



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW *good works*

SUMMER 2022
ISSUE NO. 90

Vision



**NEW SHOP
OPENS
IN DUBBO**

**VACCINATING OUR
MOST VULNERABLE**

**140 YEARS IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

**RECORD RESULT FOR
COMMUNITY SLEEPOUT**



4



6



11



13



17



18



21



25



29



30

CONTENTS

- 4 NEWS
- 10 ACROSS THE STATE
- 16 FUNDRAISING AND PARTNERSHIPS
- 21 VINNIES SERVICES
- 23 SOCIAL JUSTICE
- 25 MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS
- 28 YOUTH
- 29 SHOPS
- 30 SPIRITUAL REFLECTION
- 31 IN MEMORIAM

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

Supervising Editor: Steven Murphy

Contributors: Lachlan Jones, Robert Crosby, Robin Osborne, Leo Tucker

Designed by: Claudia Williams, Claire Hutchinson

All correspondence can be sent to:

Director, Communications & Marketing
St Vincent de Paul Society
PO Box 5, Petersham NSW 2049
Email: media.nsw@vinnies.org.au

© St Vincent de Paul Society NSW 2021
ABN: 91 161 127 340

We'd love to hear what the Society is doing in your area. Send us an email, or call with an idea or a story or news piece: media.nsw@vinnies.org.au.

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Christmas is a time of great importance for the St Vincent de Paul Society and the wider community as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child.

As a major tradition of deep spiritual and religious significance, it is socially celebrated as a time where people come together with

loved ones. The Christmas season will take on additional weight this year after so many moments were unable to be celebrated in person as a result of the pandemic.

So many plans were disrupted in the final days of June and only now are loved ones able to be reunited in person.

As we spend time reconnecting without the distance of a screen, it is important that we keep those for whom Christmas is a time of sorrow and hardship in our thoughts.

Every society requires connection to properly function; we all have a responsibility to keep one another safe and uphold a social contract in the name of collective good.

With 2021 coming to a close at the same time travel restrictions are easing, I am looking forward to seeing the Vincentian spirit of good works in action by meeting with many of you in person in the coming year.

I am particularly proud of this edition of Vision acknowledging the 140th anniversary of the Society in NSW. Leo Tucker has chronicled some of our most storied accomplishments during that time on page 6.

The Society has grown in scale and impact over time, yet through so much change, the compassion we have for those in need and each other endures.

Denis Walsh
Provisional State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

CEO'S MESSAGE



Dear friends,

Thank you for the resilience you have shown throughout this extraordinary year.

So much has happened over the past twelve months, yet there have been times where it has been difficult to know where one day ends and another begins. Amid

so much uncertainty, concern over daily case numbers and interest in vaccination rates, the members and volunteers of the Society have remained committed to being of service to those in need of a hand up.

We cannot say with certainty that life will return to normal next year. The volatile nature of the virus is something that will almost definitely present new challenges to contend with.

For as draining as the pandemic has been in so many ways, it has provided a rare opportunity to take stock and assess the things we place importance on as individuals and as a collective. Connection is a

fundamental part of any society, but it is especially resonant in the work we do across communities every day.

The heart of our work rests in being with people. The assistance we provide is crucially important, but the compassionate act of being present and giving of ourselves to another in need is what is core to the St Vincent de Paul Society.

We have been able to achieve so much this year in the face of challenge after challenge. As you read through these pages, you should look on with pride, especially in the stories of our disability and health services working to combat COVID-19.

I wish you a happy and holy Christmas and a 2022 filled with connection.

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



Stories from our vaccination hub

The COVID-19 vaccine clinic at the Ozanam Learning Centre in Woolloomooloo recently provided hundreds of doses each day it was open.

The joint effort by the St Vincent de Paul Society, St Vincent's Hospital, the Kirketon Road Centre, and the City of Sydney has been credited with immunising people in high-risk groups.

Caryn Gottcent, one of the frontline nurses who has been vaccinating people at the clinic since it opened in May, says the recent lower attendance is a positive sign.

"At its peak, people were very patiently waiting up to four hours for a vaccine but numbers have come down considerably since then.

"I'm confident that most of the people we were aiming to provide the vaccine to have been immunised.

"It's really important that people experiencing disadvantage have been given access because many of them have underlying health conditions that place them at high risk," Ms Gottcent said.

As part of a research project with the Queensland University of Technology, a blueprint for the vaccine hub was recently published.

The information has been made freely available to help healthcare providers set up their own vaccine hubs for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The model of care it describes is also relevant to health workers trying to target other hard to reach or marginalised communities.

One of the people grateful to have received their vaccination through the clinic is Carole Ann King, a local resident and vaccine advocate who has encouraged many people to get immunised.

"We've got some non-believers," Carole Ann says, talking about how she's felt it's important for her to show people experiencing homelessness that the vaccine is safe and effective.

To people who remain hesitant, Carole Ann has a simple message.

"You run over and you have a flu shot because you're hoping to prevent having a flu.

"This is the same thing.

"It's better to try and prevent something than get it and be sorry," she says.

Speaking about the vaccination clinic itself, Carole Ann has nothing but good things to say.

"It is so professionally done," she says.

"And even after you've had the jab, they send you off to another area to sit and relax and have a cup of coffee.

"I can't speak more highly," she says.

Carole Ann is also generous in her praise for the healthcare workers.

"The care, the support – if anyone's got queries the staff walk along the line, it's beautifully done," she says.

Since receiving the second dose of vaccine, Carole Ann says she's feeling less stressed as a result of the pandemic.

"It did give me a sense of confidence," she says.

Playing a part to prevent COVID-19

Earlier this year, the St Vincent de Paul Society was celebrating the fact that supported workers with disabilities at Ozanam Industries had assembled one million COVID-19 testing kits.

NSW Health Pathology, Australia's largest public pathology organisation, commissioned the work during the pandemic to keep up with the soaring needs for COVID tests.

We're now very pleased to say that the supported workers have made more than 1.5 million COVID-19 testing kits.

1.3 million have been assembled at the city sites in West Ryde and Stanmore, while 200,000 more have been put together at Castlereagh Industries in Coonamble.

In a community effort, the production line at Castlereagh Industries has received assistance from volunteers at the SES, the Lions and Quota clubs, and local Aboriginal kids involved with the Clontarf Foundation.

The testing kits comprise nasal and throat swabs, a storage vial and a sealable poly-bag.

Boxes of assembled kits are then loaded up and despatched to NSW Health Pathology.

Along with vaccinating and contact tracing, testing is a key component in the fight against COVID-19's spread.

The Vinnies centres employ people with disability who undertake tasks and training tailored to their individual circumstances.

They also do assembly-line work for organisations such as HarperCollins, World Wildlife Fund, Caritas and Future Logistics.

'We provide meaningful, sustainable and valuable employment to over 100 people with disability,' said Rod Silber, Business Development Manager Disability and Inclusion at Stanmore.

'This gives individuals a sense of worth, an opportunity to develop a variety of new skills and the chance to make new friends. The centres provide a professional, customer-focused service to some of Australia's most respected companies, State Government departments and community groups.'

One worker, Sue, who is vision impaired, had been at Stanmore for more than 21 years.

She said she enjoyed the work because she could utilise her skill at 'feeling the job'.

'It's like I'm contributing in a small way to ensuring that the NSW community can be kept safe during this pandemic,' Sue said.

NSW Health Pathology's COVID-19 Operations Lead, Michael Crowther said at the start of the pandemic NSW Health Pathology staff were packing the test kits at the end of a busy shift in the lab and in the Newcastle office.

'As you can imagine our staff were exhausted doing this on top of the normal workload,' he said.

'Thanks to their help, we can get a steady supply of testing kits to frontline staff who need regular testing in hotel quarantine and airports, special health hospitals and to testing clinics around NSW.

'I'd like to give a big shout out and thank you to everyone who has helped, from Sydney's Inner West and all the way out to Coonamble in Western NSW. It's a great opportunity to show that people with a disability are making a meaningful contribution to the community during the pandemic.

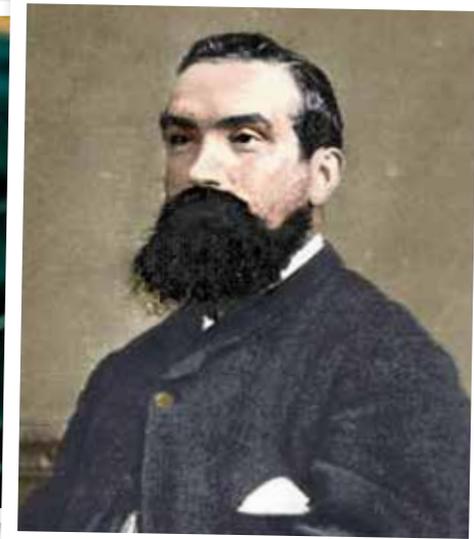
'We couldn't do it without their help.' Michael said.

