Helen Anne Johnston and Mini Vinnies members.



NEW MINI VINNIES ON BOARD IN LAMBTON

Congratulations to the 24 students from Years 5 and 6 at St. John's Catholic Primary School, Lambton who were officially commissioned as members of Mini Vinnies. With the help of Coordinator, Mrs Kate Drake, the students attend meetings during their lunch times to help build a more compassionate and caring school.

WYD 2011 REFLECTION

"Thank you for your joy and resistance," the Pope told us as we sat, drenched from the rain, watching as lightning and strong winds bore over the two million people gathered in vigil with the Holy Father. "Your strength is stronger than the rain. Thank you. The Lord is sending us his blessings with the rain."

And we were stronger. That day we had arrived at 10am to set up camp for our vigil with the Pope, followed by Mass the next day. We waited in an airfield, through 45 degree heat and were then lashed by wind and rain as the evening arrived. We continued our wait and our vigil, because we had been driven there by our faith.

Twenty-six Australian Vincentians from NSW and WA shared a pilgrimage that took us from a three day celebration with Vincentian Youth from around the world, to a Mass with the Pope and near two million young Christians, to a journey through the Vincentian heartland of France. Our group consisted of young Vincentians from all ends of the country, as well as our two Baillys Kevin and Jo Walsh and our State Youth Chaplin, Fr Paul Ghanem. Together, we explored our faith and were challenged to continue to grow in our roles with the Society.

Liam Duncan, Deputy Chair, State Youth Team

LIL' BOOK OF PRAYERS



Mini Vinnies at Holy Family Catholic Primary School in Parkes holding the 'Lil' Book of Prayers

Prayer of Beauty

When I think of you I have so many things I would like to say.

Some people think of a man dressed all in white or someone who calls day and night.

I think of plants and the gorgeous red sun, or dolphins having so much fun.

One day my life will change and I will meet you in heaven.

Until then I'll think of you.

Sarah Meacham, St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Mini Vinnies, Condobolin, NSW

MINI VINNIES COMMISSIONING IN ARMIDALE

Youth and Mini Vinnies activity in the Armidale Central Council has seen a new Mini Vinnies group join from St Mary of the Angels Catholic Primary School, Guyra. Twenty-eight students pledged their willingness to serve the poor and disadvantaged under the name of St Vincent de Paul. St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Glen Innes also came on-board with 26 students getting involved and holding a very successful Winter Appeal Blanket Drive collecting three large boxes of blankets, which were presented to the Central Council President, Kerry Muir.





PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

In September 2011 the NSW Provisional Board formed a Strategic Planning Committee to oversee the development of a State based Strategic Plan to help plan effectively for the future.

Earlier this year, NSW Provisional Board President, Ray Reynolds outlined his thoughts on the need for a new strategic plan in a letter to members. Some key points from his letter are included below.

■ WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN?

- The St. Vincent de Paul Society has been established in NSW for 131 years. In this time, the Society has worked to meet the needs of the poor and marginalised in our communities.
- In NSW we have 23,922 dedicated people consisting of

8,801 members and 15,121 volunteers endeavouring to meet the needs of those people experience disadvantage. In the last financial year, we assisted 682,029 people and spent over \$58 million in accomplishing this crucial work.

- The Society has 418 Conferences, 215 Youth & Young Adult Conferences, 59 Regional Councils, 10 Diocesan Central Councils and the NSW State Council. We also have 103 Special Works catering for the disadvantaged, disabled and homeless.
- The Society operates 253 Centres which not only help fund these works through the sale of clothes and other goods, but also provide direct assistance to those struggling to make ends meet.

All of these activities are supported by a number of employees throughout the state.

- With the advent of the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) in July this year, all charities will come under closer scrutiny by the Federal Government to improve public trust and confidence in the sector.
- To meet these requirements, the NSW State Council has seen the need to incorporate as a company limited by guarantee. It is also imperative that we have a map for the future. This will be accomplished by developing a Strategic Plan that will identify future goals and the resources needed to accomplish them. Our last plan was issued in 1994; it is now time to reassess the situation.
- Strategic Plans help ensure sufficient resources are available to maintain existing services and cover any new initiatives to be undertaken.
- In order to prepare a Strategic Plan, we have engaged consultants called Noetic Solutions.

■ WHAT ARE SOME OF OUR CHALLENGES, STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES?

Challenges:

- The majority of our current members are in the 61 to 80+ years age group with a median age of 68.57 years. It is obvious that if this trend continues, our total member numbers will dwindle over the next ten years.
- Whilst the Society is making inroads with young children and young adults through its Mini Vinnies programs in primary schools and secondary schools, and University groups, people in the 25 to 55 years age group are very scarce in the Society.
- We need to recruit new members and volunteers in order to have long-term sustainability. Our challenge then is, 'How can we revitalise ourselves sufficiently to encourage new members and volunteers in this age group to join the Society?'
- The Society now moves in a much more competitive environment, with over 600,000 charities and community clubs operating within Australia. We are

providing services in a diverse range of areas which means that we are competing with a number of other charities and community clubs for funding, donations, members and volunteers.

