



St Vincent de Paul Society  
NSW  
*good works*



# VINNIES BUSHFIRE APPEAL

## REPORT 2022

Vinnies is rebuilding lives and  
communities across Australia

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

**Two years on from the Black Summer bushfires, with more than 9,500 households helped nationally and the \$25.9 million the St Vincent de Paul Society raised almost exhausted, this report is a reflection on the path a long-term disaster response takes.**

The need for emergency relief in the wake of a natural disaster, particularly one as extreme as the 2019-20 summer bushfire season, is always overwhelming.

People are hurt, their homes have been destroyed, entire communities have evacuated.

And those who survived are mourning the lives lost.

There is urgent need for food, water, clothing, medicine, and other everyday necessities.

Emergency accommodation needs to be found.

It's not just homes people have lost, in many cases they've lost their businesses or workplaces, too, and that makes financial assistance very important.

At the same time, roads are closed and some places are too dangerous to reach, leaving people cut off from the rest of the world.

For people providing support there are logistical nightmares to overcome to break through the fog of war that comes with any disaster.

As time moves on and the immediate crisis passes, public attention wanders but the damage remains.

Damaged or destroyed houses remain so, people don't stop being traumatised by their experiences.

Grief catches up with the survivors and they need support.

We, at the Society, continue to help for the long haul.

Our members live and work in communities throughout Australia.

They are just as likely to be affected by these disasters as their neighbours and rebuilding affected communities is just as important to them as other residents.

These are their homes, too.

To that end, it is very pleasing to read this report and see that of the \$9.4 million raised in NSW, \$5.8 million was provided in emergency relief.

It's also great to note the achievements that have been made possible by grassroots organisations making use of the Society's Community Grants program in NSW.

Community halls have been refurbished, bush regeneration has taken place, additional aid has been distributed to bushfire victims, community spirit has

been rejuvenated through special events, support groups have been formed, and health services have been provided.

In total, \$1.4 million in Community Grants funding was distributed to 76 projects in NSW with one of the criteria being that they must deliver a sustainable impact now and into the future.

It is also good to see the labour that has gone into our \$2.2 million Bushfire Recovery Community Development program yielding fruit.

Scheduled to finish in June 2023, the program has a focus on building resilience and training to help communities in the event of another disaster.

It was first piloted in Kempsey and has now rolled out in six bushfire-affected local government areas.

Response to a natural disaster, to have maximum impact, needs to have a staged and measured approach.

When we are entrusted with large sums of donated money, we take care to spend it in a way that not only provides for people's immediate needs but also helps them rebuild in the long-term.



Paul Burton,  
President,  
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW




Jack de Groot  
CEO,  
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

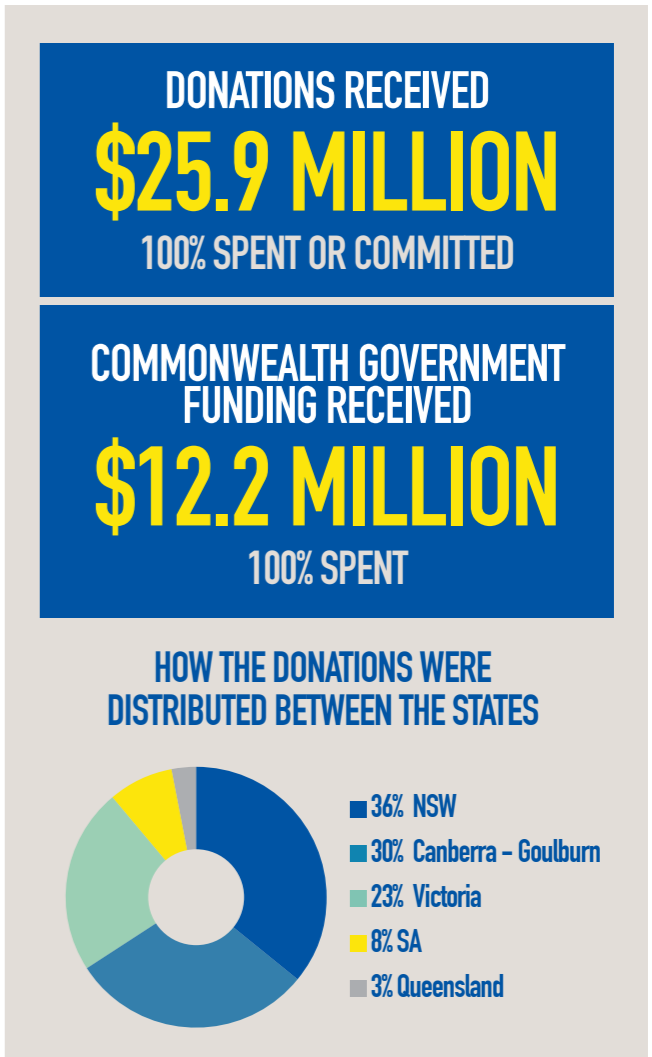


# HOW WE HELPED NATIONALLY

**The St Vincent de Paul Society raised \$25.9 million in the Vinnies Black Summer Bushfire Appeal and has spent or committed all of that money on immediate relief, recovery, and longer-term rebuilding efforts.**

In the process, more than 9,500 households have been helped with:

- Urgent cash payments to impacted households of up to \$3,000 to supplement the Commonwealth Government's Emergency Relief Fund payments of \$1,000
- Material assistance with food, water, clothing, bedding, essential items and grocery vouchers
- Emergency hotel accommodation for people who have lost everything
- Referrals to organisations providing crisis accommodation and other specialised services
- Financial assistance with bills to help households recover
- Emotional support and practical assistance in the wake of the fires, such as clearing burnt-out properties
- Grants for a wide array of projects including infrastructure, health services, and events to rejuvenate community spirit in the wake of the fires
- Funding for resilience programs and strategies to help communities rebuild stronger and prepare for future disasters




**MORE THAN 9,500 HOUSEHOLDS HELPED**

**EMERGENCY RELIEF GRANTS OF UP TO \$3,000**

**DONATIONS 100% SPENT OR COMMITTED**

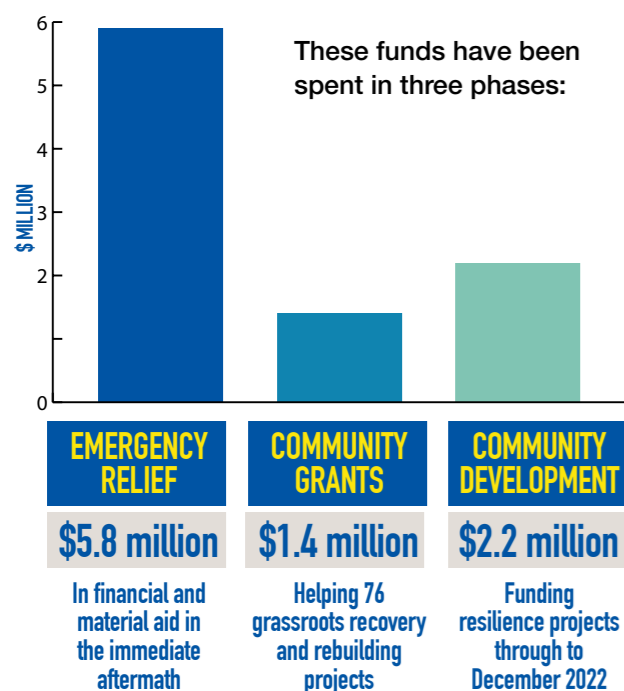
**14,448 MEMBERS**  
— OUR NETWORK DRIVING OUR COMMUNITY RESPONSE

**3,850 PEOPLE**  
INVOLVED IN BUSHFIRE RECOVERY & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

# HOW WE HELPED ACROSS THE STATES

## NEW SOUTH WALES

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW raised **\$9.4 million\*** in the Vinnies Black Summer Bushfire Appeal.



