



St Vincent de Paul Society  
NSW  
*good works*

WINTER 2023  
ISSUE NO. 93

# Vision



**NEW STRATEGY  
AND LEADERSHIP  
FOR THE SOCIETY**

**FORMING  
FIRST NATIONS  
CONFERENCES**

**NSW PREMIER  
SLEEPS OUT  
FOR VINNIES**

**HOMELESSNESS  
ON THE RISE**



# CONTENTS

4 NEWS

10 ACROSS THE STATE

15 FUNDRAISING AND PARTNERSHIPS

21 VINNIES SERVICES

24 SOCIAL JUSTICE

26 MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

28 YOUTH

29 SHOPS

30 IN MEMORIAM

31 SPIRITUAL REFLECTION



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



As we welcome our new state government here in NSW, the pressing issues of homelessness and housing remain consistently evident across the state.

Prior to the recent state election, our Society called for specific focus in regard to justice concerning the housing crisis. In our society,

it is an essential expectation to ensure everyone can have a safe place to call home. The leadership in NSW Government may have changed, yet our Society remains evermore in continuing to do our part in acknowledging the causes of homelessness and disadvantage that severely impact the most vulnerable in our communities. Providing support for those facing homelessness and housing insecurity is a core part of the work performed by our Society.

Our members continue to be at the forefront of providing relief to the plight of those lacking appropriate advocacy. As evident throughout this issue of Vision, the work of our members is becoming increasingly diverse meeting people in need wherever they are. I am heartened to have witnessed this sincere dedication and relentless commitment.

To all our members, volunteers and staff, thank you for dedicating your time and showing your kindness and compassion, providing hope and making our community a better place for all. You continue to affect countless lives making a profound impact in our community. Let us all continue to work together sharing our Christian vocation of supporting those in need.

God bless,

Paul Burton  
State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

## CEO'S MESSAGE



Welcome,  
It gives me great pleasure to address you as members and volunteers of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW for the first time since being appointed as CEO.

I come to this position eager to ensure everyone who carries the Vincentian spirit has the support to bring about

the aspiration of a just and compassionate society.

It is important for us to acknowledge that heritage is not history and that we have continued opportunities to build on our mission as a lay-Catholic organisation.

One of the unheralded aspects of the Society is the change that occurs within our members, volunteers and employees through being part of a mission-based collective.

We often hear of the change we are able to make in the lives of people experiencing hardship and

disadvantage, yet it is similarly transformative for individuals coming together in the name of bringing about the change.

This sense of purpose drove the likes of Frederic Ozanam, Charles O'Neill and continues to be seen to this very day through the good works of the Society.

It is important that we build an inclusive Society that provides care and assistance to all people, and that we go to where we see the need and respond with compassion.

I am excited to lead the organisation as it implements its new Strategic Plan (more information over the page) which looks for all of us to work together to expand the reach of our good works in community.

Yolanda Saiz  
Chief Executive Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW



# Strengthening Communities, Transforming Lives

**The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is launching a new Strategic Plan, plotting the course of the organisation from 2024-2028.**

It is called Strengthening Communities, Transforming Lives.

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council President, Paul Burton, says it is a strategy driven by the people we assist.

"It is our experience of working with people in need that has informed the direction of our new strategy – we have consulted broadly with all our people and those who we assist in its development. One of the Society's strengths is our ability to renew and adapt to our changing world, always focussed on providing support for those most in need.

"Our new strategy commits to service excellence and to service growth in areas of most need. All of our people, our members, volunteers and employees, as well as our partners and supporters in the community, contribute to the transformation of the lives of the people we assist, and to build a more just society. This strategy will enable us all to provide more targeted, impactful support to those most in need," Mr Burton says.

The strategic vision is underpinned by three core goals:

**1. Excel: amplify the impact of our service offering**

- improve security, stability and social connection outcomes
- ensure the people we assist sustain outcomes over time
- achieve comparable outcomes for the most disadvantaged communities

**2. Grow: extend the reach of our services**

- ensure more people across NSW achieve and sustain housing security
- increase access to impactful services for the most disadvantaged and hard to reach communities

**3. Cultivate: enable our people, operational and financial capabilities so we can deliver more and better outcomes**

- a vibrant, skillful and collaborative network of members, volunteers and employees
- change and innovation informed by analytics and research
- increased net revenue to invest in service delivery by excelling in our retail, commercial enterprises and fundraising operations

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, Yolanda Saiz, says in order to achieve these aims, our ability to help must expand and that means improving revenue is a priority.

“We also plan to grow – to extend the reach of our services to new groups of people in the most disadvantaged and hard to reach communities. Growth in service delivery requires growth in income generation – we will invest for growth in our retail, commercial enterprise and fundraising operations so that we can provide more services to people in need in our communities. With this strategy we aspire to do more and do it better, extending our impact for people in need in communities throughout NSW,” Ms Saiz says.

As part of the development of this strategy, we conducted extensive consultations to better understand our aspirations for impact, and to identify the key challenges and opportunities within the Society.

We identified three major success drivers that will allow us to achieve our strategic goals and deliver on our mission.

They are:

### **Collaboration**

Successes will be driven by collaboration. We have identified ways in which members, volunteers and employees can work together more effectively, led by our mission and values, to deliver more and better impact.

Likewise, we will increase collaboration between our services, our advocacy and our enabling functions to increase our impact in communities.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships will be key to our successes – we will partner with the people we assist, to co-design services and evaluate service provision. We will also work with other organisations to provide integrated services to the people we assist.



We will enhance our partnerships with both state and federal government agencies, to support the best outcomes for the people we assist; and we will continue to work with our many corporate partners who generously support our work in community.

We will be more visible in communities throughout NSW through local partnerships, by working with local organisations to provide integrated services, engaging with local First Nations communities and conducting local advocacy.

### **Responsiveness**

Our people have expressed a strong aspiration for the Society to continue to adapt to the changing world, and to increase our capacity to understand and respond to the needs of the most disadvantaged.

Our successes will rely on our capacity to be responsive, to improve and to adapt. We will increase our research and evaluation capability to ensure our services are contemporary, leading practice and informed by evidence.

Our service design and implementation will be underpinned by data and evidence. We will conduct ongoing community needs analysis, increase our analytics capability and monitor and evaluate the impact of our services to ensure that our services are responsive to the needs of the people we assist.

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Chair of the Board, Richard Stewart, says the new strategy will better enable the Society to provide support to match changing demands placed on it.

“This strategy responds to the significant need that currently exists in communities throughout NSW. The escalation of the housing crisis and the rising cost of living is pushing people closer to the margins. We know that in this environment, many people are experiencing vulnerability or personal crisis for the first time. Our strategic goals – Excel, Grow and Cultivate – articulate our commitment to anticipate and respond to the need that we see in community. We will do this by delivering service excellence, growing our footprint so we can assist people in their communities and cultivating our capacity and capability to do so effectively,” Mr Stewart says.





## MEET OUR NEW CEO

### An upbringing shaped in solidarity and equality drives Yolanda Saiz's dedication to the Society's work.

Yolanda made history in March 2023 by becoming the first female CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW since its establishment.

Born in Sydney and raised by parents who had migrated to Australia from Spain, Yolanda credits her upbringing in a close-knit family and community for shaping the core values that guide her both personally and professionally.

"My parents are my role models. They had a great sense of personal sacrifice and focus on the integral things that matter most," explains Yolanda.

"I saw early on the importance of community and how crucial it is for people to lend a hand when needed. This instilled a deep appreciation of equity in me, a value that I hold very strongly today. My education at Catholic schools also promoted a great sense of faith in action, and what that could and should look like in the community."

Yolanda has had a diverse career working across sporting events, local government, media, and not-for-profit. Initially starting out in journalism, she transitioned into issues and crisis management,

broader communications, and strategic planning. She joined the Society in 2012 as Head of Communications, before expanding her role to eventually include fundraising, retail, and commercial operations.

Yolanda draws inspiration from the organisation's impactful work, which fuels her passion to drive meaningful change for the most vulnerable in the community. She also admires the commitment shown by the conferences that tirelessly support communities across the state.

**"I am motivated by our focus on making a tangible difference in community and in the lives of people often left at the margins of society."**

"The Society has an enormous amount of work to be proud of. Our response to the bushfires across NSW and floods in Lismore; our growing retail network offering a unique shopping experience whilst raising critical funds; the visitation and outreach work of our members; and our range of services assisting people experiencing homelessness, domestic and family violence, and drug and alcohol addiction. It is a privilege to be part of an organisation that makes such a difference," says Yolanda.

Yolanda believes the Society's new Strategic Plan holds valuable potential to amplify the impact of its work on the people it serves. She emphasises structured and clearly identified approaches to foster collaboration among teams and projects to ensure its success.