- The Society needs to be ready to meet the increasing demands of government in order to secure funding.

Strengths:

The Society has a:

- strong commitment to our faith and helping people in need.
- dedicated group of members, volunteers and support staff.
- strong income source from our Vinnies Centres, which means that we are not as heavily reliant on government funding or financial donations as other charities.

Opportunities:

The Society has a range of opportunities including:

- using our asset portfolio to invest in improving existing services and delivering new services.
- a great opportunity to build stronger relationships with businesses and other charities in order to meet increasing demand.

■ WHERE TO FROM HERE?

It is important for any Strategic Plan to have ownership. Experience has shown that to achieve this ownership, the genesis of the plan should begin at the grass roots.

This is why Noetic have undertaken extensive consultation with a broad range of groups including membership, volunteers, staff, clients, government representatives, the church, benefactors, sponsors and community sector partners. These consultations gathered information about the Society including but not limited to what we are doing now, what we should be doing and the general perception of the Society. These consultations provide the research and evidence base for the development of a Strategic Plan which sets out the future direction of the Society.

It ensures that the Strategic Plan is not just a collection of good ideas but a plan that provides clear strategic direction and objectives, and most importantly tangible outcomes.

It is envisaged that a draft Plan will be completed by the end of April.

For more information on the Strategic Planning process please feel free to contact Violetta Kostovski on 9568 0262 or email violetta.kostovski@vinnies.org.au

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN JOHANNESBURG



Bec, who was previously the Vinnies NSW Youth and Young Adult Coordinator, said one of the greatest highlights of her trip was her four months working with the Three2Six program at Marist Sacred Heart College in Central Johannesburg. Sacred Heart College is uniquely placed between one of the richest suburbs in Johannesburg and the fringe of the rundown city centre, which has become home to thousands of refugees fleeing conflict and famine in other parts of the continent. Many of these children have witnessed unimaginable horrors and have survived journeys of great hardship. All of them struggle for survival in a city they had hoped would provide safety and a future.

Four years ago the school decided to help refugee children get an education. They set up a bridging school which runs from 3pm to 6pm each weekday

Bec Bromhead has been a St Vincent de Paul Society member since she was in Year 11. Recently she undertook a year-long project in Southern Africa to set up Assist-a-Student programs with National Councils in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. Funded by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, the trip allowed Bec to work with fellow Vincentians to support some of the most marginalised children in Africa.

South Africa's post-apartheid constitution tells us that every child, no matter their background, circumstances or citizenship status has the right to receive an education. Unfortunately, the reality is that for many, education remains unattainable. Schools are packed to overflowing and resources are scarce. In an environment of tension and regular outbursts of xenophobia the first to be excluded from what little educational support is available are children who have fled to South Africa from other countries – refugees and asylum seekers. The African Assist-a-Student program gives access to school supplies and much needed tuition for the most disadvantaged students.

to provide a compressed curriculum of literacy, numeracy and life skills to 150 children. Three2Six gives these children basic skills, a safe and well-equipped learning environment, a solid nutritious meal each day, language practice, access to positive mentors, support to enter mainstream public schools and most importantly, hope.

“They may share two bedroom flats with three other families, squat in garages and come to school without shoes or anything in their tummies, but they wear the biggest smiles and come with such a hunger to learn that you can't help but get excited about learning with them,” said Bec.

“The Assist-a-Student program and other Vinnies Twinning initiatives are such an important example of Frederic Ozanam's vision to ‘encircle the world in a network of love’. The quality of work the Society is doing in these places is really impressive,” said Bec.

“It is equally important to recognise how much we can learn through these relationships, about love, faith, grace and courage.”

“Clients have expressed joy at being able to get around town more easily, but also overwhelming gratitude...”

Sydney is a beautiful but sprawling city. For onshore asylum seekers receiving the Vinnies Asylum Seeker Allowance (VASA), using public transport in Sydney can be an unaffordable luxury. Being unable to get around can have deep ramifications as it often leads to isolation that compounds physical health problems and can exacerbate mental health issues.

PEDAL POWER

Migrant and Refugee Support Worker Zoe Bishop explains that ensuring that people have affordable transport so that they can access a range of social support services was the main idea behind starting what is referred to as the Vinnies Pedal Power program.

“When a VASA client explained he could not get free lunch from a community centre because the bus ride there was too expensive, the idea for Vinnies Pedal Power was born,” explains Zoe.

“Starting Vinnies Pedal Power was similar to building a bike. The frame was the idea – to provide VASA clients with a free, healthy, empowering mode of transport. Next the idea needed wheels, handle bars and a bell.”

