



MEDIA RELEASE

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Compeer Celebrates 20 years

Compeer celebrated its 20th anniversary in Australia on Saturday with a lunch in Lidcombe during National Volunteer Week.

An international award-winning program within the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, Compeer helps adults with a diagnosed mental illness overcome the effects of their illness and improve their quality of life and self-esteem, through the power of friendship.

Denis Walsh, President of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, recognised how Compeer Volunteers make a difference in the lives of others.

“Compeer has been hugely successful in combatting social isolation, a significant concern for people living with mental illness,” says Mr Walsh.

“We chose to celebrate the 20-year milestone during National Volunteer Week because Compeer relies on the commitment and passion of its volunteers.

Dianne Lucas, Acting CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, noted how the program has flourished over the 20 years.

“Our first friendship matches in Australia took place in 1997 when we set up 10 friendships,” says Ms Lucas.

“Right now we have 190 friendship pairs, plus 155 individuals in the Alumni Program across Western Sydney, Northern Sydney and Sydney City South East.”

Mental health professionals have reported the positive effects of Compeer: clients with a Compeer friend – someone to trust and who listens to them – feel important and validated and have changed their outlook on life.

Brian from Greenwich has been a volunteer partner with Max* since the beginning of the program. He says they have become firm friends and enjoy meeting up regularly.

“I have gained so much from our friendship and have been able to make a worthwhile contribution to someone else,” says Brian.



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

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“We have done an almost endless number of activities together – learning surfboarding, going to movies, the zoo, museums, bush and beach walks, Sculpture by the Sea. We’ve also attended many Compeer picnics, Christmas lunches and annual dinners together.

“Max often reminds me that I am his only ‘normal’ friend. Through him I have learned how hard it is to live on the pension, how hard it can be for some people to deal with the basics of life and how very simple things can bring so much pleasure.

“And Max has also been exposed to places and ideas for the first time, such as discovering the Art Gallery. He is now interested in experimenting with painting.

“What I say to anyone considering volunteering: follow the Nike creed and "Just Do It". You will find it an enriching experience.”

National Volunteer Week ran from 9 -15 May 2016 with the theme *Give Happy, Live Happy*. Research shows that volunteers live happier and healthy lives.

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*Max is not his real name