"The strategy is bold and expansive, and I am highly energised to be leading its implementation. This is an opportunity for us to better define where we want to provide services, what communities are most in need and how do we, together, build new initiatives, models of care and programs to reach these communities."

"Increased impact in the communities we serve will require a new level of responsiveness, innovation and approaches to partnerships. The difference I would like to see is open and meaningful collaboration between all parts of the organisation to offer better outcomes for the people we assist."

"Imagine what more we can do together, if we see ourselves and each other as working towards delivering the mission and vision of the organisation," she concludes.





## Clear pathway to Voice referendum

**Following months of consultations with the Referendum Working Group, the Government has announced the wording of the referendum question and draft constitutional amendment for the proposed Indigenous Voice to Parliament. The question the Parliament will now consider to be put to the Australian people will be:**

*A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.*

Government hopes to have Parliamentary approval by the end of June, with the referendum to be held between October and December.

Earlier this year, representatives of the Society of St Vincent de Paul participated in the 'Yes 23' campaign launch in Adelaide. The launch saw over 100 grassroots organisations come together to support the campaign for a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

The breadth and diversity of these organisations reflect a strong backing of the Call of the *Uluru Statement From the Heart* as well as the commitment to build community understanding, awareness and support for the referendum.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and across the nation supports the call for a First Nation's Voice enshrined in the Constitution. This derives and is informed by our Good Works of charity and justice.

We support the Voice because we aspire to a society transformed by compassion and built on justice – where the dignity and hope of all people is respected by

ensuring they have control of their own destiny. We know the importance of vulnerable people having a voice. As The Rule states,

*The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored. (I #7.5)*

A Voice to Parliament is about ensuring the First Nations people have a real say in the decisions that affect their lives permanently.

The Society's support for the Voice is a matter of Social Justice – not politics. One in five people seeking our support in NSW identify as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In their hardship we witness the long-term impact of the dispossession and powerlessness endured since the earliest days of colonisation.

Giving First Nations peoples a voice will help break this viscous cycle and lead to better laws and policies for the wellbeing of their families and communities.

The Society's Social Justice Team have developed a suite of resources to support our networks to better understand and take action in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the Voice to parliament. These resources are available at [www.vinnies.org.au/ulurustatement](http://www.vinnies.org.au/ulurustatement), including a list of trusted resources to learn more about the issues in the lead up to the referendum.

If you would like hardcopies of any of these resources, please contact us at: [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au)

Now is the time to get informed about Constitutional recognition and a Voice to Parliament. It's time for open and respectful conversation on this important social justice issue with your family, friends and community.

# A new look for greater impact

If you've visited [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au) recently, you'll have noticed a new look for our website.

Following in-depth consultation and development involving all states, territories and National Council, the new St Vincent de Paul Society website was officially unveiled in May 2023 to improve the experience for people seeking information and assistance from the Society.

All the key information on the Society remains but in an easier to navigate manner. Simply select your state using the location finder in the top right corner and learn all about the varied initiatives and services taking place in NSW and across the country.

Stay up to date on latest announcements by following our media releases and read inspiring stories of change



our members and services make in the lives of people every day on the NSW Blog.

The website features a directory of all our shops and services, information on our various advocacy campaigns – you can even read the online edition of this magazine as well as past editions of Vision!

The St Vincent de Paul Society website contains a trove of information on our good works – past, present and future – learn more for yourself today by visiting: [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au)

## Members make a point of difference

**Members have been collaborating with Amelie Housing to help residents engage with each other and build safe connected communities.**

Amelie Housing is a special work of the St Vincent de Paul Society, operating for more than a decade, that aspires to build hope through housing by providing people facing disadvantage with a secure place to live and a community where they can thrive.

As part of the aspiration to create an inclusive community for all, the Society has leveraged its vast membership base to engage with residents to address social isolation and loneliness, building strong interpersonal and community connections, both within the housing communities and with the broader community.

Some of the member and tenant activities include:

A community garden established in Ermington along with regular sausage sizzles held for residents and local neighbours.

Members from the Mary MacKillop Conference deliver donated fresh bread each week to residents at Amelie Housing's social and affordable housing complex in Katoomba. Conference President Russell Smith reflects, "while the bread is gratefully received, the time spent sharing is even more valuable."

Youth members, volunteers and staff hosted a Buddies Day Halloween Party at the Penrith units with some children attending from the Marian Centre.

Members from the Nepean Region hosted lunches for Christmas and Easter at Penrith with gifts and Easter eggs for the children.

A new Caringbah Conference was formed late last year to engage residents in Burraneer, holding a BBQ and an evening highlighting the music of the 1960s.

Conference members can find out more about the Point of Difference project here by contacting Kate Scholl, Member Engagement Officer for Amelie, at: [kate.scholl@vinnies.org.au](mailto:kate.scholl@vinnies.org.au)



# First Nations Conferences to care for local community

**The Society has established First Nations Conferences in Walgett and Moree to empower and meet the needs of local communities.**

The word Guniinii translates to queen bee in the language of the Gamilaraay traditional custodians.

The word carries additional meaning as the name representing the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's newly formed First Nations Conference in Moree.

"The whole idea being that the queen bee looks after the whole community and it grows, provides," says Phil Donnan, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW North West Regional Director.

Conceived by a group of three First Nations women, working in coordination with the Society's membership team, the Conference which aims to serve the needs of the community has since grown to eight members.

A naming and blessing ceremony for the Guniinii Conference was held at the St Pius X Chapel, located on the country of the Gamilaraay traditional custodians, in March with members of the Conference coming from all three distinct parts of the First Nations community in Moree.

According to Phil Donnan, the success of the initiative is in combining the Society's resources with people understanding the needs of where they live.

"Rather than us saying, 'this is what we think you want', it's them saying 'this is what we need'. We're allowing them control of their own destiny using our resourcing and within our mission."

"It's incredible to see the energy and enthusiasm and we're thrilled to be able to resource them to make a change in their community."

The initiative to establish First Nations Conferences originated in Walgett, located on the country of the Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay and Ngayimbaa traditional custodians, after the previous Conference had been disbanded for a number of years.

After establishing relationships with the local community, an inaugural First Nations Conference was established in Walgett in late 2022, which has seen people reach out for assistance for the first time due to the connection of the Conference to the community.

By establishing First Nations Conferences, the Society aims to increase cultural knowledge across the wider membership base as a whole.

"One of the issues for us is to be culturally appropriate with First Nations people. We'll be engaging with these Conferences to train and educate our existing members on being more appropriate and relatable, so there will be better engagement at all levels of the organisation."

The establishment of First Nations Conferences is one of the actions the Society has taken as part of the current Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations people.

Plans are underway for the Guniinii Conference to complement the existing St Therese Conference by establishing a drop-in centre and offering financial aid programs such as EAPA and NILS in Moree, while members in Walgett are engaging with local elders to formally name their Conference.

The Society is currently developing a new Reconciliation Action Plan that will be unveiled in the coming months.



# Dame Beverley Kerr of the Order of St Gregory the Great remains remarkably humble

**Bev Kerr, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's Vice President – Special Works, has been declared a Dame of the Order of St Gregory the Great, an order of papal knights.**

Bev was conferred the honour during Mass on Sunday morning, 22 January at the St Francis Xavier Cathedral in Wollongong by Bishop Brian Mascord.

The accolade was bestowed in recognition of Bev's lifelong dedication to assisting people experiencing homelessness, poverty, and disadvantage. It follows much behind the scenes work, particularly by Leo Tucker, Executive Director – Mission and Spirituality, to advance Bev's nomination all the way to the Vatican.

On the day, Bev seemed happy but both surprised and very modest about being named a Dame in the Order of St Gregory the Great.

"I think I was still, sort of, in shock because I still don't understand why Leo nominated me for that medal.

"You don't get a medal for doing what you enjoy doing, helping the poor, the destitute, and the vulnerable.

"I just love doing it all and I'm just so passionate about what I do, I just don't think you need a medal for doing something that you love doing," Bev says.

"From what everyone tells me, it's very, very important and it's a very high achievement but I'm just an ordinary person.

"I'm just an ordinary Vincentian, just doing Vincentian and God's work," Bev says.

And with COVID restrictions no longer in place, Bev is looking forward to getting out on the road again in her role as Vice President – Special Works.

Before the pandemic it regularly took her all around the state to oversee them and one of the first places she'll be headed is the Society's Castlereagh Industries and Green Villa in Coonamble.

"We have 72 special works across New South Wales – I travel as far as Broken Hill, Albury, Tweed Heads, and out to Coonamble," Bev says.

One of the highlights of her more than 20 years of being an ordinary Vincentian was being the co-project manager



**From left to right: Bishop Brian Mascord, Bev Kerr, and her husband Alex**

for the refurbishment and opening of Vincentian House in Sydney.