Pedal Power's first wheel came from the St Vincent de Paul Society Centres. The Society receives donations of bikes, but can't sell them without safety checks. The cost and effort of this often cancels out any profit made on the bike.

This is where Cycle Recycle, a community bike workshop in Waterloo steps in. This volunteer run workshop aims to assist disadvantaged people own a bike. Community members work with experienced bike mechanics to fix up or build bikes for free. Cycle Recycle is always buzzing with bike enthusiasts. Not only can Vinnies Pedal Power bikes get safety checked but asylum seekers are included in a friendly community project.

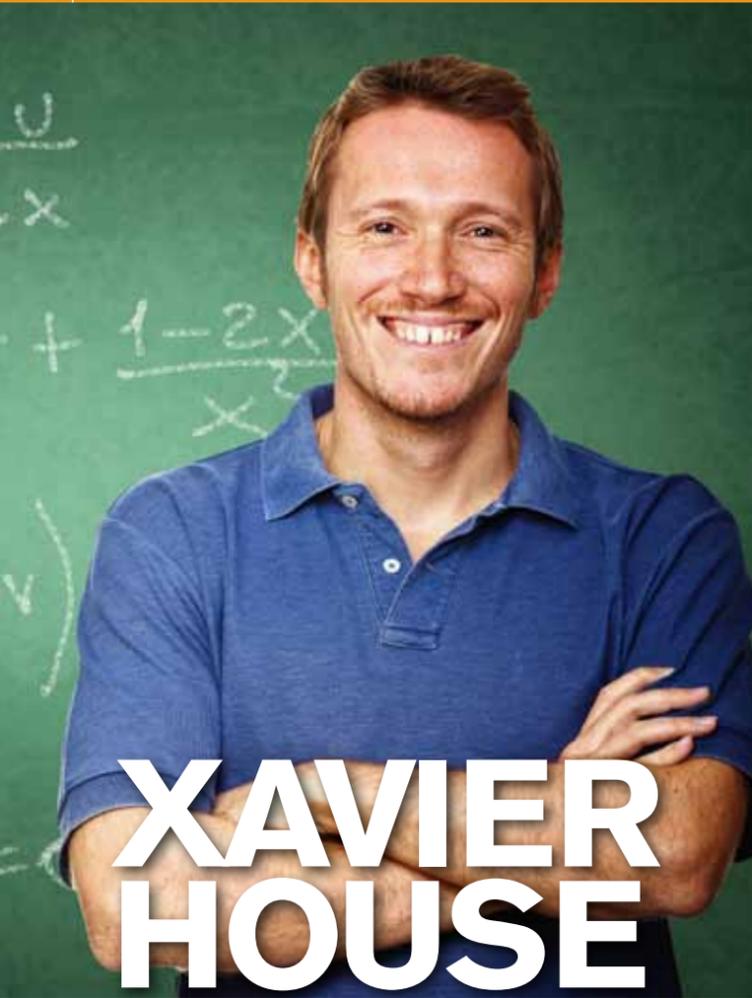


The St Vincent de Paul Society Distribution Centre team also cooperate in the process by regularly delivering donated bikes to Cycle Recycle. They identify and number the bikes as they come in, so they can be matched with the clients.

To finish the Pedal Power process, the Migrant and Refugee team provides a helmet, bell and a lock to keep cyclists safe. Clients also attend a City of Sydney road cycling course, to ensure they know the NSW road rules.

A number of Vinnies Pedal Power bikes have now ridden off into the sunset. Clients have expressed joy at being able to get around town more easily, but also overwhelming gratitude for the community generosity they have experienced.

Vinnies Pedal Power is a true collaboration, delivering not only bikes but a great deal of community spirit.



For many young men, turning their dreams or aspirations into reality can be a difficult undertaking. For young men living in regional or remote Australia, the task is even more challenging; compounded by high unemployment, higher than usual rates of depression and substance abuse, and a range of other social issues.

Pursuing further education or employment outside of their communities is often out of reach and unaffordable. For many families, supporting a child in the city is impossible, as they have seen their livelihood stripped from them by the devastating droughts and the collapse of local industries and businesses as a consequence.

As a result, young people from these communities are often robbed of the opportunity to pursue further education and employment.

In inner-western Sydney, the St Vincent de Paul Society's Xavier House (Sydney Archdiocese Central Council) is helping to relieve some of this burden by offering affordable home-style accommodation for young men hailing from regional or remote parts of our country.

For Will, 22, Xavier House has made all the difference in helping him achieve his dream of becoming a teacher. Originally from the North Coast, the most renowned schools of his chosen profession were miles away in Sydney.