Rod Silber added, "This work was extremely exciting for our supported employees and the support staff at both of our facilities. Our priority is to ensure that each person has the opportunity to develop their full potential as a member of the Australian workforce through effective, relevant and ongoing training.

'Our support staff work with each employee to achieve their personal and individual goals.'



Photo: Oliver Brown/
Coonamble Times



Charles Gordon O'Neill, the man who founded the first St Vincent de Paul Society Conference in Sydney.

140th Anniversary of the Society in NSW

Leo Tucker looks back on the origins of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW and charts some of the milestones achieved over the past 140 years.

A brief reading from St Paul's letter to his community in Colossae, "Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as if it were for God and not for others...It is God that you are serving."

T.S. Eliot reminds us that *"Home is where we start from"*. On the evening of the 24th of July 1881, 140 years ago this year, in the crypt area of St Patrick's Church in Grosvenor Street, The Rocks, the first Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in NSW found its home in Sydney. This meeting, with the support – spiritually and physically – of the Marist Fathers, was the final coming together of much work in raising awareness of the importance of the Society's charitable works, especially in the slums of the dock areas of the Rocks.

Charles Gordon O'Neill built the Society during the 1880s, applying the experience he had gained in Glasgow and New Zealand. During those formative years, he established additional Society Conferences in Sydney; those of St Francis's Haymarket, St Mary's Cathedral, St Benedict's Broadway, St Thomas' Lewisham, even to as far away as Braidwood. Such early growth of the Society outside of the initial establishment at St Patrick's and the continued communications between O'Neill and the

International Council was possibly the reason the Society remained strong in NSW.

In addition to mainstream assistance such as food, clothing, travel, and medicines, he gained approval from the International Council to provide money for rent in support of Sydney's struggling families. Providing rent assistance was unique and only particular to Sydney.

In 1889, St Patrick's Conference in the Rocks instituted a risky new project. This was the St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank that was established primarily for encouraging habits of saving and economy in children, particularly in The Rocks and other inner Sydney suburbs. It was used by Catholic and non-Catholic



The first Vinnies Shop, opened in Newtown in 1922, will celebrate its centenary in 2022.



The Matthew Talbot Hostel is recognised as an icon of the Society's work in NSW, supporting men experiencing hardship and homelessness in the heart of Sydney.

depositors alike (the Society embraced inclusivity from its origins); parents also could be depositors. No limit was placed on the amount deposited. This crude banking system saved many struggling families through crushing economic depression years.

In the 1920s, the Society established our centres of charity. There is more to our Vinnies shops than pre-loved clothes. They are a place of our Vincentian spirit lived out in the marketplace of local communities. Since their inception and now with more than 220 stores across NSW, the humble Vinnies Shop offers a beacon of hope to many and are an important fabric in the story of our state and nation.



The Society continues to make an impact every day as a member-based organisation and leading social service provider. In 2021, members of the Society led a petition, which was debated in NSW Parliament, calling for greater investment in social housing.

In 1938, a different journey began for us at 420 Kent Street. This site was formally known as St John's Church Sydney and was the first establishment of the Matthew Talbot Hostel – blessed by Archbishop, later Cardinal, Norman Gilroy on 25th October 1938. It was dedicated by the Society as a hostel for “friendless” men and was named after the Dublin dockworker and reformed alcoholic, Matthew Talbot.

Today, as we continue our journey of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW, let us ask ourselves, how well do we really listen to the voices in need? Do we listen to their stories? Do we acknowledge their potentials? How do we care through the values of *Compassion, Respect, Commitment, Integrity, Empathy, Advocacy, and Courage*?

Happy birthday to you all as One Society of devoted members; dedicated staff; and compassionate, caring volunteers. May we all in one Vincentian spirit continue our good works through tough times and times of celebrations and may the eternal God bless us each step in the journeys ahead of service to the vulnerable working in compassion for a more just and hope filled society.

This, then, seems to be the work of the Spirit: to keep you growing is to keep you vulnerable to life and love itself.

Notice that the major metaphors for the Spirit are always dynamic, energetic, and moving. Spirit-led people never stop growing and never stop changing and recognising the new moments of opportunity. (Fr Ron Rolheiser)

VINNIES LAUNCHES RAINBOW PRIDE NETWORK

The Vinnies Rainbow Pride Network was launched in August to further our commitment towards creating a diverse and inclusive community for LGBTQIA+ people and their allies.

Staff from across the state joined over an online morning tea as part of the launch, which took place on Wear It Purple Day – an initiative led by young people to foster supportive, safe, empowering and inclusive environments for rainbow young people.

As part of the discussion, Brenna Harding, Vice President – Wear It Purple, shared her experience of becoming involved with Wear It Purple and offered words on how to be an effective ally.

LGBTQIA+ defined:

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual

Transgender

Queer / Questioning

Intersex

Asexual / Ally

+ recognises that other identities, and that our understanding of the diversity of sexuality, gender and sex is evolving.



“A key part to having a conversation is listening.”

Jac Tomlins, Manager, Gender and Sexuality of Vinnies Victoria's VincentCare, spoke on the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ people experiencing homelessness, family and domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, and mental health conditions. Through her role, Jac helped VincentCare in Victoria achieve accreditation as the first Catholic organisation to receive a Rainbow tick for being safe and inclusive for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Nathaniel Alderson, Aged Care Quality Coordinator – Uniting, provided an insight into how the Uniting Pride Network was formed and the importance of diversity within organisations.

“In order to build safe, inclusive and welcoming environments, we need people with lived experience leading the way.”

The Vinnies Rainbow Pride Network was formally launched by Kate Temby (Executive Director, Corporate Services).

Michelle Kot (Members, Volunteers and Regional Operations), Peter Gormly (Mission and Spirituality), Priscilla Dawson (Vinnies Services) and Marj O'Callaghan (People and Culture) were among the members who spoke about the vision and activities of the network.

To learn more about the Vinnies Rainbow Network, contact Marj O'Callaghan at marj.ocallaghan@vinnies.org.au



CDS wins big at Golden Crow Awards

Our Container Deposit Scheme achieved a huge result at Wagga Wagga's annual Golden Crow Awards.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW won the award for Excellence in Sustainability, in recognition of being an organisation with a demonstrated commitment to sustainable business practices and working to reduce operational impacts on the environment.

Held online by the local Business Chamber in August, our Commercial Enterprise team were unable to accept the award in person due to restrictions brought on by the state-wide lockdown.

The award, sponsored by Wagga Wagga City Council, was based on a nomination highlighting the Society's ambition to play a part in reducing the 160 million containers that are littered throughout the state each year.

With the creation of a bulk sorting depot in Wagga Wagga, developed in partnership with Tomra Cleanaway, in April 2019, the Container Deposit Scheme has been able to collect, sort and process waste containers that would

otherwise end up in landfill. The initiative also provides an additional revenue stream which helps to fund our good works in communities.

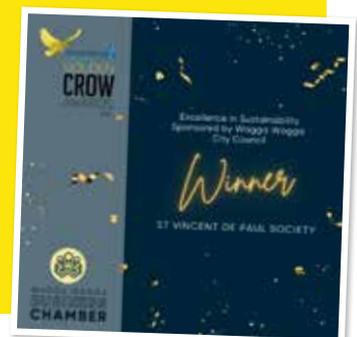
The Container Deposit Scheme in Wagga Wagga has proven to be a hit with locals as the site processes 1.25 million containers on average each month.

“We're incredibly proud to be recognised for our work in creating a more sustainable society,” said Mitch Saddler, Vinnies NSW Director – Commercial Enterprise

“The Container Deposit Scheme has been a huge achievement over the course of our last Strategic Plan, and we hope to grow the program in years to come.

“It's really pleasing to see how the Container Deposit Scheme has been embraced by the Wagga Wagga community with around 500-600 people using the depot each week.”

The Society operates additional Container Deposit Scheme sites in Penrith, Unanderra, South Nowra, Cardiff, Dubbo and a new site in Tweed Heads, which opened earlier this year.



Vinnies commits to new Reconciliation Action Plan

It is with great pleasure that we announce that the Society's 2021-2023 Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) has been approved by Reconciliation Australia.

The RAP has been made available to members, volunteers, and staff and will guide them on the journey towards embedding cultural knowledge and understanding across the Society.

Our RAP is supported by a Cultural Competency Framework which consists of a range of documents and strategies to help fully implement its goals over the course of the next few years.

These include:

- The RAP Implementation Strategy
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Retention Strategy
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness programs which include:
 - The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Inclusion and Safety (induction) program
 - The Gan na Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program
- A set of Guiding Principles outlining the Cultural Competency Framework
- A Community Engagement Plan
- State-wide Consultation committees:
 - The Bulbulwul Baya Aboriginal Advisory Group
 - Vinnies State-wide RAP Working Group
 - Regional RAP Committees
- A calendar of reconciliation events
- A cultural protocols document
- The First Nations Employees Network
- A Reconciliation Action Group on our company-wide communication system, Workplace
- The St Vincent de Paul Society Acknowledgement of Country

The introduction of a set of guiding principles and a RAP implementation strategy will provide clear directions on how everyone within the Society can actively participate in the RAP.

