

Donor Report

2019-20



Vinnies:
Rebuilds. Restores. Renews



St Vincent de Paul Society
CANBERRA/GOULBURN
good works



John Feint, President

St Vincent de Paul Society

Canberra/Goulburn

President's Message

When I was considering taking on the role of President in 2019, I was encouraged by the professional way the Society is managed and the reach we have across many areas of need. I was also very much aware of the way the Society builds self-reliance and resilience through its strong positive relationship with our donors – who contribute significantly to our achievements.

2019-20 has been a year where the Society has faced the most significant challenges to its operations since it was formed in Canberra/Goulburn. We have faced bushfires that affected our coastal and mountain communities as well as drought across all our rural communities. If that were not enough to address, the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent shutdown has impacted the Society significantly. We had to take unprecedented action, temporarily closing many centres, reducing staff hours to 4 days a week, and working from home.

Despite the challenges, the Society members, volunteers and employees have shone. They have remained positive throughout, looking

for new ways to address the needs of those we help – our companions. Programs were adapted, new methods of support tried, and importantly new and stronger relationships built. Many of these come from the perspective that ‘we are all in this together’ and so we need to work together to find solutions.

Our Night Patrol vans continued providing support every night, bushfire recovery assistance went to over the phone and online, conferences continued to support companions whilst respecting ‘social distancing’ and our centres that opened have traded strongly. In Canberra key centres remained open throughout the COVID-19 lockdown as part of the Canberra Support Network, providing critical support hubs for those in need. Programs such as Blue Door at Ainslie Village, where we would normally provide sit-down meals and companionship, moved to take-away. Compeer and Clemente, which provide support and companionship to companions with mental health issues and returning to post-secondary studies respectively, continued to provide this support over the phone or internet. Our youth

programs moved to providing support and activity packs for children and young carers.

Fundraising also needed to adapt to the changed environment. Due to dangerous levels of bushfire smoke in Canberra, our traditional February Doorknock Appeal moved from knocking on individual doors to collection stations at shopping centres. Whilst this modified approach did not raise as much money as the traditional Doorknock Appeal, it did raise the profile of the Society in the wider community, and built relationships with businesses and other organisations where collections were made.

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout also went online. This too provided an opportunity to try a new approach, with participants encouraged to sleep out at their homes or workplaces. This increased the number of participants and resulted in Canberra/Goulburn raising \$545,768, achieving well above our reduced goal of \$350,000. Nationally, the event raised over \$5.7 million.

Whilst I have been impressed with how well we have adapted and managed during this year of crisis we are still working hard on our financial recovery. Important capital works to improve our centres, and management of donations is being delayed and we have had to refocus our priorities to areas of most critical need.

Bushfire recovery in Canberra/Goulburn continues to be priority. We know from our experience of the March 2018 Tathra bushfire and the January 2003 Canberra bushfire that recovery takes years. The scale of the 2019-20 summer bushfires in our region was immense, stretching our resources along the coast and into the mountains and slopes. Whilst our work is supported by Federal Government funding and the Society's bushfire relief appeal, I know from my personal contact with hundreds of fire victims, that their recovery is complex and made even more difficult by COVID-19. The Society is there with victims for the long haul, through the support and

companionship of our conferences. This work is supported significantly by our donors and I thank you for that support. It makes a difference – I hear it in the comments from companions – to be able to be there in the crisis – to help with bills, accommodation, transport, utilities, referrals or just be someone to talk to.

The Society is mindful that many of our companions have benefited from enhanced Commonwealth payments under JobSeeker and JobKeeper and there is no clear indication about what long term arrangements will apply. We are expecting that if there is a return to previous assistance arrangements that there will be increased calls on our services. This will be compounded by the impact of COVID-19 on employment across our region, pushing more to seek assistance.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Canberra/Goulburn does a lot given our size. We could not provide these services on the scale that we do without the dedicated service of our 631 members, 160 employees, and 1,500 volunteers. I am very proud of them for their generosity with their time and their dedication to continuing the work that our founders Frederic Ozanam and his companions commenced 187 years ago.