At first, Will tried to commute between his home and Sydney, an arduous two and a half hour trip each way, every day. Will's eyes glaze over as he recalls those commutes. "There wasn't much to do on the trips, either try and study or get some restless sleep. It was a good idea to have a fully charged iPod," he quips.

The daily grind eventually started to impact on Will's grades and personal life, but unfortunately the cost of living in Sydney was more than he could afford. While dedicated to his dream of becoming a teacher, it seemed that the relentless commute was pushing the dream further out of Will's grasp.

This was where Xavier House stepped in, offering Will a place to stay close to his university, freeing up time for study, part-time work and a personal life.

Although the transition would be tough; leaving his family behind for the first time, the ambience at Xavier House and the camaraderie with fellow housemates, would make all the difference.

"The house mates took me out on the town on my first night. You become friends very quickly after that," says Will.

Step inside Xavier House, and it instantly feels like a home away from home. Computers, free internet access, cable television, a pool table and even home cooked dinners, easing the transition for most young men.

"The best part of the house is its location. It really is just a short train ride to anywhere in Sydney," states Will.

Will has now completed his teaching degree and is working casual shifts in schools around Sydney. With his own determination and the help of Xavier House, Will has well and truly left behind the obstacles that originally stood in his way.

As for the future, an overseas trip is on the agenda, before returning to work as a full-time teacher.

"I'm planning a trip to Italy with my partner. We want to see the sights and absorb the culture, then return home and start full time teaching."

“Step inside Xavier House, and it instantly feels like a home away from home.”

THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

Compeer is an internationally recognised program that uses the power of friendship by matching volunteers with people living in the community who have a mental illness.

The St Vincent de Paul Society currently has six Compeer Programs operating in NSW. Jim, a Compeer volunteer tells how being involved with the program has had a positive impact on his life.

Jim had a successful career, a wife and two beautiful children, and a comfortable home, yet always felt something was missing. He realised that his life had been consumed with his own well-being, and began to believe that a fulfilling life is only possible in the selfless service of others. So where should he start?

Sitting in church one Sunday listening to a sermon, Jim's attention was drawn to an advertisement for volunteers in the Vinnies Compeer program. Perfect, Jim would start here.

After completing his Compeer training, Jim was matched up with Brad. In this new friendship Jim had to learn to listen. He had to learn compassion and understanding. Simple, not easy.

Jim explains how each encounter with Brad teaches him humility. "Each encounter I see a new Brad; an intelligent, inspiring and courageous man. I do not have any other Brad's in my life. He makes me feel unique, special," he says.

Jim is now passionate about mental health and trying to remove the stigma that is often associated with mental illness.



"Brad had been living with mental illness a long time and no one recognised it. He hid it well as a child until one day he could bear it no longer. A mental health epidemic is rampant in our society and, as a parent, my goal is to instruct parents on how to look for signs and deal with the increasing prevalence of this disease in our children.

If Brad was diagnosed when he was 16 years old perhaps things would be different," says Jim.

A SINCERE APOLOGY

In a recent meeting between Ray Reynolds, President NSW Provisional Board, Graham West, CEO St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and Les Mico it was agreed that the Society would attend to Mr Mico's request for an apology.

After discussions with Tony Thornton, National Council President, it was agreed that an apology would be sent on their behalf. Following on from that request to Tony Thornton, it was decided that an apology would also be made on behalf of the NSW Provisional Board (State Council).

In a letter to Mr Mico, Ray Reynolds wrote:

"On behalf of the NSW Provisional Board, I want to say to you that I am deeply sorry for any hurt that you have suffered. We offer this sincere apology on behalf of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

We thank you for your service to the St Vincent de Paul Society over many years. You can rightly take great pride in your many achievements to assist Christ's poor, especially in your role as President of the Sydney Archdiocese Central Council.

We also wish to express our deep gratitude to you for your continuing ministry to people experiencing marginalisation and your great commitment to the cause of social justice."

It is hard to imagine being told to move out of your family home of 10 years. This was the reality faced by public housing tenants living on the Macquarie Fields estate.

Growth in the area had brought change. Public housing was slated for redevelopment for future sale in the private market. Told to leave their homes, tenants were surprised and alarmed. Lack of communication from government compounded their stress.

Enter Animation Project, a St Vincent de Paul Society Special Work (Wollongong Central Council) which has provided assistance to the communities of the south-west outskirts of Sydney for 13 years by way of community action.

Together with local students, residents and a research firm working pro bono, the Animation Project supported a tenant-initiated survey. The survey was a testament to how the community felt about being relocated from their homes. It highlighted the stress and insecurity being felt in the local community. People felt lost and confused; their futures uncertain with no-one to turn to.

The message was clear, especially to Housing tenant Barry Leigh who was staring down eviction. "The point was to get everyone's view across to the Government that this was not the right thing to do. You can't do this to people..."



MACQUARIE FIELDS REANIMATED

It's a terrible thing to say to people that you have no choice on whether or not to stay in Macquarie Fields," Barry said.