### Bushfire Community Grants

Grassroots community projects that help rebuild and create future resilience and those that contribute to positive, worthwhile community causes were selected.

The selection criteria for the grants included that the endeavours they funded needed to deliver a sustainable impact now and into the future.

All the funding for the Bushfire Community Grants Program in NSW has been spent.

### Bushfire Recovery and Community Development

The Bushfire Recovery and Community Development program will be active through to June 2023, building resilience in bushfire-affected communities.

It aims to support the recovery process by integrating the work of local conferences and member networks with the knowledge and technical capability of the Society's Community Inclusion team.

\*This does not include the areas of NSW covered by the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra / Goulburn.

## CANBERRA-GOULBURN

In addition to emergency relief, the Society in Canberra-Goulburn had three programs focussed on longer-term recovery:

### Community Grants

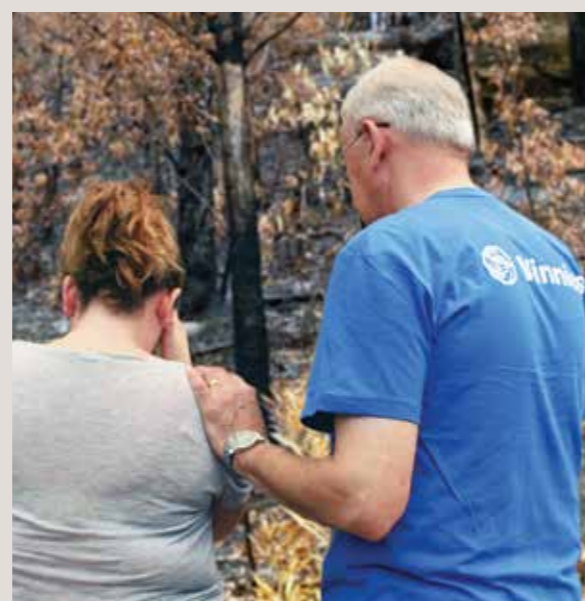
This program assisted 63 projects in the affected areas. It covered a broad range of projects, including infrastructure, arts, youth, Indigenous activities, and mental health support projects. Overall, \$990,000 was diligently allocated by the bushfire taskforce panel, who assessed the applications against nine criteria.

### Community Development

This program was implemented to assist community recovery by promoting cohesiveness, resilience, and preparedness in bushfire-affected communities. This is being achieved by the appointment of five Community Development Officers (CDOs) from the affected shires of Eurobodalla, Bega Valley and Snowy Mountains, who are working with local groups to develop activities and projects through to the end of 2022.

### Sanitation Facilities

This program was implemented to fund two projects in the Bega Valley Shire and Eurobodalla Shire. This project financed toilet and shower facilities for people who are living in temporary accommodation as they wait to rebuild their houses after the bushfires.



## VICTORIA

In Victoria, the Society provided emergency, recovery and rebuilding payments for people who have experienced loss, including funds for land-clearing, water tanks, generators and fencing, as well as material assistance such as food, fuel, clothing, bedding, laptops, school uniforms education fees and other ancillary expenses.

The Society also offered one-off community grants of up to \$20,000 for recovery projects.

Additionally, \$1 million was made available towards education costs for schools and students affected by the Black Summer bushfires.

All funds raised in the Black Summer Bushfire appeal in Victoria have been distributed.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Society provided \$3.635 million in direct assistance most of which was in the form of cash grants to hundreds of households affected by the fires. Additionally, \$70,000 worth of Vinnies Shop vouchers and grocery vouchers were distributed to help people access the items they needed in the wake of the fires.

All funds raised in the Black Summer Bushfire appeal in South Australia have been distributed.