This is the Society's second innovate RAP, after the completion of our first one for the years 2020-21.

There are four types of RAP: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch, and Elevate – each with their own requirements that need to be approved by Reconciliation Australia.

Respectively, these four types are summarised as scoping, implementing, embedding, and leading reconciliation.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW chose to begin at the Innovate level, rather than Reflect.

Vinnies takes action on inclusiveness for people with disability

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has published a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) — a plan for the whole of Vinnies to promote inclusion and ensure people with disability are able to participate fully in all our programs.

It sets out four key priority areas for action:

1. Commitment to an inclusive culture
2. Accessible communication and technology
3. Meaningful employment and career pathways
4. Equitable access to our buildings and services

Individual goals include ensuring members, volunteers and staff have access to knowledge about disability and ways to be inclusive; improving recruitment outcomes for people with disability; and improving access to our buildings and services.

"Our tradition challenges us to identify the unjust structures that cause disadvantage," St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, Jack de Groot, writes in the document's foreword.

"In this Disability Inclusion Action Plan, we formalise our commitment to identifying and reshaping the processes, structures and infrastructure of the Society in NSW which limit the full participation of people with disability.

"We commit to examining and challenging the attitudes that perpetuate stereotypes and myths.

"We commit to embedding more inclusive ways of working and to increasing access to our physical and virtual spaces.

"We commit to providing opportunities for meaningful employment and career progression for people with disability," Mr de Groot continued.

Input from people with a lived experience of disability has been fundamental to the development of our strategies and actions included in the DIAP.

The DIAP covers the years 2021-2025 and a Disability Inclusion Advisory Group will provide strategic advice to guide throughout the implementation of this plan.

Fire-hit communities still rebuilding



Despite its terrifying images, the recent series Fires on ABC television sometimes felt – to outsiders, at least – like ancient history. What happened was back in the ‘black summer’ of 2019-20 and time has moved on.

Except that many individuals and communities in eastern NSW continue to feel the impacts of those devastating bushfires as they face the daily challenges of rebuilding, re-stocking, and putting their lives back together again.

It is hard to comprehend the financial and emotional effect of such cataclysmic events, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic dominating our lives (and the media) for so long.

Vinnies is making major contributions to the recovery effort through two initiatives: the Bushfire Community Grants Program (BCG) and the Bushfire Recovery and Community Development Program (BRCD).

Both are funded through the Vinnies NSW Bushfire Appeal that was launched swiftly after the fires struck and was supported strongly by the broader community.

The BRCD, budgeted to outlay \$2.2M into 2022, has a longer-term focus on rebuilding community cohesion and improving the individual sense of wellbeing of local residents, as well as helping communities to be better prepared for future disasters. The program engages with local communities, building partnerships and supporting them to achieve their own vision and aspirations for their area.

“The strength of the Vinnies brand was apparent in the first six months of the program,” said program manager John Fenech.

“To date the program has had more than 15 serious propositions and Vinnies has formalised partnerships with two organisations and is in negotiations with several others, including TAFE NSW.”

The BRCD program is working closely with Vinnies conferences in targeted areas such as Kempsey, Grafton, Nowra, and Ulladulla, with more to come in the future. The program facilitates and coordinates community activities, events and training designed to develop relevant skills and empower communities on the road to recovery.

On the ground work ranges from facilitating first-aid training and provision of equipment, to working with an Aboriginal Land Council to foster cultural burning practices, facilitating therapy sessions and visiting individual households to help them put in place emergency preparedness plans.

Vinnies has helped the Country Women’s Association in Kempsey to hold ‘Scone-versations’ to bring locals together to talk about issues of concern over a cuppa and a scone.

Another activity has been supporting the Willawarrin Women’s Group, in a mountainous location west of Kempsey, to knit woollen teddy bears for not-for-profit StandBy Inclusion, which visits households affected by the loss of family or community members to suicide.

The BCG program offers project grants of up to \$30,000 to help restore bushfire-affected communities. The third and final round of Community Grants was recently finalised, with \$674,884 provided to 32 organisations in bushfire affected areas. Round one saw 21 organisations provided with \$326,013 and round two saw 23 organisations provided with \$326,928.

In the earlier rounds, a diverse range of projects was undertaken, with sustainability a major ingredient. These include the innovative ‘Live at Sir Henry’s’, a revival of community performance in the arts-focused Tenterfield area, centred on the iconic Sir Henry Parkes School of Arts building.

At Glen Innes, Vinnies provided the Natural Resources Advisory Committee with \$300 vouchers to support ‘Fire Break’ dinners at local restaurants (alcohol excluded). The gatherings were a rare opportunity for people to support each other during this challenging time, reducing the impact of isolation and fostering mental wellbeing.

People affected by natural disasters such as drought, fire, and flood need help immediately as well as into the long-term. As ever, Vinnies stands ready to help out.

New Vinnies Shop Opens in Dubbo

A new-look Vinnies Shop has opened in Dubbo just as COVID-19 restrictions have eased throughout New South Wales.

Located in prime retail position in the main street of town, the 1,500 square metre site is one of the largest in the state and has already proven a hit with locals and shoppers from surrounding towns eager to discover a pre-loved treasure.

Vinnies Dubbo will also act as a sorting hub for surrounding shops in the North West region, while plans are in place for the local Conference, St Brigid's, to move into the space in the new year.

The official opening was attended by CEO, Jack de Groot, following the easing of travel restrictions from Greater Sydney into regional areas, as well as members and volunteers from neighbouring communities.

Uncle "Riverbank" Frank Doolan and Aunty Pat Doolan performed a Welcome to Country as traditional owners of the unceded land of the Wiradjuri people. Dugald Saunders MP, State Member for Dubbo, was also in attendance on the day.

Vinnies Dubbo is the first shop to undergo a redesign featuring new-look signage which will be rolled out in the future throughout the state.

2022 marks the centenary of the first Vinnies Shop opening in Newtown. Over the past 100 years, Vinnies Shops have become an institution of the Society's good works with 225 currently operating in New South Wales.

The funds raised from items sold in Vinnies Shops help to support services and programs assisting people experiencing disadvantage and hardship.



Vinnies Christmas hampers brighten a tough season for many

St Vincent de Paul Society members are once again delivering Christmas hampers to people doing it tough this festive season.

Throughout December, conferences will be providing hampers of food and toys to their communities.

The hampers contain everything from leg ham, vegetables, and pasta; to Christmas pudding, custard and lollies; to breakfast cereal, jam, and Vegemite.

Some conferences have opted to supply food vouchers

instead out of concern for the people we assist.

"They're worried about people carrying heavy parcels because they feel they may be too heavy to get them on busses whilst also manoeuvring prams etc and also because of COVID," Lisa Dalton, Vinnies Support Centre Coordinator for Gosford, says.

Whichever way the help is delivered, it will provide some Christmas cheer to people experiencing disadvantage.

"We've started wrapping toys for Christmas gifts for the children.

"The conference members know their clients really well.

"The conference has a list of who they're giving a hamper to and they know the children's ages so that they can give age appropriate gifts," Lisa says.

Locked down, but not forgotten

During the most recent lockdown we have assisted hundreds of people who have been impacted in a variety of ways.

For those who have lost livelihoods, experienced illness and faced uncertain futures, our members and staff have been there to offer a hand up.

Here are some messages of thanks from those we have supported.

Thank you so much for all the help you have offered.

I can't express how much lighter and less stressed I am feeling now, it's helping to get my mental health and head space in a better position. You can't put a price on that!

Zac*, lost work because of the pandemic.

Your compassion [and] understanding far exceeds what I perceive most people think of the service you provide... Thank you for caring, thank you for making a difference.

Brendan, discharged from hospital without a home to recuperate in.

I cannot express how much this has helped me get through this horrible time I'm experiencing since contracting COVID. You managed to get the food to me in a matter of hours and I truly appreciate it more than you will ever know.

Thank you again for being such an angel.

Leigh*, isolating after testing positive to COVID-19.

I sincerely appreciate the above and beyond attention to detail that you have given to our case, calling us after hours, always calling back promptly, your compassion and enthusiastic friendly voice.

It has always been a pleasure talking to you in these grave times.

Tina*, staying in crisis accommodation due to domestic violence.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without Vinnies"

Christine* is one of the many people we have been able to assist in times of hardship. In her own words, she describes the support she has received from our members and services.

I am so grateful to be able to share a story and journey with you about the kindness and support Vinnies has provided me over many years.

I hope this gives inspiration to hold on when one thinks there is nothing left except the will and encouragement to believe.