"It is a home, it is more than just a house, and I have been here for such a long time."

The survey brought the community together. It was a community effort, where people sharing the same hopes for the future, joined together and got something done.

Eventually, the NSW State Government made the decision to postpone redevelopment of forty houses on the Macquarie Fields public housing estate until 2015. The community breathed a collective sigh of relief. Their homes are safe for now.

Michael Thorn, Community Animator with the Society's Vincentian Social Action Centre believes that empowering

the community to instigate social change is a very powerful tool.

"It was great to see a group of disadvantaged people finding their own way towards making social change, let alone seeing them experience a favourable outcome," said Thorn.

"While the tenants may still be required to move some day, for now they are able to stay, and it is this outcome they celebrate."

The Macquarie Fields survey is a powerful example of how a close and dedicated community can tackle problems which would possibly marginalise them further. Only through an indomitable sense of community could the Macquarie Fields community reclaim their homes and their voice.

CRAFTING A BETTER WORLD AT ST JOSEPH'S WORKSHOP

As the patron saint of workers, St Joseph oversees the effort of people working as an agent of good ideals. His stoic spirit resides in the work of an old panel saw and the volunteers of St Joseph's Workshop in Gosford (Broken Bay Central Council).

Volunteers work with a healthy vigour, crafting necessities for those who can't afford them. Since 1992, St Joseph's Workshop has been making beds, drawers, cabinets and tables, anything to make life easier for people in need.

The service helps people in many different situations, those escaping domestic violence and trying to rebuild their lives, or people struggling to pay for the bare necessities.

Public housing shortages in Gosford have forced people to seek private housing. Most struggle to pay the ever increasing rental prices of the private market, leaving very little if anything at all to furnish a home.

Furniture becomes a treasured luxury and each piece provided by the kind hands at St Joseph's Workshop helps those trying to get by day to day. It is just another cost they don't need to worry about.

"Making a good product helps people feel great. They won't feel as if they were given second hand offcuts. We are committed to creating quality products that will make them feel better no matter the situation," says the President of St Joseph's Workshop, Bruce Dent.

Over 60 volunteers dedicate their time and skills to the work of St Joseph's Workshop. The benefit that they receive from being involved with the service is also an important part of the process.

Many of the volunteers are retired and elderly, living up north and often isolated from their families. The workshop gives the volunteers a community to belong and contribute to.

"The best part about working at St Joseph's is the comradeship," says Dent.

"Most of the people here are retired and isolated, we give them a place where they can meet and interact with each other on a daily basis. Applying their creativity to their work



All wooden furniture and toys were made by volunteers



keeps them mentally and physically fit"

There are already plans to expand the reach of St Joseph's Workshop, which now not only services the Central Coast Vinnies Centres but also those in Brookvale, Hornsby and Chatswood.

CONGRATULATIONS to St Joseph's Workshop for winning the Gosford City Council Australia Day Community Award for a Volunteer Organisation.



FREEMAN HOUSE: REBUILDING LIVES

Freeman House, a Special Work of the St Vincent de Paul Society, is centrally located in Armidale and has been in operation since 1979. It services clients across NSW and has evolved to deliver three specialist homelessness and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, with both residential and community-based components.

This innovative approach is underpinned by evidence-based case management, and therapeutic interventions, and provides a continuity of care to clients experiencing homelessness and addiction. In a first for regional NSW, the community clients are able to access groups and services specifically targeted to assist them develop living skills with the ultimate aim of independent living.

Last year, Freeman House was successful in the Australian Government's Regional Development Australia Fund, receiving an \$8 million grant. This was the largest grant in NSW, and recognised both the success of Freeman House and the value of the Society's assistance to clients in need. Construction of the state-of-the-art facility will commence in July 2012.

Kerry Muir, President of the Society's Armidale Central Council says that the re-development of Freeman House will provide a safe, quality environment in which clients can heal and achieve their goals.

"We are very excited to receive this funding as it has taken years of planning and work to develop this project, and it

will benefit our clients and the region through improved infrastructure and ability to provide homelessness and rehabilitation services to the marginalised and disadvantaged," says Muir.

The new facility will provide designated purpose-built areas for people who are rough-sleepers, which is in line with the objectives outlined in The Road Home, Homelessness White Paper (2008), and will ease the pressure on homelessness services in the area, which are often full to capacity.

The new facility will provide an environment for professional learning and development for staff, clients and external service providers and will maximise opportunities to

strengthen current partnerships with TAFE New England Institute and The University of New England, and other key services in the region.

Scott Sears, Manager, Freeman House explains that the project will include a regional Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC); a key part of the program for Freeman House residents, that will also be available to the wider community.