"When I was in DOCS – I was in child protection – we would have a father and his daughter or a mum and her teenage boys come in because they were homeless.

"We could place the mum in a refuge or the dad in a refuge but the children would have to go into foster care or short-term care because there were no facilities for them to be together.

"And they would say to me: 'I'd rather be homeless than be separated from my child.'

"When the Society built Vincentian House, which was for single mums, mums with children, dads with children, families – mum, dads, and the kids.

"I think it was a really important thing and I felt so good about this because those people didn't have to be separated from their children.

"They could be together.

"Nothing is more daunting than to have to say to a parent we'll place you in a refuge but you can't take your child with you," Bev says.



## Bushfire Appeal funds provide long-term support

**The St Vincent de Paul Society has spent and committed the entirety of the \$25.9 million raised nationally through the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal launched in response to the devastating Black Summer bushfires.**

In the final months of 2019 and beginning of 2020, a series of bushfires swept across Australia resulting in approximately 30,000 square kilometres being burnt, thousands of buildings destroyed and – most tragically – hundreds of lives directly and indirectly lost.

Thanks to the generosity of donors and supporters across Australia and abroad, the Society has been able to help over 9,500 households, distribute \$12.2 million in Commonwealth Government funding and support individuals and communities to recover and rebuild with resilience.

In NSW, the Society responded over the short, medium and long-term by drawing on the \$9.4 million raised to assist with emergency relief (\$5.8 million), community grants (\$1.4 million) and community development (\$2.2 million).

The Bushfire Recovery and Community Development Program completed operation at the end of June. Highlights of the program include partnering with over 100 community-based organisations in Kempsey, Shoalhaven, Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley.

Funding delivered through the Bushfire Community Grants Program enabled communities to rebuild and create resilience through infrastructure, events, equipment, training, bush regeneration and identified needs.

Across Australia, 14,448 members of the Society contributed to assisting people in their time of need. It is thanks to our members that we have been able to make such a long lasting impact.

Funds raised from the Vinnies Flood Appeal continue to be committed and spent in communities across the Northern Rivers.

## Returning and Earning in Tamworth

**The St Vincent de Paul Society opened its latest Return and Earn depot in Tamworth in January. Locals have embraced the service, with the depot now having collected and processed over 3.5 million containers from the local community. More than 40 businesses have already signed up as ongoing customers.**

The Tamworth depot is the eighth the Society operates as part of NSW Government's Return and Earn scheme. It has the capacity to process up to 100,000 containers per day.

The Society commenced its first depot to the public in January 2018 in the Shoalhaven. Over time, the Society has reached the milestone of over 376 million container returns across NSW; diverting more than 1.4 million cubic metres of waste from ending up in landfill.

Under the Return and Earn scheme, customers can collect and return drink containers to one of the Society's depots. They receive a 10-cent refund for each eligible container. Customers have the option to donate the refunds to help fund important programs and services the Society runs in the community. That way, socially the customers help change lives of people in their community while environmentally they help to reduce the volume of litter across the state.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW also operates additional Return and Earn depots in Cardiff, Dubbo, Maitland, Nepean, Shoalhaven, Tweed Heads, Unanderra and Wagga Wagga; employing a total of 35 people across the eight depots.



# Help for the whole family on National Pet Day

To mark National Pet Day, the Redfern Vinnies Support Centre staff and volunteers provided various pet supplies to people we assist in the area.

Over a hundred people attended the Redfern Support Centre on 11 April, some accompanied by their cherished dogs, cats and even parrot. They were visibly pleased and grateful as they discovered an ample supply of essentials for their pets, including pet food, treats, bowls, flea treatments, collars, leashes, toys, and pet beds.

Pets are more than just companions to those experiencing homelessness – they are a source of love, comfort, and unwavering loyalty; things that are much needed in times of hardship. However, with the ongoing cost of living crisis, caring for pets can be challenging for those already struggling to make ends meet. Many pet owners experiencing homelessness will sacrifice their own needs to ensure their pets are cared for.

Gehard, came to the pet day with his moodle, Heath, who has been his loyal companion for almost thirteen years. He was grateful for the support he received from the Redfern Support Centre.

"We [Gehard and his partner] got Heath since he was eight weeks old from Queensland. Since then, he's been everywhere with us. He's been through the hardest part of our transition which is being homeless, he came every step of the way."

"You [the Society] have been really good. Helping us with dog food and things like that – [it's] much appreciated."

Gehard was almost lost for words when asked about the importance of Heath in his life.

"Oh.. he's like our child. That's how important he is."



## Help with all aspects of life

**"I would have given up, but my caseworker kept fighting for me and re-assuring me that if we keep battling, we will get what is required."**

When Tanya rides around on her bright red mobility scooter, she does so independently and with confidence about the future.

"Now that I have my scooter, I am able to leave my house whenever I want and don't need to rely on my caseworker or others... it has been a game changer and it feels so good to have it."

Accessing a mobility scooter through the NDIS is just one of the ways the Society has been able to support Tanya in recent years.

First coming into contact with the Society through the Together Home program, an initiative of the NSW Government during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to assist people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, Tanya was provided with stable accommodation and wraparound support.

Going from a caravan park on the south coast to a home boasting a backyard for her dogs to run free, Tanya is glowing in her praise of the support her caseworker, Phillip, has provided.

"Nothing has been too hard for my caseworker – dental work, vets, scooters, furniture for my home, referring me to all sorts of programs and avenues for help."

The Society has also advocated for her dog, Fifi, to receive treatment from a vet.

"The program is really holistic and can help with all aspects of my life."

# The power of pictures

**Livingston Armytage is many things – he’s a human rights lawyer, an expert photographer, and a volunteer at the St Vincent de Paul Society’s Matthew Talbot Hostel in Sydney.**

All of these things and more came together to prompt him to pick up a camera and spend a year documenting the lives of people experiencing homelessness in Sydney in a new book.

Livingston has generously made the decision to donate proceeds from *Homeless: Hidden in Plain Sight* to the Society to support the work of the Matthew Talbot Hostel.

“When I started to sit down and talk with these homeless people what they all told me is that they felt ignored and completely invisible in plain sight.

“I’ve learned that there were many causes to homelessness, but when they’re all boiled down, I now understand that it’s one knock too many that can shatter a life’s equilibrium,” he says.



“It’s my experience that one photograph, not just can tell a 1000 words, but it can touch the heart and affect feelings in the way no amount of scholarly reports will do,” he says.

If you would like to buy a copy of *Homeless: Hidden in Plain Sight*, you can do so at <https://www.tgpublishing.com.au/our-books/homeless-livingston-armytage>

## Family Fun Day brings cost of living respite

**The first Vinnies Family Fun Day was held in Wagga Wagga during the April school holidays to assist families feeling the pinch amidst the cost of living crisis.**

With many families unable to participate in social activities as a result of soaring expenses across the board, the Family Fun Day was conceived to provide a day of fun at no expense to families, while also informing the local community on the breadth of services offered by the Society.

“We’ve seen with increased cost of living it’s been really hard for families to afford things, and it’s the school

holidays, [which] are really hard for some families,” said Ana Suarez, St Vincent de Paul Society Schools and Youth Engagement Officer.

Close to 1,100 people attended the event at Wagga Wagga Showground, which featured a range of entertainment including rides, jumping castle, petting zoo, pony rides, face painting and more.

“The family fun day is a really good icebreaker for people who have been considering asking for assistance but don’t quite know what’s out there,” said Peter Burgess, St Vincent de Paul Society Wagga Wagga Central President.

Close to 900 people have sought assistance from the Society in the Wagga Wagga Regional Council since the start of the financial year with members providing \$165,000 in financial and material assistance.

The Society extends thanks to Claffy Foundation, Teys Australia, TOMRA Cleanaway, Wagga RSL Club, The Astor Inn, and Pinot & Picasso for enabling the Family Fun Day through their generous sponsorship.



# Gosford women receive recognition

**The NSW Government recognises the outstanding contributions women, in all facets of community life, make through the annual Women of The Year awards.**

In this year's *Gosford Women of the Year Awards*, Nikki Willmette, Woy Woy Support Centre Coordinator and Lisa Dalton, Gosford Support Centre Coordinator, received Community Service Awards. Joining them was Christine Munnoch, a long-time member and volunteer in the Gosford region.

Nikki and Lisa have worked tirelessly within the Central Coast community, establishing positive, professional relationships with other agencies while strengthening the Society's reputation for good works.

Members in the Gosford Regional Council such as Christine, have provided more than \$400,000 in financial and material assistance during this financial year. Demand for assistance has seen four in five people request support with food, while 50% are experiencing housing stress.

Nikki, Lisa and Christine work with those who are homeless, fleeing domestic and family violence, in need of mental health services and those who just need a hand up negotiating the barriers before them.