Vinnies aspires to help the poor with love, respect, justice, hope, joy and dignity. Their staff and volunteers share in making a compassionate society and we are all so very blessed to have their assistance.

After years of repeated personal setbacks, inability to work, humiliating, condescending bureaucrats and endless defeats, I reached out to Vinnies for help.

I am extremely independent and proud and found these encounters terribly difficult. I felt like it was the end of the world – in fact it was a new beginning.

At my age (or whatever stage you are in life), in my wildest dreams, I never imagined the thought of being homeless with very few possessions or living on the streets. Thanks to Vinnies, I know how fortunate I am every minute of the day and feel safe, secure and no longer lonely and isolated.

Vinnies helped with finding a place I can finally call my home. They assisted me with furniture, household goods, a fridge, blankets, food vouchers and advice with finances.

My case worker Lauren is such a wonderful human and still contacts me just to have a chat and see how my health and mental wellbeing is going. Lauren's emotional support is invaluable and keeps me going when I think everything around me is broken and lost.

According to statistics there are about 116,000 people homeless on any given night. We must endeavour to assist Vinnies in every possible way to increase their public profile, widen donations, and reach out for additional funding by the government to broaden their services to have a sustainable base to continue this support. The efforts from each and every one of us in whatever small way will be invaluable.

Words cannot express enough my gratitude and thankfulness to the entire Vinnies team. I trust with my heart and soul that peace, confidence and contentment is in reach for all.

*Name changed for privacy reasons.



Don Hewitt, surrounded by his family, whilst accepting a papal honour from Most Reverend Michael Kennedy, Bishop of Armidale.



Above, right: Paul Burton, Armidale Central Council President; Don Hewitt, Member, St Augustine's Armidale Conference; Paul Robinson, President St Augustine's Armidale Conference

Papal honour for Armidale's 'Go to Man'

"Don has always acted out of faith to bring hope through serving in a sensitive manner to those in need" – Papal Medal Award Citation for Don Hewitt

The citation accompanying the Cross Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice ('for the Church and the Pope') awarded to Don Hewitt for his service to the St Vincent de Paul Society describes the humble octogenarian as the 'Go to Man' in his local area for over fifty years.

His achievements are many and varied, from countless home visits to "the elderly, lonely, sick, broken, poor, addicted, neglected", through to his key role in the founding and running of Freeman House, Armidale's alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre.

The Vatican's recognition of the man named as 'Donaldo Arturo Hewitt' is an honour established by Pope Leo XIII in 1888 and given for distinguished service to the Church by lay people and clergy. It is the highest award that can be awarded to the laity. The medal, cast in gold, depicts the Apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the centre of the Cross. The decoration's ribbon is yellow and white, the colours of the Papacy.

The award was presented to Don by Bishop Michael Kennedy at the Mass at Saints Mary and Joseph's Cathedral, Armidale. Members of his family were in attendance, along with many parishioners and admirers of his work over the years.

The award citation notes, "Don possesses a calm capacity to be with a person, listens carefully and maintains a humble manner which affirms others... Don is ever prepared to give to those in need that rare, golden gift: his time and enduring patience. There are people with addictions who have consulted Don on a regular basis for years."

Don first joined the Society in 1966 and was awarded Life Membership in June 2015. He continues to this day in a mentor role, drawing people back to the ideals and spirit of the Society.

Don and Barbara (nee Carey, a Society member for many years) were married in 1961. They have six children — who say their father was always there for them — and six grandchildren.

Paul Robinson, President of St Augustine's Armidale Conference, offered congratulations on behalf of all Vincentians, noting that the Cross Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice is a merit award granted in recognition of service to the church and society.

"It is granted as a symbol of recognition to those who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in cooperating with the efforts of the church. It is the highest award the Pope gives to a lay person, and richly deserved by our brother, Don Hewitt."

A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENTS



The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Annual Report 2020/21 is available online at <https://nsw202021.vinnies.org.au/>

In the face of immense challenges over the past twelve months, the many highlights achieved by the Society include:

- Assisting more than 35,000 people with \$7.7 million in financial and material assistance through our state-wide network of members
- Developing a Pfizer vaccination hub for vulnerable members of the community in inner Sydney
- The Build Homes, Build Hope petition, calling for greater investment in social housing, being debated in NSW Parliament

A printed Year in Review report will be distributed to Conference in early 2022.

Blankets Make A Difference In North East

Our Laurieton Conference accepted a donation of 36 hand-crafted blankets thanks to the generosity of the Ocean Club Resort Knitting Club.



The blankets have been distributed to people impacted by floods and experiencing hardship in the local community. The OCR Knitting Club, based in Lake Cathie, regularly meet to knit and stay connected, while contributing most of what they make to various charities in the area.

Jeff Downie, Hastings Regional Council President, presented the group with a certificate of appreciation prior to parts of the state going into lockdown.

Deniliquin Unites For Homelessness Week

Vinnies members, volunteers and staff came together during Homelessness Week to hold a pop-up soup kitchen in Deniliquin.

The COVID-safe event was held in the lead-up to the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout, with all donations enabling the local St Michael's Conference to continue supporting people facing hardship with food, clothing, household items and other assistance.

While the Vinnies Services team served hot soup to the local community in the main street, members and volunteers set up a makeshift shop filled with items to keep people warm during winter.



Reflecting at The Well

Vincetians from across the state have gathered online each Wednesday night as part of *The Well*, an evening of spiritual reflection.

The Well, inspired by the conversations and reflections Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, has provided an opportunity for members, volunteers and staff to share fraternal spirituality through prayer, music, scripture, spiritual readings and conversation.

The evenings, led by the Mission Spirituality and Pastoral Care team, have been well received and are set to return in 2022. For more information, contact Leo Tucker at leo.tucker@vinnies.org.au.

State Council President Elections

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (NSW) is seeking expressions of interest for the position of State Council President.

The State Council president will hold the position for a four-year term, commencing in early 2022, while also holding the positions of Chair of the Trustee Board; Company member director; and NSW representative on the National Council.

TO BE ELIGIBLE, APPLICANTS MUST:

- have been a Conference member for at least five years or a Council member for at least three years
- possess a current National Criminal Record Check
- not be the subject of a current complaint or grievance process within the Society
- to the best of their knowledge, have no legal impediments that would affect their ability to be a State Council President of Board Director.

For more information, and to receive a copy of the Expressions of Interest document, please email: nazli.munir@vinnies.org.au

Nominations close on Monday 17 January 2022.

**State Council President Elections will be held on
Friday 18 February 2022.**

CORPORATE PARTNERS CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We are so thankful for the contributions our corporate partners have made during a time when so many people have been impacted by the on-going challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses have an enormous influence on the way society functions and can take action to bring about change for the collective good. As we head into the Christmas season and the year to come, we look forward to continuing to work with our corporate partners in order to make a difference to the lives of people in need every day!

IGA CHRISTMAS APPEAL

IGA has once again partnered with Vinnies by holding an appeal this Christmas. During November and December, shoppers can purchase a \$2 Christmas Bauble and specially marked Community Chest products, during December, from participating IGA stores to help Vinnies make a difference to people in need. IGA has supported Vinnies nationally during the festive season since 2012; this year's appeal will help to address the impacts of COVID-19 which has seen an increase in people at risk or experiencing homelessness and seeking assistance due to domestic violence.

AMAZON AUSTRALIA

Amazon Australia is teaming up with Vinnies once again by providing more than 1000 students experiencing disadvantage across the country with the essentials they need ahead of the 2022 school year. As part of Amazon's global commitment to support disadvantaged students to succeed at school, Vinnies will distribute a thousand \$100 gift cards to ensure students can thrive in the classroom.



SUPRE FOUNDATION

In response to the growing rates of domestic and family violence taking place during the pandemic, the Supre Foundation came on board with Vinnies to support our vital service delivery work. At the conclusion of the campaign in June 2021, the Supre Foundation had raised over \$200,000 to provide women and children across Australia access to a safe place to live, food, clothing and other support at our refuges. "Having this extra funding allows the Vinnies Domestic Violence services to meet the individual needs of women and children seeking assistance," said Brett Macklin, Vinnies NSW Director of Housing and Homelessness.

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

The Johnson & Johnson Family of companies confirmed a three-and-a-half-year partnership worth over half a million dollars to fund the Vinnies NSW First Nations Traineeship and Development program. As part of program, the Society will increase its First Nations staff by 30% and leadership roles by 5%, along with creating partnerships with First Nations organisations and increasing cultural awareness across the organisation.

Additionally, J&J funded the renovation of two kitchenettes at the Marion Centre to ensure women escaping domestic violence can cook their own meals, connect and share with each other in order to foster a sense of community and independence. J&J also facilitated the installation of a keypad entrance system to give residents the autonomy to come and go in a secure environment.