"With a comprehensive education program including computer literacy, vocational skills, health, nutrition and independent living, the OLC program will be crucial in achieving community re-integration and sustained wellbeing, particularly for those living on the margins," says Sears.

Several issues around homelessness are shared in regional and metropolitan areas including a lack of services and increased demand particularly by people who experience addiction, mental health issues, or family and domestic violence.

There are several ways however, in which these issues present in regional and rural Australia which differ to metropolitan areas. These include: higher rates of Indigenous homelessness; a lack of employment opportunities, homelessness services and lower incomes; and a greater lack of domestic and family violence and mental health services.

The new Freeman House facility will ensure that the excellent results already achieved in addressing the factors that contribute to rural homelessness will continue well into the future.

MINGALETTA:

EASING THE PRESSURE FOR HOMELESS PARENTS

Where there is a concentration of families there is always a need for childcare. This applies even where the families are homeless, perhaps more so.

The Mingaletta Family Centre (Wollongong Central Council) in Eaglevale caters for the children of families staying at two homeless refuges run by the St Vincent de Paul Society's Macarthur Ozanam Centre in Campbelltown. One refuge is for women with children, and the other is for couples and men with children.

Mingaletta Family Centre provides child care for up to 10 preschool aged children 3 days a week, and after school care for school aged children one day a week. It is a free service for refuge residents which provides young children whose families may be experiencing difficult circumstances with some normal child-centred play space and time. Importantly, it gives parents who are navigating tough challenges some respite and the opportunity to attend appointments and interviews without children in tow. Transport for the children to and from the Centre is included in the service.

The service has the usual preschool setting, complete with outdoor play area, bikes, sandpit, and distinct indoor play areas including reading corner, puzzles, baby doll and kitchen areas. But it is uniquely able to offer more one on one attention to its children because of the low numbers in attendance and subsequent higher staff to child ratio.

"This more tailored attention is especially important if they've been on the homeless circuit or moved around several times in the last year before they come to us," said Macarthur Ozanam Centre Manager, Kylie Richardson.

The qualified staff are able to refer families to specialist early intervention services if they notice children struggling in any area of their development such as learning or behavioural problems. As part of a broad approach to supporting families, once a month they hold a hands-on parenting day, giving parents the chance to learn basics such as how to make play dough and no-bake cookies, and ideas for low-cost picnics and trips to the park.

"If parents are struggling with how to connect and spend time with their children, we can help bring that back into focus," said Richardson.

The Mingaletta Family Centre also runs a school holiday program that seeks to engage children with age-appropriate treats which they may not have had the chance to experience such as a baby animal farm, magic show, swimming, face painting and a family barbecue Christmas party.

In December, staff from Daly International hosted a Christmas party and brought gifts for the children. Daly International plans to host a series of fundraising events later this year to build a new children's play area at the Centre.



Daly International staff at the family Christmas party



FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Fleeing your country and leaving behind all that you know is a difficult and heart-wrenching experience for most refugees.

The St Vincent de Paul Society assists many people in the difficult journey of making a new home by providing material assistance, educational support and help in finding short term accommodation.

For Achen, a refugee from Uganda, moving to Australia was difficult, especially at first, when she says she “did not know where to start”. Fearing for her life and with no adequate protection, she made the very difficult choice of leaving behind her family and friends to come to Australia.

As Achen tells her story, she fights away tears as she thinks of the son she left behind when fleeing the violence in her home country. Many days she feels unable to go on, her heart heavy from missing him so much.

Once in Australia, the Society offered her support with a basic living allowance of \$30 per week for four months,

but it was not just the money that helped but the kindness of the people within the organisation.

“The warmth of the people put a smile on my face to replace my everyday tears,” says Achen.

Despite the language barriers, Achen is currently working in a welfare centre and studying to complete her Social Work degree in which she is achieving mainly distinctions and high distinctions.

When asked what she would like to be doing in two years time, she says she would like to be working as a social worker, delivering hope to refugees who have had similar experiences to herself.

“It is always important to have hope because tomorrow will be a better day,” she says.

Achen’s story reminds us that it is not always about what the individual gets from Australia but more importantly what Australia gains from opening up its doors and hearts.

ACTIONS OF LIFE

Life is a really hard thing in this world especially when there was a time that you've got

No one to turn to

No one to talk to

No one that is there for you

No one that cares about you

No one that wants to know what you've been up to

But all you have to do is sit, think, wait and stare up high in the sky looking at the sun shining bright until it is night time and you just look at the night stars bright up high, wondering what is up in the sky.

The next day you will be thinking if you will ever have someone that cares, loves and adores you.

But in this life there is no one that will be there for you at the time you need help with your issues.

All you have to do is keep waiting and praying, thinking of when your life on this earth will ever change or end.

Everyday when you wake up, you think of how your kids will make it through everyday life, thinking about how you are going to feed them, pay their school fees, or even put them in school if you are a parent.