To all our donors and supporters, a very sincere thank you. We could not do what we do without your continuing help and support. We rely on your generosity to enable us to reach out to our companions and to keep going when sometimes the task seems great.

John Feint, President,
St Vincent de Paul Society,
Canberra/Goulburn

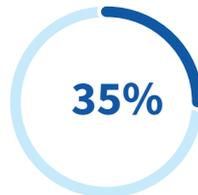


Our Companions

We refer to the people we support as 'companions' as we walk beside them, offering a 'hand up', while they achieve their personal goals.



of people experiencing homelessness in ACT & NSW are aged 55 or over



of people seeking help from homelessness services, nationally, have experienced domestic violence



of Canberra's homeless are women



of people experiencing homelessness in ACT & NSW are aged 12-24



of our companions identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander*



of our companions are female*

**These numbers are from 2018-2019 Annual Report and only represent companions seeking assistance through our conferences*



▲230% increase
In number of people in Overcrowded dwellings In ACT & NSW between 2001 & 2016



There are **1596 people** Experiencing homelessness In the ACT, an increase of **69%** since 2001



▲75% increase
In people on Newstart Seeking assistance from Homelessness services Between 2013-2019

Sources: ABS Census, 2016. ACOSS, 'Poverty in Australia 2018' report. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017-18'. Homelessness Australia, 2019, 'Clear connection between homelessness and inadequate Newstart payments'



How we help

The St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn helps people in need in a number of ways, giving them a 'hand up' to make life-changing decisions.

The type of support offered differs from situation to situation, but our conferences remain central to the Society's good works and governance.

The special works of the Society focus on services that require professional staff and full-time support, though most are reliant on the generous donation of time from volunteers.



Centres



Community Outreach



Homelessness Services



Mental health Services



Education Services



Youth Programs



School Engagement



Social Justice advocacy



Learning a reward and relief

Richard* has a Fine Arts degree and has been living in crisis accommodation for several months.

After his mental health deteriorated, Richard struggled to find and keep work. Unable to even afford rent while surviving on Newstart, he was desperately looking for ways to make more money and was becoming more and more concerned about the growing gap on his CV as he kept sending it out but getting no response. Richard ended up falling into homelessness, relying on couch surfing with friends.

Eventually he was diagnosed with a chronic mental health condition and placed on the Disability Support Pension. Living in crisis accommodation, Richard was looking for an occupation – something to fill his days. ‘It was only through NDIS that I found activities I could do. Everything else is far too expensive when you have no income,’ he said.

Without purposeful ways in which to spend time, mental health conditions can be exacerbated and Richard was looking to recovery.

‘My case worker at City Mental Health told me about Clemente,’ said Richard. Clemente is an adult education program Vinnies runs in partnership with the Australian Catholic University.

‘Clemente was a way to fill my day. I learned we were going to study philosophy, which I had done years ago at uni.’

‘I’m really enjoying the course, and doing really well with it.’

‘It’s rewarding to achieve good results, and rewarding to have activities to fill days. I’ve enjoyed studying philosophy as a way to get back into the Arts, and realise that my early days at uni were helpful!’

‘It’s been grounding to study ethics and humanity, and good to check in on my moral compass.’

Richard has now completed his first semester of Clemente, moved into transitional accommodation through CatholicCare and picked up some part time work. He intends to continue studying in the Clemente program as he’s found it incredibly rewarding.

‘I found more and more reasons I was doing it as I got into it.’ ‘I definitely recommend it. It’s really well set up and provides a hell of a lot to a lot of people.’

**Name changed*

St Vincent de Paul Society's response to Black Summer



When bushfires raced through NSW this summer, the St Vincent de Paul Society was in a unique position to provide assistance. Vinnies is comprised of volunteer members in each local community, so assistance was provided by locals with first-hand knowledge of the emergency, the services available, and the people they were helping.