GENWORTH

We are so thrilled to welcome Genworth back into our family of corporate partners. Through a significant donation of \$300,000, Genworth will support the Our Lady of the Way refuge, enable a newly created role for a Domestic Violence Support Case Worker in the Inner West and Eastern Suburbs of Sydney as well as support for the Metropolitan Van Service.





DEFYING COVID WITH A RECORD RESULT

The NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout achieved a record result in August with more than \$290,000 raised in support of locals experiencing hardship.

Taking place as a state-wide event for the fourth year in a row, the spread of COVID-19 throughout Greater Sydney and into regional parts of the state required it to be held virtually with participants sleeping out on the night of Friday 27 August in backyards, cars and couches.

In addition to braving the cold for a night, participants took part in a webinar highlighting the impacts of homelessness and disadvantage occurring in their communities. Some of the issues raised included the 51,000 applicants currently on the waitlist for social housing in NSW and the number of people recorded sleeping rough during the annual street count.

More than 220 people slept out on the night with all funds raised going towards local Vinnies Conferences and services in Albury, Armidale, Central Coast, Deniliquin, Dubbo, Maitland, Murrumbidgee, Southern Highlands, Tweed Heads, Wagga Wagga and Western Sydney.

Some of the services to benefit from the funds raised include Fred's Place in Tweed Heads, Edel Quinn in Wagga Wagga and Freeman House in Armidale.

The majority of funds raised will enable local Conferences, Care and Support Centres and Community Hubs to continue assisting people facing hardship and disadvantage with household bills, food, clothing and other support.

St Vincent de Paul Society members supported more than 35,000 people during the past year by providing \$7.7 million in financial and material assistance.

We are so thankful to all our participants, donors, supporters and sponsors who stepped up in the face of exceptional circumstances to raise \$296,841– our highest ever total for the event.

The continued challenges brought on by the pandemic threatened to cancel the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout but, through the dedication and resilience of everyone involved, the funds raised will make a profound difference at a time when so many people are doing it tough.



A Season of New Life

Through our Christmas Appeal, we are sharing the story of Heidi and Nikolas, who now have a home to raise their young family thanks to the support of Vinnies.

"You'd hear someone walk past and think 'are they going to do something to us or are we going to be ok?'"

For Heidi and Nikolas, each day living while homeless was gripped with fear.

Fending for themselves in a retail store tent, with only a dog named DJ for companionship, the couple's circumstances were all the more dire due to Heidi being halfway through her pregnancy.

Having both struggled with addiction, which spiraled to the point of homelessness, Nikolas reached out to Vinnies for assistance with food and pillows to add a small comfort to their makeshift residence.

Staring down the prospect of bringing a baby boy into the world, without the security of a place to call home, Heidi felt a despair she never had before.

"We spent two weeks in the tent, [that] was the most that I'd ever prayed, just for some sort of movement in our lives," recalls Heidi.

Experiencing the reality of homelessness faced by more than 116,000 people on any given night across Australia, the movement Heidi had hoped for came in the form of Ian and Sheila.

As long-term Vinnies members experienced in supporting vulnerable people, Ian and Sheila acted on instinct to restore stability in Heidi and Nikolas' time of need.

"When the woman [Heidi] came out of the tent and we saw she was pregnant, I thought 'We're not leaving her here. We've got to do something'," says Ian.

Managing to secure temporary accommodation in a motel for a few nights, followed by a short-term stay at a nearby caravan park, the trade-off for a roof over their heads saw the couple forced to surrender DJ.

For Nikolas, the loss of man's best friend was a bitter pill to swallow.

"When he got picked up, he went straight to the back, past the shelf of the car, and he just stared at me the whole time as he drove off," says Nikolas.

"He's the reason why we could fall asleep at night and know we were safe."





"We couldn't actually believe that we went from a tent to a three-bedroom house in only a few months,"

Adjusting to a stable routine in the caravan park, which saw the couple begin the road to recovery from substance use, a fateful call from Ian and Sheila a few months later brought news that proved lifechanging.

Thanks to the generosity of a Vincentian offering a vacant house in the area to a family in need, Heidi and Nikolas were able to welcome their baby boy into the world with the certainty of a home.

"We couldn't actually believe that we went from a tent to a three-bedroom house in only a few months," says Heidi.

Heidi, Nikolas and baby Matthew are currently doing well in their new home.

Heidi has reconnected with her children from a previous partner, Nikolas has resumed part-time work with an eye towards something permanent, and DJ is back as well!

Ian and Sheila continue to keep in touch and provided furniture, donated by Vinnies, to give the house the feel of a home.

Now living with the stability of a place to call their own and continuing to abstain from using illicit substances, the couple have also been able to reconnect with family members.

Heidi and Nikolas are determined to make the most of the

assistance provided at the lowest point of their lives.

"We're very lucky, we couldn't have done it without Ian and Sheila. There was no judgement and they respected us as people and not as drug addicts," says Heidi.

"Through the help and support of our Vinnies family, we are so blessed to have the opportunity to work on our relationships with our own families.

"We want to thank everyone who has supported us moving forward. We feel so lucky."

Every year the St Vincent de Paul Society is able to assist hundreds of families find accommodation and plan for a better life.

Sadly, as a result of the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, many people are facing uncertainty and the prospect of a Christmas without a home.

The Society experiences an increased demand for assistance during the festive season.

Please share the word of our Christmas Appeal in order to help us give families like Heidi and Nikolas hope for the future.

You can make a donation to the Vinnies Christmas Appeal at www.vinnies.org.au or calling 13 18 12.

Killara Refuge Gets an Upgrade

The Prince of Wales Hospital's Resident Medical Officers Association (RMOA) held a fundraiser during September in support of Killara Refuge.

Initially aiming to raise \$5,000 for Killara, a domestic and family violence refuge based in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney, the RMOA surpassed their goal by an impressive 64 per cent with a final amount of \$8,200.

The total raised will enable Killara to purchase new bedding and mattresses, while the surplus funds will be used to purchase an outdoor setting or computer for residents.

As part of the month-long fundraiser, various virtual events took place on Friday evenings during lockdown. Events included a trivia night, cook-a-long, pilates class and HIIT class, while other merchandise such as baked goods, face masks, tote bags and earrings were sold to raise funds.

As one of the primary refuges for women and children in the Eastern Suburbs, the RMOA were motivated to support Killara due to the increased rates of domestic violence occurring during lockdown.

Killara Refuge is one of several refuges run by the Vinnies Services team supporting women and children fleeing domestic and family violence. In the past year, Killara assisted 119 women and children and helped 46 rebuild their lives by transitioning into permanent accommodation.

With the challenges of COVID-19 preventing community fundraising events from taking place in person, virtual campaigns have proven to be an effective way to continue raising crucial funds in support of our good works.

Conferences can organise similar fundraisers for their local works through the community fundraising website at <https://fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au/>



Many families have done it tough this year and are facing uncertainty heading into the festive season.

Thanks to the ongoing support of the Southern Highland Motor Group, Christmas will be a time to celebrate.

Since 2017, the Southern Highland Motor Group have run a Toy and Food drive to ensure locals doing it tough can look forward to something special on the 25th of December.

Businesses and residents generously donated unwrapped presents and non-perishable food items to the Southern Highland Motor Group offices in Moss Vale during November and December, which were distributed by St Vincent de Paul Society Conferences throughout the region in time for Christmas.

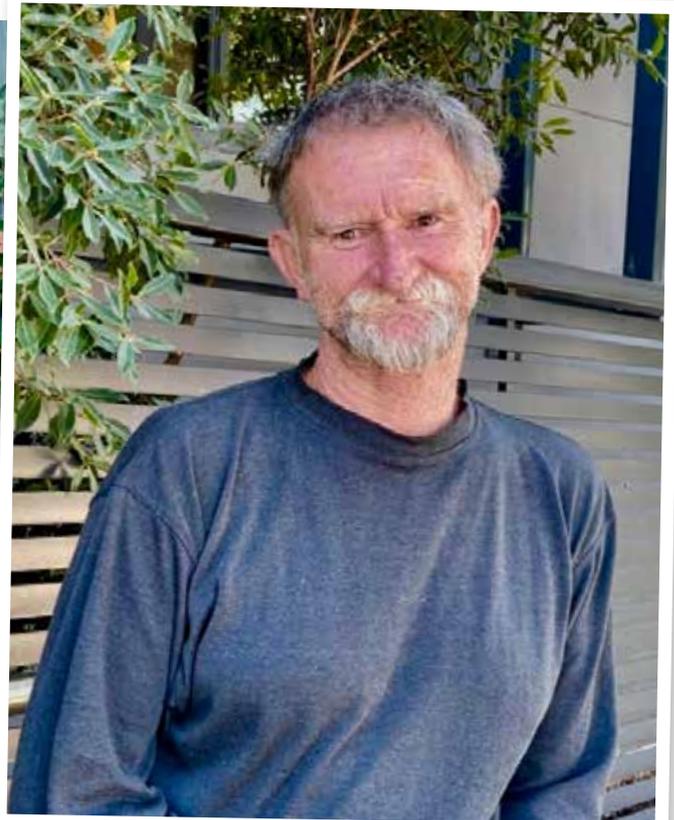
With residents throughout the region facing severe challenges in recent years, such as the Black Summer bushfires and, more recently, COVID-19, the spirit of giving is all the more important in 2021.