They all know, live and are highly valued in the Central Coast community. Between them, they show the vital role women play as volunteers, members and staff of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Well done, Nikki, Lisa and Christine!



## KNOWING THE SIGNS TO HELP

**The Vinnies Reconnect team in Deniliquin have been enhancing community wellbeing through a youth mental health first aid course delivered across the local region.**

Developed in response to a growing number of young people seeking assistance due to mental health issues, the early intervention program was designed to teach participants the signs and symptoms of the most common mental health conditions experienced by youth; as well as strategies to provide initial help to someone who might be experiencing a mental health crisis or in distress.

Funding to deliver the program was made possible following a successful Strengthening Rural Communities grant offered by the Australian Government, in partnership with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, while the Society generously covered the outstanding funds required to deliver the training.

Local communities including Barham, Deniliquin and Hay have been able to receive the training, provided at a 2-day course offered free of charge, which has had a community-wide benefit for young people and adults alike.

"Not only does it help build the resilience of young people when they feel heard and understood but it also empowers adults to have the confidence to support young people with their mental health issues," said Vanessa McKay, Vinnies Reconnect Team Leader.

Feedback from the program has been overwhelmingly positive with participants expressing greater confidence and knowledge to engage in conversations and refer people to appropriate professional pathways and self-help strategies.

# Sleeping out to make a difference for those living rough

The Society is calling on local communities to unite in solidarity and support those experiencing or at risk of homelessness by joining the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout. Now in its sixth year, the Sleepout will return to in-person events on Friday 25 August.

As part of the Sleepout, participants brave the elements outdoors for one night in the cold of winter with nothing more than a piece of cardboard, a cup of soup and bread for dinner. The experience allows participants to learn about the harsh realities of homelessness while raising essential funds needed to assist the vulnerable. The funds raised will enable local Vinnies services and members to continue providing food, financial aid, and homelessness services to people experiencing disadvantage.

The ongoing cost of living crisis critically leads towards worsening rates of homelessness. The latest census figures revealed that the homeless rate in NSW is the third



highest across the country, and 35,000 people in NSW go to bed each night without a secure place to call home.

Everyone can participate as a team or individually to make a difference for those without the security of a home. To register as a participant or to make a donation, go to [www.vinnies.org.au/communitysleepout](http://www.vinnies.org.au/communitysleepout)

Events will take place on Friday 25 August 2023, in the following locations:

- Albury
- Armidale
- Fred's Place, Tweed Heads
- Wagga Wagga
- Western Sydney

## Making change one step at a time



**Team Vinnies is back with some exciting fun runs and physical events in 2023!**

If you're a walker, runner or just interested in taking on a new challenge, you can get involved and show your support for the Society at the same time.

Mark these dates in your calendar today and consider whether you would like to take part and have fun whilst raising vital funds for the life changing services that the Society provides across our communities.

- City2Surf 13 August 2023
- Sydney Running Festival 17 September 2023
- Beach2Beach 27 August 2023
- Runaway Half Marathon 21 May 2023

To enter, head over to [fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au](http://fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au) and join Team Vinnies today! We will be with you every step of the way.

“Without Vinnies, without the accommodation I doubt whether I would have seen my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday”

# Finding hope after heartache



**The theme of this year's Winter Appeal is 'What if you mum, grandma, or sister became homeless?', spotlighting one of the fastest growing demographics of people at risk of and experiencing homelessness across Australia: older women.**

In the past year, the Society supported 4,400 women aged over 55 through our conference members; more than half cited housing stress as a cause for reaching out, while 31% sought assistance for the first time.

One of the women assisted is Joan, who shared her story of finding hope after heartache.

\*\*\*

**“I had nowhere to live because I wasn't even in the will. I was homeless.”**

Immediately in the wake of the death of her loving husband of almost 50 years, Joan made the shocking discovery she had secretly been written out of his will.

Even worse news was to come when she tried to seek her lawyer's help.

“I can't act for you anymore because I'm acting for your daughter,” Joan recalls being told, “She's the executor.”

Joan's daughter had abused the access her parents had given her to their personal details and finances to have her father's will rewritten to exclude her mother.

Things only deteriorated from there.

A few weeks out from her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, Joan was told by her daughter “This is my home now and you're not welcome here.”

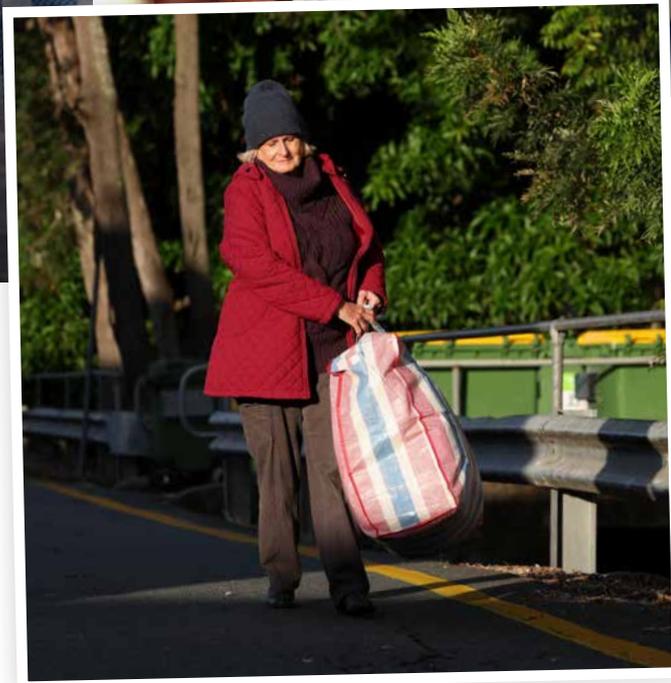
“Now, I can still see it to this day,” Joan says, “Standing out the front of our double-glass doors and she said, ‘You're not welcome here.’”

Joan found herself packing and before long she was dropped off on the main street of her suburb, left to fend for herself.

Luckily for Joan, she wasn't far from support and she was able to find short-term accommodation in a motel before being referred to crisis accommodation.

It was there she first encountered the St Vincent de Paul Society.

“Without Vinnies, without the accommodation I doubt whether I would have seen my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday,” Joan says.



"I was just broken-hearted.

"I'd lost my husband, I'd lost my home, I'd lost my family.

"I had nothing to live for – I didn't even have a pension."

A pension was one of many things the Society helped Joan access but it was just the beginning.

Joan speaks incredibly highly of personal support she'd received from the team at the Society.

Speaking of a hospital visit, Joan describes the generosity of the people assisting her, "They're there. I had major heart surgery – [they are] the first people there."

Joan goes on to speak about how a simple barbeque held by the Society lifted her spirits on Mother's Day.

Luckily for Joan, she was able to find long-term accommodation in public housing following the dedicated work done on her behalf by Society team members.

Being in a new home did not stop the support she was receiving from the Society.

"Even my dog, when I got here.

"I said, 'I miss my little pup because they took him away.'

"She found a little dog. Then she drove to get the little fella and, yes, he's here... today and we've got that little dog."

"It's the emotional things that they do," Joan says.

"Medical – I had cataracts. They drove me to the hospital, picked me up after the operation.

"They still can do my shopping, or pick something up, or take me to the hospital, or take me to an appointment, and that's what I'm saying – you don't get that from everybody.

"You've got to be really dedicated to your job to get that," Joan says.

**You can help the Society restore hope to women like Joan by supporting the Vinnies Winter Appeal. Make a contribution today at [www.vinnies.org.au/nswwinterappeal](http://www.vinnies.org.au/nswwinterappeal) or by calling 13 18 12.**



# 18 years in, Vinnies CEO Sleepout celebrates another win

**When the first Vinnies CEO Sleepout took place in 2006 with a handful of business leaders led by Bernie Fehon braving the cold, a little under \$5,000 was raised to support the good works of the St Vincent de Paul Society.**

Fast forward close to two decades and an impressive total of \$8.4 million was raised on 22 June thanks to well over 1,400 participants from all around Australia.

In New South Wales, 365 leaders from business, community and government took part at events in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong to raise nearly \$2.9 million to help the Society continue its good works across the state.

At a time when our services have seen increased demand due to the soaring cost of living and lack of affordable housing, the funds raised will enable the Society to perform vital support for people experiencing hardship and homelessness by providing assistance with crisis accommodation, food, case management, healthcare, educational programs and other support.

Deborah Knight, 2GB and Channel 9 Presenter, acted as Master of Ceremonies for the fourth time, while journalist Joe Hildebrand hosted the pre-event live-stream.

For Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, the 2023 theme of 'Home' allowed participants to understand the important role played by the Society in providing support over the short and long-term.

"The funds raised through the Vinnies CEO Sleepout will enable the Society to meet the need that exists currently

in the community and will tragically continue to grow over the coming months," said Ms Saiz.