People who had fled with nothing turned to Vinnies shops for emergency provisions of clothing and other material items such as towels and bedding. Members in the local areas were also able to immediately provide vouchers for groceries and fuel.

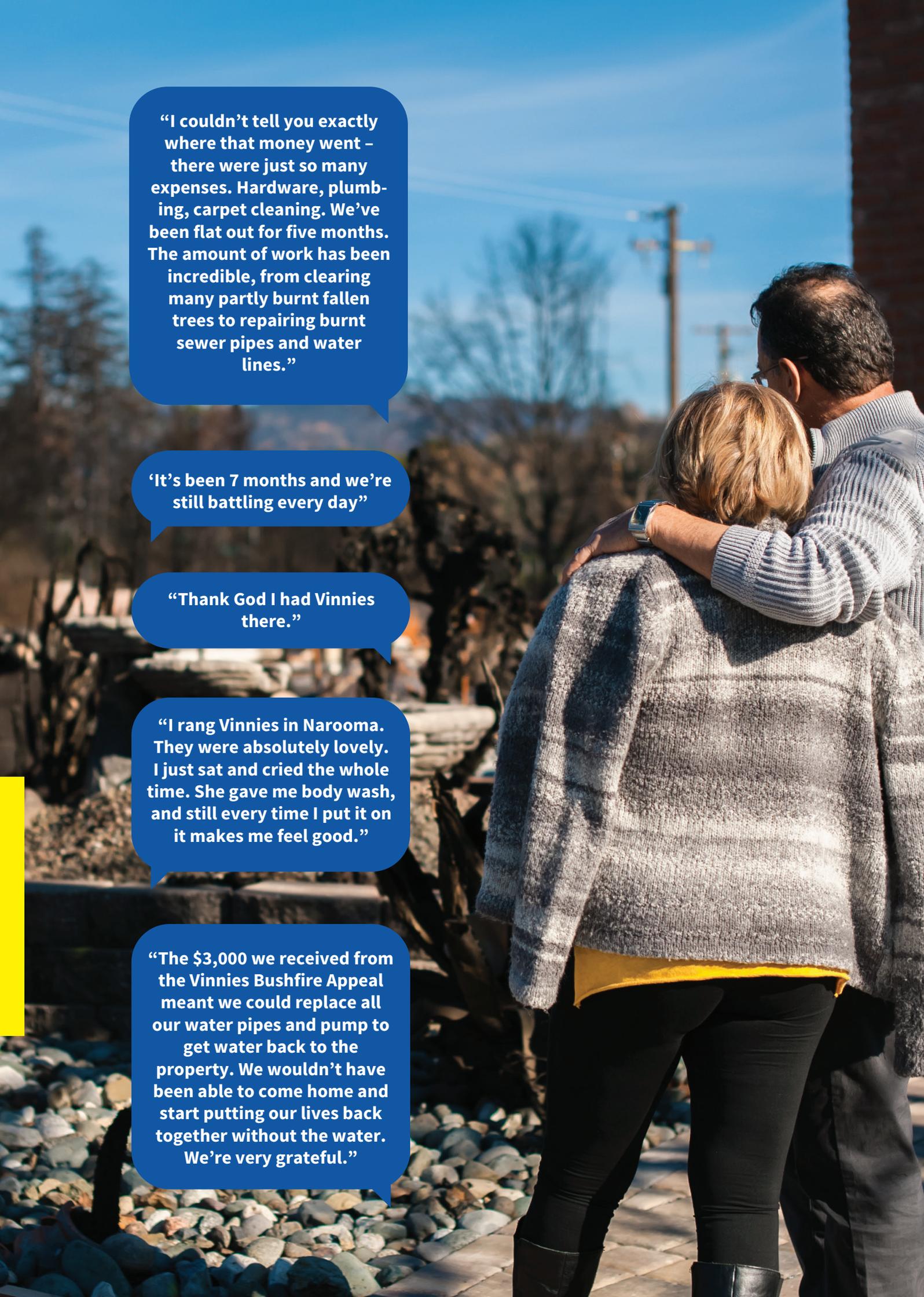
“I just want to convey my sincere thanks to Vinnies and the thousands of people who donated, for the generous donation given to me when I visited the Bushfire Recovery Centre. The people there were just great - understanding and sympathetic. Thank you again.”