# NSW COMMUNITY GRANTS

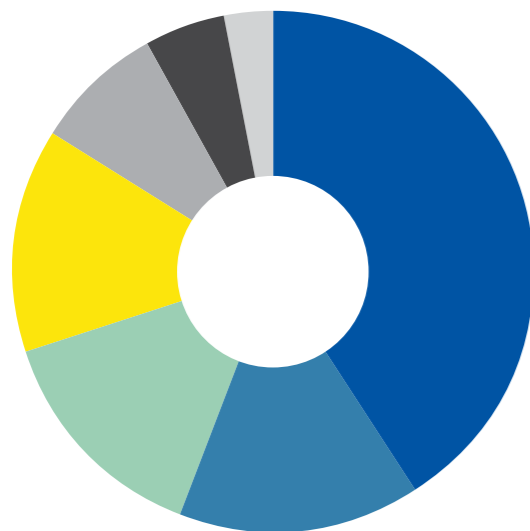
The Community Grants funding proceeded in three rounds and supplied grants of up to \$20,000 (rounds 1 and 2) or \$30,000 (round 3):

- **Round 1** (opened in July 2020) provided 21 organisations with a total of \$326,013
- **Round 2** (opened in September 2020) provided 23 organisations with a total of \$326,928
- **Round 3** (opened in May 2021) provided 32 organisations with a total of \$674,884

Community grants funding was used for a range of purposes – everything from flying doctors and other health professionals to reach sick kids to holding special community events in bushfire affected areas (read more on pages 10 and 11).

Funding also went towards sustaining a number of support groups for people affected by the fires, helping the NSW Rural Fire Service provide training to people in the community and improve infrastructure, and refurbishing a number of community halls.

## HOW THE COMMUNITY GRANTS WERE SPENT



- 41% INFRASTRUCTURE
- 15% COMMUNITY EVENTS
- 14% EQUIPMENT AND GOODS
- 14% RESILIENCE
- 8% TRAINING
- 5% HEALTH
- 3% BUSH REGENERATION

# NSW BUSHFIRE RECOVERY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (BRCD)

Community development is a process where community members are supported by agencies to identify and take collective action on issues which are important to them. Community development empowers community members and creates stronger, more connected communities.

Community development programs are led by community members at every stage – from deciding on issues to selecting and implementing actions, and evaluation. Community development has an explicit focus on the redistribution of power to address the causes of inequality and disadvantage.

The Bushfire Recovery and Community Development program is rolling out a set of activities, across six impacted local government areas (LGAs), which are designed to work together in order to improve the wellbeing and prosperity of communities and individuals. Each village and community is different and the activities will look different from one place to the next. However, what is consistent is that the activities are based on:

- research and evidence
- consultations with and inputs from the community and local authorities
- successful practices and technical expertise
- and, ultimately, community's knowledge, participation and ownership to make it successful

### The BRCD Program has three main objectives:

1. To improve community and individual resilience and disaster preparedness capacity
2. To strengthen community cohesion and increase individual sense of wellbeing and positive outlook
3. To support local environment rehabilitation, regeneration, and productivity

These three objectives apply across all LGAs we work in and are converted into local workplans that reflect the local context, and aspirations and issues in each community. These workplans are developed in consultation with local councils, community groups and community members.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- + 3,850 people involved in activities
- + 78 activities running/planned
- + 29 villages involved in activities
- + 19 community-based organisations are partnered with BRCD

## CHALLENGES

- + COVID-19 locked down communities and made community-based activities more restricted
- + More disasters have impacted multiple areas since the fires, which sets back communities and the program
- + Crisis fatigue has impacted many people and communities. When this happens, the program needs to take a step back and let people heal and recover.

## KEY RESULTS

- + 500+ vulnerable / impacted households are more informed and prepared for future disasters
- + 90+ community leaders' skills built in different areas of hazard reduction and disaster management such as first aid, chainsaw operation, and basic counselling.
- + 3 communities have received support to build their local preparedness including defibrillators, first aid kits, satellite internet, and ember-proofing the local hall
- + 65+ community activities implemented, aiming to revitalise community connections
- + 190+ community members have gained skills and confidence in trauma management/mental health or have been referred on to appropriate services.
- + 8 community not-for-profits organisations are receiving training and support to strengthen various capacities (for example, grant writing and governance).
- + 90+ individuals have received informal case management support from Vinnies or third-party staff
- + 20+ households have been supported with shelter / infrastructure needs
- + 6 land regeneration activities have occurred

AND THERE IS A LOT MORE TO COME THROUGHOUT THE REMAINDER OF THE PROGRAM.