"In the short-term our services will be able to support people in crisis, however my hope is that the leaders from business, politics and the community who participated can take what they have heard from the night and advocate for long-term change.

"In the midst of so many people doing it tough right now, it is heartening to see such a generous display of goodwill from everyone who has donated and participated in the event this year," said Ms Saiz.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council President, Paul Burton, highlighted the legacy of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout as the largest annual fundraiser for the Society for nearly two decades.

"We've been able to make a difference to so many lives over the years and the success of this year's event will ensure we can continue to do so for many more to come," said Mr Burton.

## SYDNEY

Participants in Sydney braved the cold of winter at the White Bay Cruise Terminal in Rozelle on a night where temperatures dropped into the single digits.

Leaders were privileged to hear from people with lived experience of homelessness and hardship prior to formalities, where State Premier Chris Minns, who became the first sitting NSW Premier to attend the event, addressed attendees.



Robert Kelly, Steadfast CEO, topped the fundraising in Sydney – and nationally overall – with a phenomenal total in excess of \$139,000. “Too many people and families sleep with cold, fear and uncertainty night after night, which needs to change,” said Mr Kelly. “I’m grateful for every CEO that dedicates their time and resources to such a worthy cause.”

## NEWCASTLE

Participants from across the Hunter slept out in the courtyard of the Rendu social housing apartments operated by the Society in Cardiff.

More than \$111,000 was raised by a hearty group of participants in attendance which will be used to deliver vital services offered by the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service in Wickham, along with supporting the residents at the Rendu social housing apartments.

Close to 800 people have sought support from the Matthew Talbot Homeless Service during the first three quarters of the current financial year with the lack of available and affordable housing options resulting in the average period of assistance expanding from 76 to 118 days.

Adam Boyle, Pegasus CEO, topped the Newcastle tally with more than \$15,000 raised. “Every year, we hope that we’re doing something that makes it better... it seems like the need is greater every year.”

## WOLLONGONG

Business and community leaders in Wollongong prepared meals to be distributed by the Vinnies Vans service across the Illawarra as part of an intimate evening held at the Society’s hub in Coniston.

The event raised more than \$90,000 which will be used to assist the Vinnies Vans service, which has experienced a surge in demand for support with more than 6,000 people assisted this financial year.

Daniel Munk, Aster Group CEO, once again finished as the highest fundraiser in his ninth sleepout with \$33,000 raised to bring his overall fundraising to over \$250,000.

**“The homeless situation is something that all of us should all be thinking about and being involved in – the Sleepout hopefully gets people a little focused at this time of year – it’s just not that one person you see on the street... the person on the street is the tip of the iceberg.”**

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout has been changing lives for the better for the past 18 years. The funds raised play a vital role in enabling the St Vincent de Paul Society to deliver specialist services and support to people experiencing and at risk of homelessness. We extend our thanks to the compassion and generosity of our members, volunteers, employees, sponsors, and participants who make the Vinnies CEO Sleepout possible.

**Eligible leaders from business and the community can now register to take part in the 2024 Vinnies CEO Sleepout:**  
[www.ceosleepout.org.au](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au)

# Corporate partners step up in times of need

The generosity of our corporate partners enables the Society to bring our vision of offering a hand up to people in need to life.

## Ripen

Ripen rallied up their network of partners to collect gifts and toys for women and children experiencing homelessness due to domestic and family violence. Throughout their Christmas Toy Drive campaign held in January, Ripen collected over 300 gifts that were donated to families residing at the Marian Centre, one of our domestic and family violence refuges.

*"A difficult thing for our families is they arrive with virtually nothing, just what they can carry, and a child's favourite toy or their favourite activities, unfortunately doesn't make the cut when you're leaving in such an emergency situation", said Sandra Auchterlonie, Family Engagement Worker.*

Ripen CEO Matt Hughes travelled across NSW to collect gifts from Ripen's partners before making a warmly received drop-off at the Marian Centre. The support and generosity of Ripen has brought joy for families doing it tough!



## Amazon

Thanks to Amazon, we were able to provide another 1,000 children around Australia with back-to-school essentials for the start of the new year. The school packs helped ease the pressure for families struggling with household expenses by providing necessary items for their kids to participate at school, such as stationery, lunchboxes, and drink bottles.

Amazon continues to work with the Society by establishing Disaster Relief Hubs in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and, most recently, Perth. The hubs stock critical relief items ready to be distributed to communities impacted by natural disasters, allowing an immediate and effective response in times of emergency.

## 2GB

To support our most recent Christmas Appeal, 2GB held the Vinnies Christmas Radiothon with staff and members of the Society appearing throughout the all-day coverage. Over \$121,000 was raised in support of the larger appeal as a result of 2GB's on-air support. We look forward to collaborating with 2GB once again during the 2023 Vinnies Christmas Appeal.



## IGA

For the tenth consecutive year, IGA ran their Christmas Appeal in support of the Society. Over \$342,000 was collected from the sale of \$2 Christmas baubles and specially marked Community Chest products, which will be used to assist families and individuals facing rising cost-of-living pressures.

IGA also extended their support to our Flood Appeal by donating \$300,000 to flood-impacted families and raising an impressive \$407,124 from the sale of \$2 appeal tokens from October to November last year.



## Manildra Group

The Manildra Group continuously supplies the Matthew Talbot Hostel with meat and generously donated \$100,000 to our van services. Thanks to the Manildra Group, we can continue to provide the people we assist with healthy and nutritious meals.

# Two years in and Deb is living her best life



## **A few years ago, Deborah Madden was plunged into homelessness following the death of her husband Rick.**

After a period of couch surfing and living on the street, she found refuge at Our Lady of the Way, a specialist residential service for women 55 and over operated by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

She has since found a permanent home at a Society-built and operated social and affordable housing development made possible by the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund.

We've spoken to Deb before (in the summer 2020 issue of Vision) and if you'd like to know more about her story prior to her arriving at her new long-term home, you can read on our website.

This isn't a story about what came before, though, it's about how the benefits of having a permanent, safe, and secure home have enabled Deb to live her best life.

"I've been here nearly two years now, and I love it here. It's absolutely beautiful.

"When I first arrived, I said: My God! This is fantastic, I just love it so much."

But it's much more than that for Deb.

"My life has improved since I've been here.

"I was brought up in this area. It's like home to me. I just love the area around here."

"When I shifted here, all of my stress is just about nearly gone. Since I've moved here, I feel much better in my health."

"It gives me peace of mind, it gives me peace within myself, and I can cope a bit more since my husband passed away," she says.

Deb and the other people living in the building have formed a great community spirit with regular gatherings that see 30 or more people attending.

"The people in the building are very nice. And we have – on a Friday afternoon – we all get together, and have a barbeque or a pizza or just sit down and see what other people are doing that week.

"In the building, we go and visit people who are sick in hospital or if they need help," she says.

Visitors to Deb's home often comment on how lovely it looks, when asked how she does it she humbly says, "I don't know what the secret is."

But it might have something to do with Deb being an ace bargain hunter.

"One thing I love, I do it twice a week, I walk from here to the local shops.

"I'm a shopaholic for second hand things.

"I'm a shopaholic in Vinnies Shops.

"I've got a lot of things from there, nice glassware and little cups and saucers.

"I just love second hand shops."

Deb's home already looks great but she has a lot more planned before she's done.

"It's only about 35% done at the moment," she says.

# A welcoming place for social connection

**Michael never thought he would ever be near the brink of homelessness. He enjoyed a secure and stable life that he could afford from a lifetime of hard work.**

"I was a primary school teacher for 16 years, and then I decided to do my own interior design business and owned three properties. I rented them out. I was very, very comfortable. I worked my guts out to get there, but I was very comfortable."

His life changed suddenly after he left the domestic violence that he had experienced for eight years. The divorce from his partner stripped Michael of all his possessions. Finding refuge in social housing, Michael was left with only two dogs he loved dearly.

"So, suddenly I was homeless, and I had no money to access, and I had two dogs, and I had nowhere to go."

"It was all taken from me, and I did nothing wrong. He seemed to be able to take all my money and put it into bank accounts I couldn't touch. He had the help of our solicitor.

"I had to sell my Flybuys points to get chicken necks for my dogs at Coles. They'd eat first and then whatever I could eat afterwards was fine."

"One of my dogs died, and that was traumatic. So now I've just got one and she's old now, so all the money that I

had had to go to her to get her heart medication."

In his time of struggle where he often wondered where he would get his next meal, Michael found respite in the form of our Vinnies Vans.

"It's absolutely horrible to know that – 'where am I going to get food from?'"

**"Then suddenly I found the Vinnies Vans. I just couldn't believe that they were giving me food for free, and it was a miracle."**

"It's healthy, and there's lots of it. As I said, it's a miracle."