"We love being a part of it," said Natasha Ryan, Fixed Operations Manager – Southern Highland Motor Group.

"It makes our Christmas extra special knowing those less fortunate have something to wake up to on such a special day."

This year's toy and food drive will be all the more special for loved ones who will be able to spend time with one another in person following the easing of stay-at-home restrictions throughout the region.

We are so grateful for the goodwill the Southern Highland Motor Group have shown over the past five years. We've been able to bring joy to those in need thanks to your support!



'Life was just me, my dog and alcohol...'

Phil Dawber, a resident at John Purcell House, Vinnies' residential accommodation for men in Nowra, shared his story during the Vinnies CEO Sleepout in June 2021.

"Life was very hard... It was cold, no warmth in life. On my own, just me and my dog. Living like that I just seemed to withdraw more and more from social gatherings, meetings, talking with people.

I start getting a lot of health issues living that way and not eating - when you do eat it's rubbish. I turned to alcohol; alcohol became the third person in my life - it was myself, my dog and my alcohol. I was very, very sickly all the time.

Lonely, very lonely. I used to go what's called 'people shoppin' - I'd sit in a car in a carpark or on a chair somewhere and watch people. Watch them with their families and think 'how good would that be to have a family like that? I wonder what they're doing while they're

out today - looking for something new to buy from that electrical shop they just went into.

I used to dream about having a life like that. Today, I know I can have that - a lot of work - but I can have that, I've just got some health issues to get over.

JPH (*John Purcell House*) has got me here which was like turning around and seeing a castle, being asked to live in a castle. And the warmth was here - I wasn't cold anymore - I had a room with a bed and people making meals for me - do you know what that's like? Wow.

I can't describe that in words, the feeling, it's all about feelings. The feeling I had inside when I was offered a bed, support by other human beings who wanted to stand next to me and wanted to help me without getting anything back... When I was offered this, it just turned everything around.

They take me to all my appointments and make sure I get to doctors and things. When I'm nervous they take the phone off me and finish the call if I can't talk. All this has only come through JPH. I would never have found these people, these sources, I'd still be up in the caves if it hadn't have been for JPH.

They put their hand out and I took it."



KEEPING ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Had Tyler not reached out to Vinnies for support, he envisaged a grim future that fortunately never came to pass.

"I'd either face jail or be living on the streets with pretty bad mental health issues," Tyler reflects.

Reaching a point of desperation after consuming himself on illicit drugs, fracturing support networks and adopting a harmful mindset of self-medicating to treat his mental health diagnoses, the dire situation led him to seek professional help with the encouragement of a Narcotics Anonymous sponsor.

Contacting Vinnies for assistance prior to detoxing in a psychiatric hospital, Tyler's initial reservations about seeking help were allayed by the caring staff on hand at Freeman House in Armidale.

"When I first came in contact with Vinnies I had no idea what I was in for; I was severely underweight and really anxious around everything that had happened."

Having used illicit substances to self-medicate his bipolar affective and schizoaffective disorders, the support of the staff at Freeman House helped Tyler take back control and aspire to a better future.

"Those disorders were very easily treated, but not easily treated with the wrong mindset – and definitely not easy to treat when I was still using at the same time."

Learning a range of mechanisms to cope with his substance dependence during a six month stay at Freeman House's intensive residential rehabilitation program, Tyler moved into the transitional program which

brought greater independence, while still retaining the support networks that helped to turn his life around.

"I was able to build a lot more connections within the community via work, training options, being able to come and go as I pleased, within reason, but still be able to connect with people who weren't just inside Freeman House.

"Being around Armidale, a very small knit community, I was able to slowly tell my story to people who are a lot more supportive which has been a huge part of my recovery too.

"It's good to be able to connect with people on a new level as opposed to how I used to connect with people before I came to Freeman House."

More than a year on from first walking through the doors at Freeman House, Tyler has a new outlook on life and hope for the future.

"Since I reached out to Vinnies, I actually found some form of self-worth and that there's things that I'm good at without having to use.

"I always have the idea of goals – getting a place by myself where my brother can have a safe place to stay as well, trying to be a good influence on him and finishing my TAFE course.

"My future's been pretty good over the last year, I can only imagine if I keep staying on the same track it will only keep getting better."



Conversations on the Shadow Pandemic: Rosalie Rendu Forum 2021

"We can't prevent domestic violence unless we have accountability for the people who use it. Until we can have a conversation about male violence against women, we can't address the complexity of the issue."

With COVID-19 being recognised as a global pandemic at the beginning of 2020, a simultaneous shadow pandemic has taken place, resulting in increased rates of domestic and family violence.

During the first quarter of the financial year, impacted by the stay-at-home restrictions implemented throughout NSW, the Vinnies Services team experienced a 20 per cent increase in women and children seeking assistance.

In response, the 2021 Rosalie Rendu Forum brought together an acclaimed and diverse group of women for an in-depth discussion on the rising rates of domestic and family violence and its implications for women experiencing poverty.

Held during Anti-Poverty Week, the annual event, named in recognition of Sister Rosalie Rendu, took place virtually for the second consecutive year due to the continued challenges of COVID-19.

Following an Acknowledgment of Country from Lisa Buxton, in recognition of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, and a spiritual reflection from Society Vice President, Brooke Simmons, on the history of Sister Rosalie Rendu, host Padma Raman (CEO of Australia's

National Research Organisation for Women's Safety) introduced the theme of The Shadow Pandemic – understanding the intersectional relationship between domestic and family violence, gender and poverty.

Annabelle Daniel OAM, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Community Shelters; Christine Robinson, Coordinator of Wurringa Baiya Aboriginal Community Legal Centre; and Rosemary Kariuki, winner of the Local Hero 2021 Australian of the Year award were the three key speakers on the evening.

Peita, a woman assisted by Vinnies, also spoke as part of the discussion to provide a primary insight as an advocate with lived experience of domestic and family violence.

Over the course of 90 minutes, a robust discussion was had on a range of issues including the national women's safety summit, the NSW Government's investment in refuges for women and children, educating the entire community – including perpetrators – in order to change behaviours, and the complexities in the understanding and management of domestic violence by police.

INSIGHTS FROM THE NIGHT

"People don't choose to be poor; people don't choose to live in poverty," – Christine Robinson.

"No one can think straight or plan a future if they don't know where they're going to sleep. Housing is foundational to feeling safe, secure and getting out of survival mode" – Annabelle Daniel

"Education is the main key; talking openly and educating why it's wrong to hit a human being" – Rosemary Kariuki

"Perpetrators aren't held accountable for what they put people through and forced to understand what their actions do to victims" – Pieta

A networking session was held following the formal discussion which saw members, volunteers and staff across the Society reflect on the insights offered throughout the night.

Vinnies would like to thank Ms Kariuki, Ms Daniel, Ms Robinson, Ms Raman, Ms Buxton, Ms Simmons, Peita and the Social Justice Team for their involvement in another tremendous Rosalie Rendu Forum.

To view the 2021 Rosalie Rendu Forum, contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au to access a recording of the event.

"We need to stop being bystanders. When you hear something, call triple zero. If all of us can do something and check on each other, extend that hand, we can get change."



“WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT”

Melissa Reil shares her experience working on the frontline with people experiencing domestic and family violence.

“I’ve just tipped your mother’s ashes out.”

These are the words texted by a male perpetrator of domestic violence to a woman who had escaped him but had had to leave her things behind in the process.

A majority of the women and their children we see are already homeless by the time they arrive.

This is not surprising, as domestic and family violence is one of the strongest drivers for homelessness in women and children in Australia.

There is a massive unmet need for accommodation for those who choose to leave violent relationships.

When I see them, they may be coming from temporary housing or couch-surfing with friends or family. They’ve probably been in that kind of transient state for weeks.

Homelessness isn’t just an absence of a roof over your head – it’s not having access to safe, stable, permanent accommodation.

The women I see often arrive at the service looking like they’re in a state of shock – and who could blame them. They’re in a place, maybe with just the clothes on their backs, surrounded by strangers and having come from a situation where they have been robbed of autonomy, often for a period of years.

They’ve made the choice to leave but for many of them, this means starting from nothing.

When a woman chooses to leave a violent man, it increases her risk of harm from him and it heightens risks associated with things like homelessness.

This is true both during a pandemic and outside of one.

What’s new in the pandemic is male partners with access to children weaponising COVID.

They take kids out to hotspots and text photos of the visit to the mother to taunt her with the act of child endangerment.

In a best case scenario, it’s likely a woman who comes to the service will be with us for about six weeks before we can help her find her own footing again in a home of her own.