## VINNIES CONFERENCES

BRCD activities are underpinned and supported by our local Vinnies conference members, who are partners with the program and continue to provide immediate crisis response and support for recovery activities and individuals in hardship.

Conference members have supported 14% of all BRCD activities.

## Bushfire Recovery and Community Development partnered with community-based organisations, including:

### KEMPSEY:

- Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre
- Wittittrin Progress Association
- Willawarrin Community Hall
- Thunggutti Land Council
- Telegraph Community Hall
- Country Women's Association Kempsey
- Millbank Town Community Hall
- RFS Bellbrook
- Men's Table

### SHOALHAVEN

- Conjola Recovery Committee
- Upper Kangaroo Valley Community Hall
- Conjola Stingrays Outrigger Canoe Club
- Action 4 Agriculture

### CLARENCE VALLEY

- Blinks Inc.
- Nymboida Community Group
- Country Women's Association Maclean

### RICHMOND VALLEY

- Red Cross
- Women on the LAND (WADL)
- Richmond Valley Council Library

## EMERGENCY RELIEF

### BELLANGRY, NSW MID-NORTH COAST

Losing their home, farm and more than 30 head of cattle when fires swept through the Mid-North Coast last November, Darren and his wife Julie spent the ensuing days scouring burnt fields and fences for the remainder of their herd.

"We got wiped out completely, we lost everything," Darren said. "House: 100%. Sheds: 100%. All our farming things. All our infrastructure, all gone. We basically left with half a suitcase of clothes each, and that was it."

After the fires, Darren and Julie moved into temporary accommodation provided by their insurer and gained financial assistance from Vinnies along with food and fuel vouchers.

Despite the twin crises of the drought and the bushfires, Darren is determined to rebuild his home with his own two hands and keep his farm running.

"I refuse to let it break me. I'm always positive, so the drought or the fire's not going to take that away from me."



### LAKE CONJOLA, NSW SOUTH COAST

**As the countdown to 2020 began, Ken and Lorraine were not celebrating — instead, they were fighting for their lives as fires swept through their coastal town of Lake Conjola.**

Boarding their neighbour's boat alongside two other people and a dog, the couple spent hours unable to see through a fog of smoke, as the sound of explosions left them fearful of what they would come back to.

"It was just like sitting in a 3D movie, it was just so thick with smoke and explosions," Lorraine said. "You're hearing explosion after explosion, and we knew we had gas bottles at our place, and just thought, is that our place going up, or is that our car? 'Cause it just went on and on and on for so long."

Returning to a place unrecognisable from the one they'd left hours before, their home remained standing — albeit seriously damaged and uninhabitable. Eighty-nine other houses in the area couldn't be saved.

Vinnies has been there to assist Lorraine and Ken with much-needed financial support.

"Vinnies as an organisation has really — I mean, they're great. You can't speak highly enough of them," Lorraine said.



### BELLBROOK, NSW MID-NORTH COAST

### NYMBOIDA, NSW NORTH COAST

**Ross Alexander was two-and-a half hours from his property near picturesque Nymboida when the call came: "The fires have closed in and your house is going to burn down," stammered his neighbour, "there's no way this can be stopped."**

Ross' dream home perched above heavily timbered valleys looking towards the New England Range. Still a work in progress, it was already a work of art, featuring Oregon beams salvaged from a demolition in Sydney, a fuel stove plumbed to heat the house, some much-loved furniture. An antique safe that would help save his personal papers.

Ross, a skilled carpenter, regarded his house as a labour of love. It sat isolated, off the grid, atop hundreds of acres of mountainous bushland, dotted with Aboriginal cave sites and plentiful wildlife.