Vinnies Vans have not only been providing Michael with food, but also with a welcoming space and social connection.

"I just have my dog, so when I'm at home, I talk to my dog. So, I don't really have that much human contact."

"So, when I do come out to get the food, it's so nice to talk to someone."

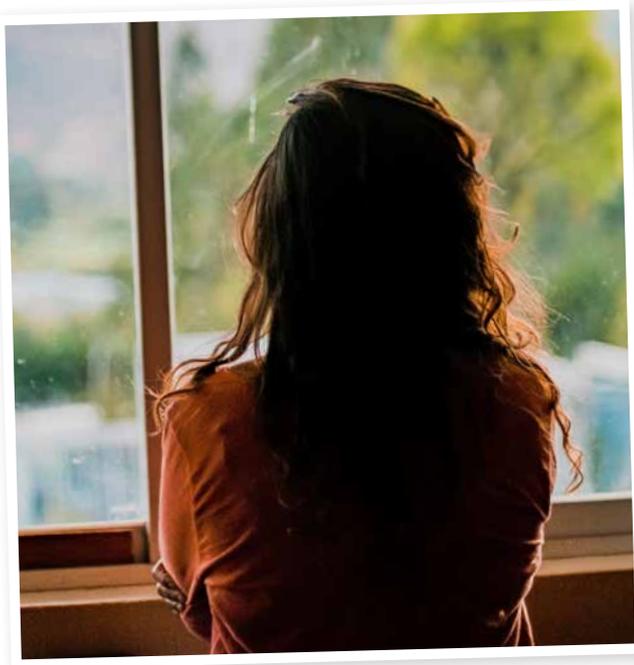
Michael speaks highly of the Vinnies Vans volunteers, whom he describes as always making him feel genuinely appreciated.

"They feel like they're your friends that you've known for years, and they're really ... when they listen, they listen. They're constantly looking at you as if they really are interested."

"They're very sweet people, and they're there because they want to be there, and they're there because they're taking a little time out of their lives to help me."

"If the van wasn't here, I don't know what I would do."





## “I don’t know whether I’m going to be there next month, next year”

The news cycle is full of stories of growing homelessness nationwide, spurred by the soaring cost of living and rental crisis. For Rachel, those stories are her day-to-day having experienced the harsh reality of homelessness twice in twelve months.

In the first instance, she lost her property on the Gold Coast, and not long after, she again lost a home when her request for a lease extension was denied.

“I was a manager for a retail department store for almost ten years and then relocated and had my son. Unfortunately, the father was not involved, so I’ve had to do it all on my own, which meant losing one property,” recalls Rachel.

“I owned a house.... that’s a hard bitter pill to swallow as well, coming from being a homeowner and a landlord.

“The second time around I had a perfect rental ledger. It was never a day late. I had a perfect inspection and

they still decided to not renew my lease, through no fault of my own.”

Rachel felt helpless before finding refuge at Pete’s Place – a drop-in service operated by the Society in Coffs Harbour.

She remembers how startled she was by the profound connection and assistance she had from the first time she entered Pete’s Place.

“I’d been homeless for two months already. I’d been in my car, couch-surfing with my son [who] was sent to Melbourne with my parents for a little bit so I could find stable accommodation, which never eventuated.”

“When I finally came to Pete’s Place – I’ve been kicking myself ever since that I didn’t come sooner – I was just shocked at what I walked into.

“I think I was directed to the showers first and then to eat... words can’t describe the care that’s given here compared to other services.”

“Everybody treats you the same way. It doesn’t matter what happens, you can always turn to Pete’s Place. The staff here are amazing, absolutely amazing.”

The worsening cost of living has left Rachel with little left over to meet other essential needs after accounting for rent. She is able to access aid from the Society which has proved invaluable in increasingly uncertain times.

“The cost of living is actually really, really hurting.”

“Even though I may be housed, and I look like I have everything, some days I do have to rely on Pete’s Place for food or just the odd item that I didn’t get or something at the chemist.

### “They don’t stop helping you once you’re housed... because the cost of living is impacting so many people that it’s getting to the point where you pay your rent now and then you starve.”

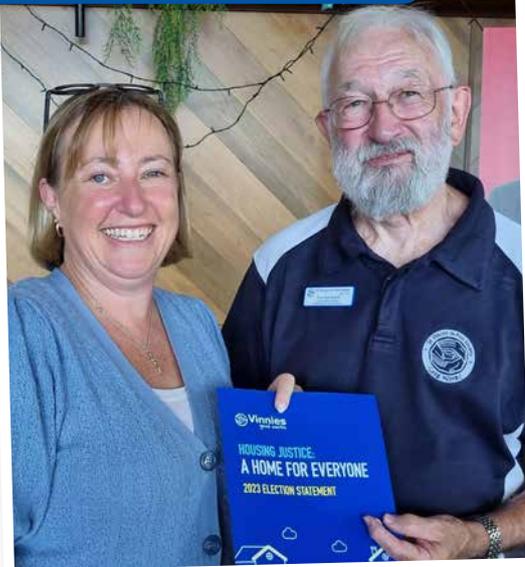
As grateful as she is for her current circumstances, Rachel wishes for a safe, secure and long-term place to call home.

“At this point in time, I know I have a verbal agreement for a six-month lease.”

“The house is what I have now. There’s no stability. I don’t know whether I’m going to be there next month, next year.”

“I took what I could get and I’m still living on the edge.

“So that still makes me nervous, it definitely makes me nervous.”



## Housing Justice on the agenda

**The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW advocated for change and housing justice during the 2023 State Election.**

With the housing crisis and soaring cost of living resulting in a growing number of people facing precarity, including many needing to seek assistance for the first time, the Society sought to hold the state's political leaders to account by putting housing on the agenda.

In order to achieve the desired change, the Society released its NSW Election Statement, *'Housing Justice: A Home for Everyone'*, late last year highlighting three key recommendations for policy action:

- 1. Ensure our housing system delivers on the right to home**
- 2. Protect renters through fairer tenancy laws**
- 3. Fund specialist services for people who are homeless**

Throughout the campaign our members, volunteers and employees wrote and met with their local MPs and candidates about the need for safe, affordable and healthy homes.

Our people and Society leadership also attended the Sydney Alliance's 2023 State Election Assembly at Westmead where Matt Kean (NSW Treasurer), Daniel Mookhey (Shadow Treasurer) and Jenny Leong (NSW Greens spokesperson for Housing) addressed a diverse coalition of groups including NGOs, faith-based organisations, community groups, unions and schools.

Key asks from the Housing Justice statement were featured in the media during the campaign, such as ending blanket 'no pet' clauses for renters.

"There's so much competition for rental properties that for someone to say, 'well I'd really like to rent time home but I've got a pet – would you accommodate it?' – that means that will rule them out," said Rhiannon Cook, Manager of Policy and Advocacy, during an interview with ABC Illawarra.

The State Election, held on 25 March, saw the NSW Labor Party form government following 12 years of the Coalition in power.

"We have worked collaboratively with past state governments to address the inequalities that exist in society and look forward to continuing that relationship during the next term to bring about stronger social conditions for the people of NSW," said Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.

"The Society called for housing justice through our state election platform to ensure that people can live securely in housing, support is available in times of hardship, and underlying issues that contribute to housing stress are remedied," said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

Chris Minns, the 47<sup>th</sup> premier of NSW, has openly supported of the Society by taking part in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout for the past three years, including becoming the first sitting NSW Premier to participate in the event.

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

# Homelessness continues to rise across Australia

**122,000.**

**This sobering figure represents the number of people across Australia experiencing homelessness on any given night, according to the newly released 2021 Census data.**

First taking place nationally in 1911, following earlier state-based reporting dating back to the first half of the 1800s, the Census occurs every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as a means of gathering important demographic information on the Australian population to inform decisions right now and for the future.

The findings from the most recent homelessness data, released just days before the NSW Election in March, reveal that homelessness across Australia has **risen by 5.2 per cent** over the past five years to **122,494** people.

New South Wales continues to account for the highest number of people experiencing homelessness of any state or territory (**35,011**). While there has been a seven per cent decrease compared with figures from the 2016 Census, the current number of people experiencing homelessness is **27 per cent higher than a decade earlier**.

In breaking down the 35,000 people experiencing homelessness throughout NSW, it is important to understand that homelessness extends well beyond the stereotypical focus on rough sleepers.

As defined by the ABS, when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate;
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

The number of rough sleepers in NSW decreased considerably from the previous Census, in large part due to the concerted focus by governments to intervene due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures such as housing rough sleepers in temporary accommodation and programs such as Together Home, which provided housing and wrap-around support to help people maintain tenancies, demonstrate the ability of the governments to take meaningful action on homelessness.