We help her with basics like furniture and linen and appliances as well.

But a lot of the time, it’s not a best case scenario.

Availability of adequate, affordable housing can be a major factor in how long this takes.

For a woman who can’t go back and retrieve important things like identification, that can delay processes like setting up her own bank account, obtaining a lease, and everything else needed to start a new life.

Domestic and family violence is very common and we are always busy here.

We’re always looking for more places for women to go once they are in a position to start over.

On the current trajectory of our society, there will never not be a need for specialised accommodation for women escaping domestic violence.

But right now, there is a shortage and we need to do something about it.

Melissa Reil is the Manager of the Our Lady of the Way domestic violence service



Retail volunteers winning awards

No one becomes a Vinnies Shop volunteer with the aim of winning an award but this was the added bonus for two volunteer teams serving in the state's Mid North Coast and Upper North Coast areas, in the Society's North East region.

Calling themselves the **'Vinnies Bellingen Shop Volunteer Legends'** the six hard-working volunteers of the popular main street shop won the Volunteer Team Award in the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards.

'For our volunteer team, it is all about helping not only our small town, but all that Vinnies does, the friendship our small shop has created and having people from all backgrounds made to feel comfortable,' Team Leader Rhonda MacGraw told the paper in nearby Coffs Harbour.

The tiny shop window has become a talking point in Bellingen, every week featuring new creative displays that engage passers-by. The community waits with anticipation to see what magic will transpire in the windows.

'The team has worked tirelessly to improve the exposure of the shop and together we have improved its performance by over 150% in the past 12 months,' Rhonda said proudly.

'This revenue goes towards providing assistance and services locally and state-wide – an example being Pete's Place, the Vinnies homeless outreach service in Coffs Harbour.

'The team engages cheerfully with every customer, welcoming them into the shop, assisting with good old-fashioned customer service. Knowing what our regular local customers are interested in enables us to point out specific items they may wish to purchase.'

Rhonda adds, 'For me, it is all about supporting not only our small town but all that Vinnies does across NSW... It's hard work but extremely rewarding.'

Fellow volunteer Isla, aged just 16, said, "I love volunteering for Vinnies because of the gorgeous team of volunteers who I also call family; it's really inspiring to be around such passionate people who are so dedicated to helping out the community.'

Further south, the five-member team of **Vinnies Hastings Van Drivers** was judged the standout Volunteer Team in the Mid North Coast section of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards.

The team has developed over the past few years and has the primary role of moving stock and resources amongst the Vinnies Shop network on the Mid North Coast. The van runs allow a remote area to connect and share resources with other shops across the region.

They help increase shop income by getting the right stock to the right locations at the right times. The drivers like to get out and about and enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Mid North Coast. They enjoy catching up with the volunteers at the different shops and unloading urgent stock.

These volunteers are valued for being adaptable, resilient and having a 'can do' attitude, even in tough times such as bushfires, COVID-19 restrictions and floods. When our Taree shop was inundated with water in March 2021, they jumped in to help with the clean up and start moving rubbish to the tip. When shops experience severe dumping of rubbish they swing into action and have almost halved the cost of waste disposal by increasing van runs to four days a week.



Bellingen shop volunteers, Team Leader Rhonda MacGraw (left) and Kay Vickers.



'Tonight is a highlight of our 50 years in Vinnies...!'

Notching up a combined 130 years of service with the St Vincent de Paul Society, three members from the Maitland/Newcastle Diocese had a rare moment in the spotlight when they were featured as part of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout live-stream.

Joy Loas and **Margaret Wheeler** have volunteered with the Society for the past 50 years, with **Barbara Strang**, the 'newbie' of the team, putting in 30 of her own. Together, the three women shared their stories as members of St Therese's in New Lambton, the Conference they were instrumental in starting.

Joy began the Conference in 1971 with Margaret and three other ladies. She had been wanting to get involved with Vinnies but was told the only opportunity for women was to work in the shop. She wasn't having that, so researched the Conference structure and with the blessing of the parish priest and the curate started what would become an all-female team.

St Therese's Conference is based in the Newcastle suburb of New Lambton where it continues a close relationship with the parish and is well supported by St Therese's Primary School, which has an enthusiastic Mini Vinnies group. Their community support work includes service at John Hunter Hospital as well as at several women's refuges.

Speaking from the Vinnies CEO Sleepout site in Newcastle, MC Deborah Knight asked what inspired the trio to start the Conference.

Joy said the spark was the loneliness being experienced by four local women, with 17 children between them, who had recently been widowed.

'They were lonely and needed someone's support,' she recalled.

So, the newly-formed team, initially comprising five Members, stepped up to provide companionship.

Asked what they personally get from their membership involvement, Margaret said, "Oh, we love it, we certainly do, forming great friendships along the way, at times we have had up to 28 members... although many have passed away. Lovely friendships have developed as well as being able to assist God's poor, the lonely and the needy..."

Barbara added, "The main thing is the spiritual association, also the fact that we can go to people's homes and meet them there, you get a feel of how things are really going for them. So, instead of just handing out vouchers for food, you're able to help more. You can both get and give more information, for example about things available in the community that they may not know about.

"As well as helping them, it's wonderful for ourselves... we can come back to the Conference and share with other members the work we've been doing, so it's very much a joint endeavour.

"It's very rewarding, because we are an emergency service, and if you can help them in the first place they are able to have the 'hand up', which is what we're all about."

Margaret finished off by saying, 'Tonight is a highlight of our 50 years in Vinnies... everyone have a wonderful night and raise lots of money to help the homeless and the needy!'

Loss of an Angel

On Tuesday the 22nd of June 2021, the Sutherland Shire lost an angel in Vicki Rolland, the President of Cronulla St Vincent de Paul Society. She died suddenly in the main street of Cronulla.

Vicki was a well-known, highly regarded, and much-loved member of the Society but she was much more than that.

Vicki was an extremely active member of the Society for many years, holding multiple positions in that time. Vicki brought love, compassion, joy, and assistance to hundreds of families throughout the Shire and beyond.

Vicki was a leader who led by example and just couldn't say no to anyone in need or who asked her to assist with a project. I should know, I called upon her talents on many occasions.

Vicki's commitment to the community was widespread with a large amount of her time and talent also given to St Aloysius Catholic Church in Cronulla, where her beautiful voice would be heard on a regular basis. She would also livestream mass and funerals, as well as develop and deliver scripture classes.

Vicki was also a wonderful cook. This led to volunteering to cook for all sorts of occasions, but she will be fondly remembered for the meals she provided for many years at the Como Social Leisure Centre where those experiencing mental health issues would gather for support. I do not think it was any coincidence the hall was always full on the days Vicki was cooking.

Besides Vicki's role as president of the Society's Cronulla Night Conference, she volunteered to answer the phones at head office where those most vulnerable in the community would ring looking for help. And when there were extra shifts to be done



guess who would offer to do these shifts – of course it was Vicki.

Vicki's generosity had no boundaries and I say that emphatically. She was also our local Twinning Officer which meant on behalf of the Society, she coordinated assistance to people living in poverty in India.

Vicki also played an active role in advocating for social justice through our committees. I remember her telling me one day that she passed the Prime Minister in the Cronulla Mall and approached him and pleaded her case in supporting

women affected by domestic violence right then and there. There really was no stopping her.

Her contributions to the Society kept her very busy. A week after she passed away, Vicki had been scheduled to assist at the official opening of our Amelie Housing Complex in Smarts Crescent, Woolaware. She was sadly missed that day, and every day since, but not forgotten.

No one did fundraising better than Vicki. She pleaded to the generosity of her audience. Such was her empathy and compassion for those she sought to assist, tears would roll down her cheeks as she described the need to raise money to support the people experiencing disadvantage.

I do not think anyone really knows the full extent of Vicki's generosity, compassion and good deeds, but be assured there are many hundreds of people out there today whose lives have been visited by an angel we called Vicki.

Tony Cranney

Sydney Archdiocesan President of the St Vincent de Paul Society, but more importantly a friend.

Volunteering with Vinnies and being an agent of change

In addition to his exploits outlined below Damien Ha has recently been named the Young Volunteer of the Year for the St George and Sutherland Shire.

National Student Volunteer Week's 2021 theme is Agent of Change and for Damien Ha, his time with Vinnies has shown him the capacity generosity has to make this sentiment resonate with him.

Having joined during his final years in high school and still in university, it's only been a few years but he's been heavily involved during that time.

Damien has already been co-ordinator of the Sydney University Night Patrol Team, President of the Sydney University Conference, and is now the Marketing and Communications Advisor for the Vinnies Youth Team.

He says one of his strongest memories of volunteering with Vinnies came early.

"It was probably one of the first times I went out on Night Patrol.

"I was on the beverages in this particular one, I was serving out Milo, coffee, or tea and there was this one particular family – a dad and his three children.

"They were three small daughters.