He was in the process of having it gazetted as a protected wildlife area.

When it was safe to return, he faced devastation. The house, solar panels and batteries, and sheds were all gone. Friends have since offered to help, and support has come from various quarters, including Vinnies, but the recovery process will be lengthy.



**Stephen and Helen Lynch moved to the NSW Mid-North Coast to retire eight years ago.**

Building a home on a 126-acre property near Bellbrook, a timbered, hilly area west of Kempsey, the couple settled down with a 'family' of animals, including poultry and rescue dogs and cats.

In November 2019 Stephen and Helen were attending the annual Kempsey Cup when dark skies emerged as a result of smoke and ash from bushfires that had erupted around the town.

Managing to get back home to collect a few possessions before heading to safety, it took three weeks until they were able to return to what remained of their home.

"Our beautiful home was completely destroyed," said Stephen.

Temporarily living in a pod while undertaking the slow process of rebuilding, Vinnies has supported the Lynches with a range of support. One of our support workers provided them with a 4WD vehicle donated by an anonymous benefactor in the area.

"Vinnies has been excellent," Helen said, "we're very grateful for the help you've provided. A big 'thank you' from us, and many others in the area."

# BUSHFIRE COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM



## Little Wings links children in bushfire-affected areas with healthcare

Little Wings' core purpose is to bring children suffering long-term, serious illness the medical and health care they need.

During the worst of COVID, instead of flying children – particularly vulnerable immunocompromised kids – to bigger cities, they started flying doctors and health professionals to the regions.

Little Wings is in the process of using funding supplied by the third round of the Community Grants program to ensure hundreds of kids get the healthcare they need.

"We're not an emergency service – we do it long-term, so kids with cancer who have to come in every week or burns victims or whatever their diagnosis is.

"Making sure that they have consistent access to care that isn't available in their hometown," explains Little Wings CEO, Clare Pearson.

"This has been done primarily with John Hunter

Children's Hospital and Royal Far West and what we do is we fly them out to deliver pop-up clinics which partner with local services.

"So, they might deliver them at a local school or the local hospital (if there is one), they might deliver them with an Aboriginal Medical Centre or a CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] service," Ms Pearson says.

It's this focus on finding the right place to deliver the service that has seen attendance at the Little Wings clinics reach 100%.

"We've had feedback from families that, before they knew about us, were coming into the hospitals, they were missing a lot of treatments because they couldn't afford to come or they were working on a farm or had multiple children and they just couldn't facilitate that.

"Which, obviously, has a very big impact on that particular child but it also affects the health literacy for that entire family.

"Because it's teaching people that health is not a priority," Ms Pearson says.

"The program's been so successful, I suppose, what's happened is we've really learned how big the gap is.

"Whilst we were aware of the gap, we didn't understand how significant it was.

"We've really learned how important the services are so we'll continue now, we've made them a permanent feature in our suite of services," Ms Pearson says.

The funding from the Community Grants program helped Little Wings reach bushfire-affected communities, where they provided treatment for children and training for local health professionals, parents, and teachers.

"Part of this is building capacity in the local community.

"On those five days that the clinics have just been done, they actually trained 30 local healthcare workers and teachers around mental health for a lot of children that had a lot of trauma and stress from the fires.

"So, they went into two newly-built schools, where the whole schools had burnt down in Glen Innes and Grafton.

"A lot of work is being done to build capacity and build those networks with local providers and local services so that if there is a problem, they know who to call and they know that person.

"In total, across the program, 225 regional healthcare workers have received direct face-to-face training over the course of this program," Ms Pearson says.

"Little Wings doesn't receive any government funding which is why this has been such an incredible grant for us to get," Ms Pearson says.

## Raft race rejuvenates community spirit at Lake Conjola

The Ulladulla & Districts Community Resources Centre used a Society Community Grant to hold a community raft race to bring people in the area back together after a trialling few years.