## Homelessness by State/Territory from 2016 to 2021

|     | 2016   | 2021   |                |
|-----|--------|--------|----------------|
| NSW | 37,715 | 35,011 | 7% decrease    |
| VIC | 24,817 | 30,660 | 23.5% increase |
| QLD | 21,671 | 22,428 | 3.5% increase  |
| NT  | 13,717 | 13,104 | 4% decrease    |
| SA  | 6,224  | 7,428  | 19% increase   |
| WA  | 9,005  | 9,729  | 8% increase    |
| TAS | 1,622  | 2,350  | 45% increase   |
| ACT | 1,596  | 1,777  | 11% increase   |

## Homelessness in NSW over the past two decades

| CENSUS | NSW HOMELESSNESS |
|--------|------------------|
| 2001   | 23,041           |
| 2006   | 22,219           |
| 2011   | 27,479           |
| 2016   | 37,715           |
| 2021   | 35,011           |

## TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS IN NSW

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings            | 3%  |
| supported accommodation for the homeless             | 14% |
| boarding houses                                      | 25% |
| temporarily staying with other households / lodgings | 16% |
| severely overcrowded dwellings                       | 42% |

"It is not an overstatement to say that this is a national crisis and drastic action has to happen right now to ensure everyone has a safe and secure place to live," said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, following the release of the Census data.

"We know it is possible, when there is political will, to provide greater assistance to people experiencing homelessness."

The Society commissioned research from University of New South Wales last year which showed that if the NSW Government built 5,000 new social housing dwellings every year for a decade, the NSW social housing waiting list would be reduced by three quarters.

In addition to further investment in social and affordable housing, the Society is advocating for better rights for renters and increasing funding for Specialist Homelessness Services which will be vitally important as a necessary measure to ensure services are properly funded to meet the growing demand for assistance.



In 1990, Neil and his family welcomed the first of his grandchildren and, during the course of his life, he would meet many more, as well as several great grandchildren.

Neil pursued a variety of careers but, according to his family, he had no job he loved better than working for Bunnings.

His grandchildren describe it as one of his three great passions.

The others were his family and the Society, which he joined in 2012.

With the death of Thea in 2017, Neil's family says the St Vincent de Paul Society supplanted Bunnings as his favourite topic of conversation.

He was following in his wife's footsteps and adopting one of her great passions as his own.

## Remembering Kenneth Neil Rabbett

### 1943 – 2023

**In very sad news, the Society has lost one of its most dedicated and senior members with the passing of Neil Rabbett at the age of 79 at Dubbo Base Hospital on Friday 17 March.**

Born just north of NSW in Texas, Queensland in 1943, Neil spent his life travelling throughout NSW.

Finding himself living on the coast in Harrington, in western Sydney in Penrith, the Central Coast, before finding farm life suited him when he moved to Eumungerie – north of Dubbo – in the early 2000s.

He was a busy man throughout his life, early on working at PMG (the predecessor to Telstra) by day, and working in clubs at night.

It was during this period he met the love of his life, Thea, and they were married in 1963.

Together they had three children, David, Michelle and Lisa.

He also honoured Thea's dying wish for him to come to faith, receiving baptism in the Catholic church in recent years.

Neil was a deeply dedicated and supportive member, serving as a Conference President, Cudgegong Region administrator, Bathurst Central Council President, on State Council and as a member of the Board.

For his efforts, he was a nominee for Senior Citizen of the Year in 2019.

Neil was a visible presence in the community, actively helping raise awareness about the Society and its good works.

He attended everything from the opening of the new Vinnies Shop in Dubbo, to helping promote the 2022 Vinnies Community Sleepout, to helping highlight the importance of disability services like Castlereagh Industries in Coonamble.

Neil's health deteriorated in recent months but it did not deter him from contributing to the work of the Society.

At his funeral, Neil was described by his family as someone who lived a life full of love and cherished memories that he shared with everyone he knew.

The mourners there were told about a diary entry of Neil's found in the wake of his death, written about his family around the time of Thea's passing.

It read "Who could wish for a better group of people to see me through. When you read this, thank you, I love you all."

"He will be missed but never forgotten," Neil's first grandson Aaron, said.

# Meeting the needs of the Matthew Talbot Conference

**The Matthew Talbot Hostel is an iconic institution of the St Vincent de Paul Society, serving the needs of men experiencing hardship and disadvantage in the heart of Sydney for decades.**

Located in Woolloomooloo since 1965 after originally being established in Kent Street three decades earlier, the service supports men with crisis accommodation, healthcare, case management and a variety of additional services aimed at restoring hope and dignity.

After years of discussion and a COVID-enforced delay, a special works Conference was formally established following the first wave of the pandemic in early 2021 to support the men residing at the Matthew Talbot Hostel.

Members of the Conference perform a variety of roles including celebrating Mass each month with residents, raising important funds in support of the service, and arranging social connections for people after they leave the service.

During the Palm Sunday Mass, conducted by Bishop Terry Brady, Lissa Votano was elected unopposed as Conference President of the Matthew Talbot Conference.

Other good works performed by the Conference include refreshing the Matthew Talbot Hostel through a donation of chairs for the TV room from Harvey Norman, touching up the walls with a light blue paint job, and installing paintings donated by a generous client in the Talbot and neighbouring Ozanam Learning Centre.



## FROM BUILDING TO RUNNING A VINNIES VAN

**The Ryde-Gladesville Catholic Parish have willed a Vinnies Van into existence through an outstanding fundraising effort enabled through a Vinnies Fundraise Your Way page.**

Our Vinnies Van services provide meals every night at locations across Sydney and wider NSW thanks to the dedication and compassion of volunteers offering a comforting ear to hear the struggles of the most vulnerable in our community.

Having volunteered with our Vinnies Van services on the Bayside van run over several years, Father Greg Morgan, Ryde-Gladesville Parish Priest, and Anna Alessi, Gladesville Conference President, conceived of bringing a similar service to meet the need present in their local community.

Setting an initial fundraising target of \$90,000 to purchase and fit out a suitable vehicle, the outpouring of support for the 'Let's Build A Vinnies Van' campaign exceeded far beyond expectations with an emphatic final total of \$162,682 raised to take the idea of a Vinnies Van from aspiration to reality.

"It was just incredible how much people were donating to this cause. It just goes to show how well-regarded the Society is in this community," Anna said.

The Van is set to begin servicing the community in the new financial year with the excess funds used to ensure the long-term viability of the service by providing meals, blankets, toiletries, snacks and hot beverages to those in need.

"It is our way to reach out to people who are falling on hard times for many reasons and who can barely afford their rent and basic cost of living," Fr Greg said.

If you have a local service or program you would like to fundraise in support of, follow the example set by the Ryde-Gladesville Catholic Parish and register a Fundraise Your Way page today at:

<https://fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au/fundraise-your-way>



## Mini Vinnies marks a milestone

**Mini Vinnies started in NSW 50 years ago. We're now reflecting on what working with Mini Vinnies has meant for our members.**

Helen Smith is the Wilcannia/Forbes Youth representative and is also President of the Sacred Heart Conference in Forbes. She has been working with Mini Vinnies since it began at St Laurence's school in Forbes in 2009 under the guidance of Kerry Turner.

"As a teacher I felt that Mini Vinnies gave the children an appreciation of what the St Vincent de Paul Society is about," explains Helen.

"It gives children an opportunity to put into practice what they learn in religious education. They act rather than just hear about what being a Christian is, and in doing so further develop their Gospel values in their lives."

In Wilcannia/Forbes, Mini Vinnies hosts Gatherings every year at different schools. Helen feels these are invaluable to our smallest Vincentians.

Working with Mini Vinnies has deepened Helen's faith and "awakened the responsibility to teach children faith in a way that meets their needs".

The Youth team are creating a book "Mini Vinnies Memories" to mark this anniversary; if you have thoughts you'd like to share, please email [youth.nsw@vinnies.org.au](mailto:youth.nsw@vinnies.org.au) so we can get in contact.

## YOUTH MEMBERS MEET IN SYDNEY

**Youth conferences from across Sydney gathered for a day of connection and collaboration as part of the inaugural Vinnies Metro Youth Retreat and Planning Day.**

Held at the Society's state support office in Lewisham, the day saw members from youth conferences including UNSW, Sydney University, Notre Dame and UTS hear from leaders and staff about the impact of youth within the Society historically and in the present day.

John Walden, Sydney Archdiocese Central Council President, spoke on the diverse range of work performed by the Society in communities across the state and different opportunities for collaboration with adult conferences.

Members also heard from the Mission and Marketing teams about goal setting and recruiting members to get involved with their good works.

The Vinnies Youth team were also present during O Week with more than 2,200 expressions of interest – a 216% increase from the previous year – recorded at university campuses around the state.

Youth membership within the Society has risen by 125% from the same time last year with 475 members now on board.