"They all just politely asked for a cup of Milo and they were so happy as well when they received the Milo.

"They couldn't have been older than eight.

"Seeing just the dad and his three daughters out there late at night in Martin Place, that's not something that you usually see or something that's right to see – to see them in the cold like that, coming all the way out here for a cup of Milo," he says.

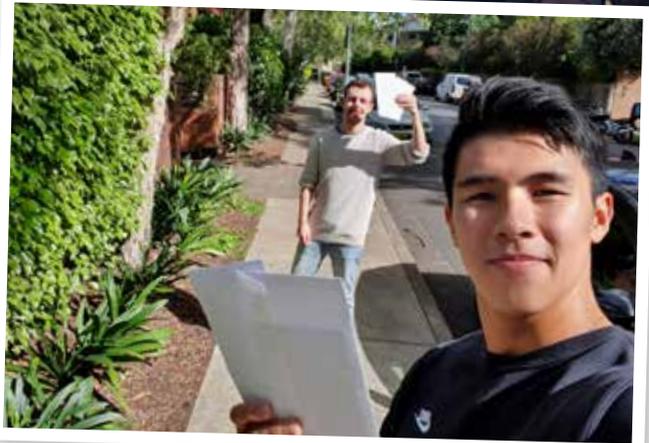
Damien says he thinks his own experience in life is what drives him to give of his own time.

"Probably, a big part of volunteering with Vinnies is probably just the values that I've grown up with.

"My parents' background – they grew up in poverty and always taught me to be grateful for everything I have.

"Perhaps that's inspired me to make a difference in other people's lives, as they have in mine," he says.

Another factor that keeps him engaged with volunteering is the people Vinnies has introduced him to.



"It's a lot of fun!

"Just being with people that share the same goal in that sense.

"With Vinnies, going out on those volunteering programs, let's say Night Patrol, we're all there for the same reason – to help the people that we serve.

"Whether that be through physical help like giving them food and beverages or maybe it's just social help in having a conversation with them.

"I think it's definitely a massive rewarding factor being part of Vinnies, just being with people that share that common goal."

Damien describes volunteering with Vinnies as a rewarding experience and encourages others to join in.

"It's something so different and meaningful compared to normal things we would do in our everyday lives.

"We wake up, we go to work or we study, and then maybe we go back home and just repeat day in, day out.

"But Vinnies, I suppose, provides that outlet to be able to make some meaningful change that I can't do in other parts of my life," he says.



"We all have passion for working here"

Sylvana Gibson is deeply passionate about her role as a Vinnies volunteer.

"I had always been interested in Vinnies, so when I found out more about what they do and the people they help, I wanted to try and give back," Sylvana explains.

"I can't give money, but I can give time."

Starting out at her local Vinnies Shop in Byron Bay late in 2020, Sylvana finds great fulfillment as a volunteer and the impact it makes for people experiencing hardship.

"We've got a big homeless population [in Byron], so when you start to get to know them, you can have a conversation about what their needs are."

"The satisfaction of when they walk out the store, they're a little bit happier than when they walked in — that really gets me."

For Sylvana, another appeal of her role as volunteer shop manager lays in no two days being the same.

One moment can consist of overseeing stock and pricing items for sale, while the next involves sorting through donations and attending to customers.



What remains consistent each time she steps foot in the shop is the care all her fellow volunteers have for one another.

"We're not just volunteers — we don't go in because we have to — we do it because we want to."

With the spread of the delta variant forcing all Vinnies Shops to close across New South Wales for a time, Sylvana maintained contact with her fellow volunteers while gaining a permit to get the shop up and running following the easing of lockdown restrictions.

"I was a bit worried as some of our girls are a bit older, I've been messaging them to make sure that they're ok."

"They're all keen to come back and work — we've got a 94-year-old who is just itching to come back!"

Having experienced health troubles requiring extended stays in hospital previously, Sylvana has been heartened by the willingness of volunteers to get vaccinated in light of the higher risks faced by older members of the community.

"Nearly everybody's had their second shot; it's safety for the staff and my safety as well."

"Everybody wants to get back in there because they want to help and are thinking of the homeless and other situations where people need Vinnies' help.

"All the money goes to helping people, so the more we make the better it is."



Christmas post-COVID in the light of Laudato si

A brief reading from the book of Genesis... “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the breath of God swept over the face of the waters.”

Reflecting on the past year and leading to this special time of Christmas, in the hope of post-covid lockdowns, I am reminded of two important writings of Pope Francis on the environment, *Laudato si* and *Querida Amazonia*.

This year, amid the turmoil of an ongoing global pandemic, locking down cities and social distancing people, there has been a renewed call to listen to the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” and the joining of Christian hearts in *The Season of Creation* in uniting us to pray, protect, and advocate for God’s creation, our common home.

This is certainly a timely reflection as we ease from lockdowns, praying for greater vaccinations so as to re-join with families this Christmas. *Laudato si* and the

voices of *Season of Creation* are significant because of the urgency, the power of arguments and insistence that the threat of climate change is a central concern for both governments and for the Church.

Recently, I read an article by Jesuit Andrew Hamilton and have adapted some of his thoughts...

The core of *Laudato si*’ was the call to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Pope Francis argues that in our reflection on the environment we must make central the connection between the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. If we pollute and neglect the earth and fray the relationships that keep it fertile and sustaining, we trigger the droughts in which poorer people starve and the waters that they drink become polluted. If we neglect and exploit the poor, we trigger illnesses that plague our cities and destroy our economies.

This has been driven home to us vividly through our experience of these coronavirus times. Its effects will fall predominantly on people who are impoverished, in nations where great inequality reigns and where the natural environment is most at risk. Where the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are neglected, human beings – rich and poor alike – will suffer the consequences.

These papal writings are just two strong voices on our co-responsibility to care for the gifts of creation and care for others. I believe that if listened to by our Government, social services, businesses and those who work within them, *Laudato Si*’ will allow humanity to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis connected and connecting, transformed even — perhaps in ways enough to transform society itself. Our prayers and hope this Christmas can ask for nothing more.

A prayer for our earth

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon this us this Christmas time the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, joy and hope and teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

Amen

A pair of boots inspired a lifelong love for the Society

Father Vince Casey, one of nine siblings, has fond memories of his late parents, Roy and Maureen, and many an endearing story to tell.

The pair met at a church youth group at St John Vianney Parish in Manly [the Brisbane suburb], Fr Casey says, adding that they married at Guardian Angels at Wynnum in April 1954, aged just 22 and 20 respectively.

Fr Casey says his parents had been raised Catholic and were always involved with their parish. When very young he asked his dad where he was going as he left the house after dinner.

"He was going to a St Vincent de Paul Society meeting but said he was "going to see a man about a dog". I got very excited, thinking we were getting a dog and was disappointed when he came home without one. He never used that excuse again!"

Although they were not wealthy his parents were generous folk: "I remember being told, years later, that they had paid for the funeral of a parishioner who had died because his widow had no way of paying it herself. They always supported the St Vincent de Paul Society appeals in our church."

Maureen Brushe was born in 1933 in Gympie where her newly married parents had gone so her father could get work in the cane fields. She left school after her junior year, did secretarial studies and worked at a Brisbane radio station until she was pregnant with their first child.

Roy Casey pre-deceased his beloved wife in 2003 at the age of 72. Maureen died in August 2020 at the age of 87. The couple had nine children, 20 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

Fr Casey adds, "Mum and Dad always supported the St Vincent de Paul Society and wanted to leave something for them in their will because our family is Catholic today because of the good work done by Vinnies."

The news of the generous bequest from Maureen Casey was conveyed to our Gifts in Wills and Estates team recently.

"This donation is made with much thanks for the work of the members of the Society 80 years ago and for your continued work today," Fr Casey says.

He explains that, "The family's early life was tough and reminiscent of a bygone era. My granddad got a job

moving mud from the high tide mark on the shore of Moreton Bay in Wynnum to build a children's wading pool.

"To start he needed a horse, a dray and a pair of work boots. He arranged to lease an old horse which was grazing in a neighbour's

paddock. The neighbour threw in an old buggy which Pop fixed up to do the job as a cart to move the mud.

"But he didn't have a pair of boots. In desperation he went to the local St Vincent de Paul Society who gave him the money to buy a new pair. Pop had never owned a new pair of boots!"

St Vincent de Paul Society does the work of the Lord in many unexpected ways, with a humble hand-up like a pair of boots making all the difference to a person's life. Indeed, to a family's life, with the repercussions enabling good works funded by the generosity of people like the Caseys.



Maureen and Roy Casey celebrating one of their many Christmases together.

**Every baby
should be
born with hope
for the future.**



**Your support can provide financial
and emotional assistance to families
spending Christmas in poverty.**



Vinnies Christmas Appeal



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

DONATE NOW

Please call **13 18 12**,
visit **vinnies.org.au** or scan the **QR code**. →