While it was brought to life using money from a bushfire grant, by the time the event took place in February 2022, the area had also suffered through a flood and the pandemic.

"I think the timing was just right," Maria Mitchell, Manager at the Centre, says.

"They were happy to have an event but it was also that freedom and, I think, that because it was the ending of all the restrictions with COVID, as well, on top of that.

"The majority of the people out there have had their houses rebuilt and getting their lives back together and then they had an event that brought their community back together as well," Maria says.

The raft race was chosen by a survey provided to the community.

A similar event had been held about a decade ago and there was strong support to revive it.

In the lead-up and when it came time to hold the event on the 19th of February, it was all hands on deck.

"It was a great success.

"Throughout the day we had about 350 people show up which was amazing. We had a lot of volunteers. We had the vintage cars come along for a display. We had the Conjola Fishing Club actually cook the barbeque.

"We had the lifesavers come down as well to be monitoring the raft race and make sure everything was done safely. We also had one of the community garden groups there. They gave out plants."

Maria gives special mention to the operator of the face-painting stall.

"We had a face-painter there – she had a line up, like everything else was finished and she's still going and I had to say to the parents, 'Better stop there; no more people.' She wanted to go home and she was still painting away. Maybe she should get a helper next year."

With the event a great success and expectations set, plans are now underway for how the raft race can be made an annual event.



# BUSHFIRE RECOVERY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



## Thungutti Land Council

**One of the early partnerships Vinnies established was with the Thungutti Land Council in Kempsey.**

Vinnies supported the Land Council, which was directly impacted by the 2019 fires, with a grant to train young men from the community in both traditional and modern land management practices – the first of its kind in this area.

The training focused on traditional cultural or cool burning, and modern weed management using artificial and organic pesticides.

The group of 10 young men have continued to be supported with additional training and equipment and have now established themselves as a commercial land care/ management service called “Ngurra Mungan” (Old Camp) that is already getting work from local community and government alike.

The project has had a significant positive impact on the Thungutti community, empowering members, creating pride in their skills, and strengthening relationships with other parts of the community.

Thungutti Land Council CEO, Arthur Bain, said, “The Vinnies grant and ongoing support provided the seed funding for an ever-expanding opportunity to improve the physical, mental, social, and cultural health of the community.

“From the initial cultural burn at Mungay Creek, a relationship of mutual respect has been built between the Thungutti mob and non-Indigenous neighbours.”

They were able to clear the area of invasive weeds and establish a cultural walk trail, which opens up further opportunities for cultural tourism and traditional storytelling.

## Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (PCEP)

**Vinnies has partnered with the University of Sydney on a process called Disaster-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR).**

Typically, in a disaster, the more vulnerable members of a community – such as those living with a chronic health condition, a disability, or socially isolated – are the most impacted and the field of DIDRR focuses on that gap.

It aims to support more vulnerable people to develop a personalised and tailored emergency plan.

We are using a tool called PCEP, which is a series of conversations about a person’s readiness for a disaster, about the other people and things they rely on, about the risks in their lives, and then ideas on how to prepare for and manage the risks around them.

Vinnies is part of a broader trial of this approach (coordinated by the University) but the early results are very encouraging.

## Wyaliba

**The Bushfire Recovery and Community Development (BRCD) program is working with a remote community called Wyaliba, which is in the Glenn Innes LGA and home to around 100 households.**

Wyaliba was right on the frontlines of the fires and over 50% of the community’s dwellings were destroyed or damaged.

Wyaliba has struggled for over 18 months in trying to gain rebuilding approvals for residents – a more difficult process than before due to higher, more stringent standards for ensuring homes can be more bushfire resistant. There are also complicated legal issues going back to when the community was founded in the 70s.

BRCD has organised for a planning and building expert to work with the community over several months.

The aim is to create a consolidated community redevelopment plan that includes some rebuilding of individual houses, as well as safe spaces for the community to use as part of a wider community emergency management plan.

**To find out more about our good works,  
go to [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au) or call 13 18 12**



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