Our Vinnies youth members participate in a variety of activities during the year such as running social days for kids and teens, homework programs, volunteering on Vinnies Vans and running social justice advocacy and fundraising initiatives.

To learn more about Vinnies Youth, including becoming a youth member, contact [youth.nsw@vinnies.org.au](mailto:youth.nsw@vinnies.org.au) or visit <https://youthnsw.vinnies.org.au>





## Leaving a mark on Vinnies

**Virginia Boyd has worked as part of the Vinnies retail team for more than 15 years.**

However, her connection to the Society goes back much further.

Growing up in Sydney with generations of family involved as members of the Society, Virginia and her younger sister Kate spent many childhood nights at the Vinnies Shop in Seven Hills.

On one fateful night as a Conference meeting took place in the adjoining shop offices, Virginia wasn't to know as a ten-year-old how a childish act of graffiti would endure in her life for decades to come.

"My sister was drawing and turned her attention to the wall, I freaked out because I thought we were going to get in trouble," Virginia recalls.

"Then just to be a smart allick – knowing I would be the one in trouble from our grandparents for being the oldest – she wrote "Kate and Virginia" even with the surname "Boyd", were here, and drew some pictures around it.

"My grandfather and a shop volunteer named Margot came in to check on us and we got caught red-handed.

"My grandfather, who was the best babysitter ever from a kid's point of view and probably the worst babysitter ever from an adult perspective, looked at it and knew we were going to cop it.

"So, after trying to clean it off, they moved the filing cabinet in front of the graffiti – and hence it stayed for maybe thirty-something years."

Going on to have roles in business development before finding her way back to the Society in the late 2000s, Virginia's long forgotten memory came rushing back when Barbara, a long-serving volunteer who knew Virginia from decades earlier, made a startling discovery during the closure of the Seven Hills shop.

"Barbara started screaming my name, it was like a grandparent who would use your middle name if you were in trouble, and then 'come here.'

"When I got in there, the filing cabinet had been moved and she was pointing at the wall – 'YOU!'

"It took me a good minute to realise what she was talking about. I could see the names 'Kate and Virginia Boyd were here' and I just died. I started laughing and she started getting riled up, 'you've always been a menace!'

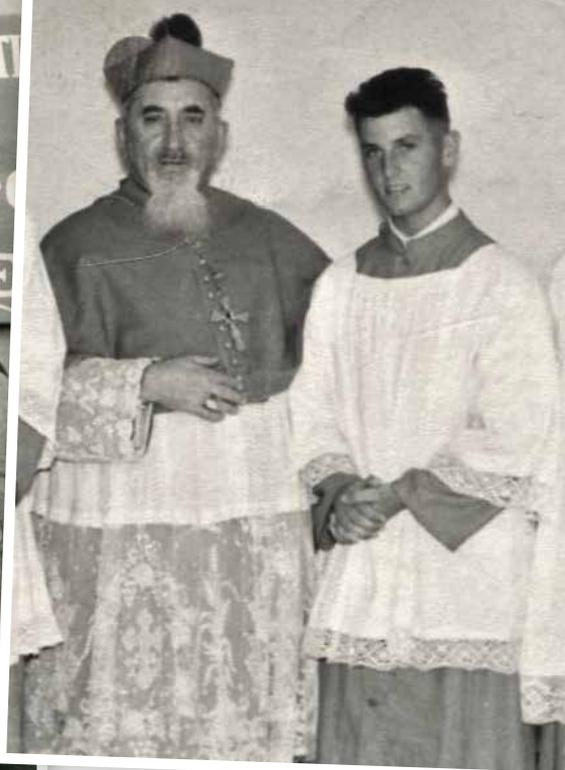
"I remember when I got home, I rang my sister and said, 'you are not going to believe what happened today!'"

Continuing to make a mark with Vinnies by overseeing 88 shops across the Sydney metropolitan region, Virginia's role as regional manager remains grounded in connecting with and sharing in the knowledge of people who give of their time as volunteers and staff.

"Every volunteer has a backstory that teaches you something when you're in the stores.

"I remember this woman, who was a dressmaker in India, at Campsie and she taught me more about clothing than working for Myer ever did. Things about stitching and different zippers, what was valuable and what wasn't.

"All the knowledge that everyone brings from their life that's what makes the really good retailers in our business."



## Faith and football In Memoriam: Anthony John Clarke, 'Tony'

**By the time Anthony Clarke arrived in Australia in 1964, he had already lived a life.**

Born in Newey, England, near Manchester, he worked as a manager of a local co-operative shop before being drafted into the British army, where he spent time in Tripoli and Northern Ireland prior to emigrating with his wife Sylvia to Sydney.

Settling in Blacktown, he worked for several companies before taking up employment as a shipping customs agent with Hardrodt's Australia until retirement. Sylvia and Tony brought up a son, Andrew, while they contributed to community life in Blacktown.

Beyond a deep love for his family, faith and football were prominent in his life.

Tony maintained a strong Catholic faith from an early age, and a cherished memory was serving mass for a local Bishop in Tripoli whilst in the army.

Upon settling in Blacktown, he served as an acolyte of Mary Queen of the Family Parish for 25 years. His other duties included conducting prayer services at nursing homes and helping to prepare liturgies for major church celebrations.

Tony had an affection for the world game, and was a supporter of the English Burnely football club. When his son wished to play football, he identified the lack of a church and school-based football club for students from local Catholic schools.

Working alongside like-minded community members to establish Blacktown's St Patrick's Soccer Football Club, he served as inaugural president, was awarded the club's first life membership and continued to attend annual St Pat's presentations up until the time he could not walk unaided. The tragic passing of Andrew left a profound impact on Tony – though the depth of his grief was rarely revealed outside of a select few.

Reluctantly letting go of his ministry as an acolyte when supranuclear palsy affected his speech, Tony was a beloved parishioner of the Blacktown congregation, while he continued to maintain a presence with St Pat's Soccer Club around the grounds where his legacy endured through the youth of footballers.

Known for his stoicism and dry sense of humour – 'I don't see doctors because they will tell me I am sick,' was one of his favourite sayings – Tony passed peacefully at Our Lady of Consolation Home in Rooty Hill on 16 August 2021.

Having interacted with members and services run locally by the St Vincent de Paul Society through his ministry work, Tony's admiration for the impact of the Society informed his decision to leave a bequest to support people experiencing hardship and disadvantage.

We thank Tony for his generosity, and extend our sympathy to his loved ones for their loss.

# We are not here to guard a museum

## – Strategic Plan 2024-2028

**“For it is as if a wealthy person, going on a journey, summoned his servants and entrusted their property to them; one received five talents, another two and another one”.<sup>1</sup>**

This brief narrative account from the gospel of Matthew, the parable of the talents, tells us that a man entrusted his property to three servants; one five talents, another two and another one, then he went away. On return the man came to settle these accounts. The one with five talents and two talents transformed them adding another five and two talents. But the servant with one hid the talent and returned only the talent given.

This parable holds much significance for the Society today. For we have been given an important gift to be nourished and cherished not just for our own sakes but for the people we walk closely with in service. However, we could hold this gift emotionally in fear and trepidation returning only a single response of compassionate care to those asking our assistance or we could step out of conservative comforts striving for the best in care, practice, excellence in our preferential option for the poor.

Our last present Strategic Plan expressed that “we are spiritual and connected” and that this spirituality espouses the ministry of Jesus advocating radical inclusivity, accompaniment and restoration. Our mission and Vincentian spirit call us to continue this pastoral ministry and to embed it in the very fabric of our story but importantly this must be through listening and understand the signs of the times, today and for tomorrow. Our new Strategic Plan continues to hold these mission imperative actions through our Catholic social principles of dignity of the human person, preferential option for the poor, solidarity and subsidiarity, in striving to transform lives and support communities.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 25.14-30

<sup>2</sup> The Rule 1.6



Pope John XXIII stated at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council; *We are not here to guard a museum, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life* and Pope Francis on numerous occasions have expressed a similar notion. The St Vincent de Paul Society also needs to cultivate and hear these signs of the times as our Mission and our Rule calls us to listen, cultivate and transform of those we serve and those we walk with in service. In this the Rule reminds us that; ***Adaptation to a Changing World, faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions.*** *It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society<sup>2</sup>.*

Let's us pause to remember that ***Spirit-led people never stop growing and never stop changing and recognising the new moments of opportunity.***

This is the mission that inspired our founders, responding to the imperatives of the gospels, and giving voice to the principles of our Catholic Social traditions, is the very voice of our spirituality to always work harder to better our services and to commit ourselves to strive collectively to identify potential efficiencies and as spirit-led leaders recognising new moments of opportunity for our future.

# WHAT IF YOUR MUM, GRANDMA OR SISTER BECAME HOMELESS?



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