And if you are a teenager you think of the future, how you are going to fit in with others or group of friends and also your school.

But life is something that only rich people enjoyed the most of, but if you are poor all you have to do is give thanks to the Lord our God for making you see the next day of your life, for making you see the next day, the sun, the moon and your friends.

Children were young they don't know or have not seen their home town, they only hear it from their parents.

Some of them always think about how it would be if they were born there, or have grown up there, how will their life be like.

Many of young teenagers from Africa are not born from their home town most of them are born in the refugee camps, everyday people woke up thinking when, why, what, how they are going to achieve in the future or when they grow up.

Wondering if they will ever imagine themselves being somewhere where they wouldn't see or hear the sounds of guns, being shot in the sky... and at people. Or people that they know dying right in front of them every day.

I always wonder how life will be without my parents because they were there for me all through to now.

And I always wonder how children without their parents, how they live or survive in everyday living.

Back then I was in the dark waiting,

Watching, for someone to rescue me,

But it didn't take long in the dark,

Now the dark has changed to shiny daylight in front of me,

I was rescued, it was unbelievable but you have to believe it.

Now my life has changed all I can think of is how the world would ever change, to be peaceful, healthy living and no poverty.

Now I'm in Australia my life's bright no more darkness But I always wonder how it will be if Australians were just living like how kids in Africa do

How would they feel? Or how they will ever manage their lives? Would they still be here with us right now? No one knows.

There is a saying that “things happen in life or a reason”

And I think I'm in Australia for a reason, and that reason is to have a second life and maintain self-motivations and self-determinations and make some changes,

Be able to help people that were just like me before.

Help people that are in need.

Also there is a saying that “tomorrow never ends”

So let see and wait for that tomorrow and see what it might bring...

By a North Coast Settlement Service client (16 years of age)

A HAND UP IN A NEW COUNTRY

With the issue of refugees dominating the political debate and on the front page of many newspapers, the St Vincent de Paul Society continues to see the individual and put compassion before politics.

Through the Special Purposes Fund (SPF), the Society supports people trying to make a new home in Australia by providing practical assistance such as helping with educational costs, providing fridges and washing machines, or even assisting with rental arrears.

Mr Singh knows first-hand the difference the SPF can make. An educated man in his home country, he moved here in 2010 in fear for his life and those of his family.

"I came here with nothing. Back home I had everything. I owned my home, my family were happy, I had a good business," he explains.

"The war came and now we are here. I have no job. It is hard for me. I want to work, but I cannot find a job. Here I am nobody."

Being a stranger in a new country can be overwhelming. Some travel here by choice, excited as they look forward to a new beginning. For others, the choice is made for them, either by their spouse and family, or by conflict in their homeland.

Whatever the motivation, whatever the reason, it takes time to settle into a new country. There is also a sense of loss to deal with, loss of family and friends, loss of status, and loss of familiarity with places, food and culture.

Whilst each situation is unique, one common challenge is trying to start again in a country where the cost of living is so high.

The SPF eases the struggle and gets people standing on their own two feet. Just like Mr Singh, who has now completed a fork lift license, is working in a factory and has enrolled in English classes.

He recently rang the Society to say thank you. Speaking quietly he said, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You changed my hopelessness into hopefulness."



Timor Leste
President José
Ramos-Horta with
local children

When the first pallet arrived in August last year, President Jose Ramos-Horta ensured its smooth passage through customs and supplied a storage facility and a vehicle for Aires to transport the clothing directly to the villages.

"It has improved the lives of the villagers. They have better clothes to wear now, especially during the freezing winter months in the mountains. It is also great for their self-esteem," said Aires. "The clothes are making a big difference for the little children."

"The people can now select good clothes to wear to Mass. Everyone tries to go to Mass with

very clean clothes, usually white and very bright"

"They wear the clothes on the very same day we hand them out. They do not want to take them off. This is good quality clothing and it is free for them. This is so unusual for most people in Timor Leste."

In deep appreciation to all those in the Society who are helping to make this happen, Aires said, "Goodness is like water to the flower. I have given out 2000 sets of rosary beads to the people and they are praying for Australians."



Andrew Silk, Donna Malconson,
Andrew Ikin (Warehouse Manager),
Katie Halliday, Naomi Walton.

A GROWING SPARK

Liverpool West Public School has become the 10th Western Sydney school to form a partnership with SPARK to support newly arrived students and families of refugee backgrounds.

It is hoped that by 2013 SPARK will have partnerships with 16 primary schools, providing social, cultural and educational programs to 350 children and families.

Crucial to this are local volunteers who provide families with an opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills they will need in their new country. A 10 year old girl, originally from Sudan says, "I think that it is the best place, they teach us new things that we didn't know and I also like it because of the people teaching us."

Volunteers also learn, getting a greater appreciation for the challenges newly arrived families face and the richness of diversity that exists within their community.