Vinnies was present in recovery centres along the coast, providing financial assistance to recover, or to support alternative accommodation. Critically, St Vincent de Paul Society members were able to provide emotional support, and also connect people to a wide network of other organisations and specialised services. Vinnies members have actively been reaching out to people affected by fires, visiting communities and spreading the word about the help that is available.

Following the immediate response of providing material support and a sympathetic ear to those affected by the bushfires, the Society began providing direct cash grants. Our Bushfire Appeal successfully raised \$22.9 million nationally to support people through emergency and into recovery and rebuilding. It takes many years to recover from a bushfire, and Vinnies is continuing to provide assistance to communities impacted by bushfires. To date we have distributed \$17 million from appeal funds, assisting over 4,560 households.

Experience shows that recovery from any disastrous event, such as the 2019/20 bushfires, is a lengthy process. Consequently, we have built into our Bushfire Recovery Plan some activities to facilitate community recovery. The first of these, the Community Grants Program, was launched in August 2020. It provides grants to existing organisations for projects that will aid in community recovery. The aim is utilise local knowledge of community needs and the skills and resources of existing organisations to hasten the impact of Bushfire Appeal funds. The Community Development Program will involve extensive consultation with communities to prioritise recovery projects.

The need for support is ongoing. As we have committed, we will continue to provide all the funds we have received to assist people rebuild their lives. This has always been and continues to be our focus.

A photograph of a man and a woman embracing from behind. They are standing in a landscape of charred trees and a blue sky. The man is wearing a grey sweater and glasses, and the woman is wearing a grey sweater and black pants. The background shows a clear blue sky and some utility poles.

“I couldn’t tell you exactly where that money went – there were just so many expenses. Hardware, plumbing, carpet cleaning. We’ve been flat out for five months. The amount of work has been incredible, from clearing many partly burnt fallen trees to repairing burnt sewer pipes and water lines.”

“It’s been 7 months and we’re still battling every day”

“Thank God I had Vinnies there.”

“I rang Vinnies in Narooma. They were absolutely lovely. I just sat and cried the whole time. She gave me body wash, and still every time I put it on it makes me feel good.”

“The \$3,000 we received from the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal meant we could replace all our water pipes and pump to get water back to the property. We wouldn’t have been able to come home and start putting our lives back together without the water. We’re very grateful.”



A hand up to become self-sufficient again

Elaine and Gordon own and operate an eco-tourism agency on the South Coast.

On the 4th of January this year the ‘border fire’ was threatening their region and residents were warned to prepare as the weather pushed the fire their way.

Elaine and Gordon spent the day preparing the house for bushfire, and took all the kayaks and camping gear for their business into Eden. The pair then evacuated to Eden to wait. They went to the wharf and waited all night at the harbour master’s office with hundreds of others.

The next day they knew the fire had gone through their town but didn’t know how it had affected their property. They were eventually told their house was standing, but they weren’t allowed home yet.

When they were able to return home, three days after evacuating, they saw the entire property had been burnt, except for the house.

“We did a lot of work to prepare the house – and clearly it was the right thing to do,” said Elaine.

However, the sheds, the garden, garage and

bridge to the house were all destroyed. Worried about looters, the couple moved back into the house but spent 17 days without power, water, phone or internet connection.

“Having a shower was a planned event. We were camping in our house. It’s definitely not as much fun as our camping trips!” said Elaine.

“This is our busiest season, and we were heavily booked. We were looking forward to the biggest year ever,” said Elaine.

However, the damage from the fire, to their property and to the surrounding wilderness, meant that all tours had to be cancelled.