"The celebration of diversity and coming together of different cultures is particularly inspiring," said a SPARK volunteer.

SPARK recently received an award recognising its partnership with the University of Western Sydney (UWS), which sees UWS students volunteer to assist primary school children of refugee backgrounds.

SPARK is calling for more volunteers, especially from the Liverpool and Fairfield areas of Sydney, to help build strong community connections and support for families.

TIMOR LESTE INITIATIVE

The Kingswood St Vincent de Paul Society Distribution Centre has joined forces with Toll Transport, the President of Timor Leste and a United Nations engineer to provide clothing and linen to remote villages in Timor Leste.

UN engineer Aires de Almeida installs small bio-gas power plants in remote areas in Timor Leste and sees first-hand the abject poverty of people who lack basic services such as healthcare, education and even electricity. He is especially concerned for the children growing up in these regions.

On a visit to Australia last year, he met a Vinnies volunteer who came up with the idea of sending clothing directly to Dili. Each month the team at Kingswood sort clothing in smaller sizes, bale and palletise them, and then take them to Toll Transport's Eastern Creek Depot, where the pallet is shrink-wrapped and driven to Darwin. From there, Toll's Marine Logistics Division ships it across to Dili at no cost to the Society.



Ordinary t-shirts won't necessarily pull people to Centres, but when they are signed by world-renowned musicians, they will.

This is exactly what saw the success of Vinnies Signed Finds flourish; a campaign initially designed for NSW Vinnies Centres that culminated in a nation-wide drop in February.

The campaign was the idea of George Patterson Y&R Sydney who believed they had a unique idea that would drive young people into Vinnies Centres across NSW. The concept was to have well-known artists and musicians donate a signed pre-loved item, such as a shirt or dress, which would then be dropped in Vinnies Centres for fans to find with the help of clues.

Some of the big names supporting the Vinnies campaign are Moby, Sneaky Sound System, Gotye, Peter Garrett, Missy Higgins, Roger Waters (Pink Floyd), Nikki Sixx (Motley Crue), Kasey Chambers, John Butler, Jimmy Barnes, The Living End and Julia Stone.

Sam Armstrong was one of those lucky enough to pick up a Signed Find, rushing to Newtown from Peakhurst as soon as she saw the clue. She managed to find the Gotye t-shirt in 10 minutes and it cost her only \$4.

"Awesome t-shirt, my favourite colour as well... I'm so glad I got one that's not only awesome but something I would wear by choice," Sam tweeted after her find.

The campaign engages fans through social media, with clues plugged through the official Signed Finds Facebook page. The Signed Finds Facebook page alone has over 33,000 fans, and requests for the campaign have come from as far as Canada and the USA.

Fans have also shared stories of having visited numerous Vinnies Centres to spot a Signed Find, and going home with a number of other Vinnies items instead.

Julie McDonald, Community and Corporate Relations Manager for Vinnies said Signed Finds is a campaign that really is of benefit to all those involved.

"We are thrilled for people like Sam, who have hit the Vinnies stores and found a piece of music history. It is a great initiative as people come into our Centres looking for Signed Finds and walk away with another Vinnies treasure, helping their local community at the same time," Julie said.

More information on the campaign can be found on www.signedfinds.com



EASTER IN THE AUTUMN

The Christian calendar year, like that of almost all the world's major religions, is framed around the passing of the seasons and the patterns of nature. Having recently celebrated Easter, it is timely for us to note that after the dark and cold of the Northern winter, the time of Easter there coincides with the return of the sun and the emergence of fresh growth.

It is so natural to link that new life with the Resurrection of the Lord, to move from death to life. But what is the seasonal pattern for us to consider at Easter time in our unique part of the Southern hemisphere?

The poet John Keats described autumn in England as a "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, close bosom-friend of the maturing sun." It may be a source of Easter reflection for us to call on our particular experience of autumn as a way of getting more insight into the significance of Christ's Easter rising and the experience of the early Christians.

Autumn in the south is marked by a sense of relief from the harshness of summer; it is a time of gentle sun and delightful cool temperatures and seems to bring a sense of calm and of wellbeing. It is a time of abundance, of crops successfully harvested, of picking of grapes in the vineyards, of almost bewildering availability of the fruits of the earth.

The suggestion is that during Easter we should consciously reflect on and try to make our own the gentleness and the calming peace of the risen Jesus with his disciples. Autumn also challenges us to be aware of and grateful for the abundance in our lives; the constant presence of a Loving God and of his generous providence shown in the good things of the earth.

Most gracious God, creator of all good things, we thank you for the precious gift of life, for the intricate cycles and the beautiful balances that sustain it, and for the unfolding story of planet earth and all creatures that share it.

(From A Prayer for the Earth, used at the Copenhagen Assembly on Climate Change December 2009)



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