“We have a lot of clients from Victoria, and those roads were closed for 6 weeks, so even if people wanted to come on tour they couldn’t reach us,” said Elaine.

Even once they thought they could get back to their tours, the river flooded.

“At first it was, ‘Thank God it’s raining’, but then further tours had to be cancelled - you can’t kayak on a flooded river!” said Elaine.

“This year we’ve also missed out on eight cruise ship tours,” she added.

Without income coming in, the couple were starting to feel the financial strain.

“Our house didn’t burn down, but we don’t have an income,” said Elaine.

“We were insured, but, like a lot of people, have discovered we are underinsured. Like, people have told us we should have insured the bridge on our property– but who insures a bridge?!”

“We were eating into our profits, and then the bills started coming in and we had no money for us.”

A few weeks after the bushfire destroyed their property, Elaine and Gordon eventually went to the Bega Recovery Centre to seek assistance.

“It was hard to go in and ask for help. We are usually proud small business operators and support 2 incomes with our tours and campsites. We are very self-sufficient people.”

“A lot of people aren’t asking for help. People saying, ‘there are people a lot worse off than me’, and we are also among the lucky ones –

our house is still standing,” said Elaine.

For all the damage caused, the fires bring out a lot of good in people.

“It’s just amazing how it affected everyone. We are all in this together. Some days are full of tears, and others are building us up, and other days we are the ones building others up while they have tears.”

Help and support comes in varied and beautiful ways. After Elaine posted on Instagram a picture of a destroyed protea, somebody who had been on a kayak tour two years earlier got in touch to say they worked for a protea wholesaler and delivered some plants to replace the burnt ones.

Elaine and Gordon received emergency assistance from Vinnies that allowed them to buy food, pay for fuel, and get back on their feet until their tours could start again, and income started coming back in.

“We are extremely grateful to Vinnies for the ‘hand up’. We were reluctant to ask for help but we had no option. We needed to get back on the tours so that business could resume and we could become self-sufficient again,” said Elaine.

“We are so grateful. Thank you.”



Volunteers in the Spotlight



**Brian and Ruth O'Reilly,
West Wyalong**

St Vincent de Paul Society in West Wyalong have recently said good-bye to two longstanding members. Brian and Ruth O'Reilly have been active in volunteering in the Vinnies shop as well as in conference work – providing assistance to those in need in the local community.

Brian has been a member for over 20 years, and Ruth has been active for the last 15 years. As they retire to Wagga Wagga, the Vinnies community in West Wyalong are thanking them for their contribution to the Society over many years.

The couple say their motivation for their dedication to Vinnies is to 'give assistance to those less fortunate. Any little bit you can contribute is some help.'



**2020 Young Canberra Citizen
of the Year Awards**

The 2020 Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards recognised a number of our Youth Conference members. The awards recognise the talent and commitment of groups and individuals of young Canberrans aged between 12 and 25 who have been actively involved in the ACT community.

The St Joe's Youth Conference received the Highly Commended Award for the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year (group category). Sarah O'Neill and Matthew Wilson were also recognised by being jointly presented with the Highly Commended Award for the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year (individual category). A testament to the calibre of our Youth Conference members.

The Society's future is looking bright with such committed and passionate youth members.

LEAVE A LEGACY THAT WILL CHANGE LIVES

Do you ever wonder what the future will look like for generations to come?

Through your legacy you can help build a stronger community.

Contact us for information about remembering Vinnies in your Will

P: 02 6234 7368

E: giving.cg@vinnies.org.au

Or return the form to

PO Box 51 Deakin West ACT 2600

vinnies.org.au/bequests-act



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Contact Us!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

- Please send me a complimentary information booklet about leaving a gift to Vinnies in my Will
- I have already included a gift to Vinnies in my Will



***Thank you for your valuable contribution –
Together with your generosity we can continue to combat
the injustice of disadvantage in our society.***



St Vincent de Paul Society

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www.vinnies.org.au

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