



18 May 2016

Leopard, floral, cartoons and stripes: it's bed wear that means business

Respected female business leaders today donned their pyjamas - in broad daylight - beside Melbourne's Yarra River. Why? To call on the community to support women experiencing homelessness.

A group of female business leaders in Melbourne stepped out in their brightest bed wear today to raise awareness of the fact that 59 percent of people accessing specialist homelessness services are women – and many more go unseen, uncounted and unsupported.

As part of the 2016 [Vinnies CEO Sleepout](#), their goal was to turn heads and change attitudes towards the 22,000+ Victorians that experience homelessness on any given night, too many of whom are women and children exposed to domestic violence.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) CEO, Sue Cattermole, said it was heartening to see some of city's most respected female leaders supporting the Vinnies CEO Sleepout and taking the time to advocate on behalf of this important issue.

"If we have a community of women standing up and saying 'it's not ok' for such high rates of women and children to experience homelessness, then the message is so much more powerful than what the St Vincent de Paul Society, Government or any other welfare agencies can achieve in isolation. We need collective support from the community," said Ms Cattermole.

The CEO Sleepout participants stressed that wearing pyjamas in broad daylight was not only a move to inspire a laugh – it was also a move to inspire action. Participants in this initiative included St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Sue Cattermole; Etsy Managing Director, Helen Souness; Founder of the Social Science, Michelle Gallaher; Urban Development Institute of Australia CEO, Danni Addison; Founder and Director of FM Innovations and Chairman of FMA Australia, Kristiana Greenwood; Monash Vision Group COO, Jeanette Pritchard; and Carman's Fine Foods Founder & Managing Director, Carolyn Creswell.

"The more people we can inspire to get involved in this event, the more powerful it will be. So we stand together in asking Melbourne's leaders to join us and sleep outside by the Yarra on 23 June 2016. It will be cold, it will be uncomfortable, but so too are the realities of homelessness that so many people in our community face every day," said Ms Cattermole.

With the help of around 250-300 CEOs, executives, community leaders and politicians, Vinnies Victoria is aiming to raise \$1.5m to help secure *200 houses for the hidden homeless* through a new program called HomeDirect, which will support the acquisition of rental properties for people in need and a shift to independent living.

"There is a shortage of crisis housing, but there is also a shortage of long term housing options. Through our [VincentCare Victoria](#) division, our new HomeDirect program will secure houses in the private rental market across metropolitan and regional Victoria and provide people in need with head leases, rental subsidies and rent in advance," said Ms Cattermole,

“This program will help people to establish a positive rental history and in turn, help to take pressure off the public and community housing sector. It will give them an opportunity to start rebuilding their lives.”

The primary groups of people who will benefit from HomeDirect include women and their children escaping domestic violence; people who are economically vulnerable; and people who have experienced chronic or repeated homelessness.

The vulnerabilities of women and children experiencing homelessness was something that particularly resonated with the female leaders today, as they discussed solutions to this problem.

“Women have for many years suffered in silence – they are the invisible people experiencing homelessness – often sleeping in cars, in transitional housing, or staying with relatives. Without a postal address and somewhere to live it’s very difficult to work, to access services, and get children back into school,” said Ms Cattermole.

“I’m a strong believer that women should be empowered to make choices, access information and utilise services, which is why we’re speaking up on their behalf today.”

Comments of support and advocacy from the female leaders who joined this important conversation today included:

Founder of the Social Science, Michelle Gallaher:

- “I really want women experiencing homelessness to know that other women care. I think they probably think ‘who cares’ and just by one woman or six women standing up and saying I’ll do this with you, I’ll raise my hand, is a really important message. That sense of being alone and lost in the system, particularly when you have kids, must be so lonely and confronting.”
- “It’s a small token to stay out for one night, but the lasting effect is quite dramatic. I did it six years ago and it really changed my view. It highlighted to me that the lives of people experiencing homelessness are not that far from my own – it can just take divorce, or mental illness, or a business going bust.”

Etsy Managing Director, Helen Souness:

- “I’m raising a daughter in St Kilda and we pass by people experiencing homelessness often. I am keen to do something to help them.”
- “Etsy sellers are 94% women and I’m working every day with a community of women, who I thought would be behind this initiative.”

Urban Development Institute of Australia CEO, Danni Addison:

- “We talk a lot about housing policy in my organisation and the development industry is looking for ways to be part of the solution to the critical need for social and affordable housing.”
- “I had my first child about six months ago and I couldn’t imagine the horror of being a young mum without a home and without the economic, physical and social support that I have in my life. Bringing women out of those vulnerable situations has the power to bring families out of those situations and that’s really important.”

Founder and Director of FM Innovations and Chairman of FMA Australia, Kristiana Greenwood:

- “There is a trend now to have shared space, or co-space, in buildings in a capitalist sense. So why can’t we consider our social responsibility and try and work towards some shared space for the homeless? I’m not suggesting we open corporation’s doors to the homeless during the day, I’m suggesting that there could be some way to offer homeless people a sheltered place to sleep on a wet cold night without any disruption to the workforce.”
- “We are the world’s most liveable city, imagine if that could extend to the world’s most socially responsible city? There must be other ways to help the homeless living in the street, we need to think outside the box.”

Monash Vision Group COO, Jeanette Pritchard:

- “I feel incredibly privileged to live in a city like Melbourne - it’s an amazing place to be.”
- “It’s a travesty in a country as rich as Australia that people are having to face homelessness – whether they’re sleeping on streets or on friends’ couches or in cars. It’s a situation that we shouldn’t have in Australia.”
- “I believe there is available housing out there, but it’s not being made available to people that need it most. It’s something we need to address.”

Carman’s Fine Foods Founder & Managing Director, Carolyn Creswell:

- “I believe, sadly, that many Australians worry more about what they don’t have in life rather than what they do. We are the luckiest people to live in this incredible country and if we can live with a grateful heart and try and do what we can, when we can, we will be a much more caring, productive, positive and successful society.”
- “As a mother, wife, daughter and sister, I feel that by putting my hand up and saying that I see these women, I hear their stories and I think we can do better to support them as a community. I’m happy to do something about starting important conversations that we need to have.”

CEOs, executives, community leaders and politicians are invited to sign up for the [2016 Vinnies CEO Sleepout](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au) on 23 June 2016, either individually or as part of a senior management team. Visit www.ceosleepout.org.au to register now.

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- Interviews with St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Sue Cattermole, and other CEO’s that have participated in this initiative are available upon request.
- Photos of participating CEO’s in their pyjamas are available upon request.

About the St Vincent de Paul Society:

The St Vincent de Paul Society and its wide network of members and volunteers provide practical frontline support, advocacy and friendship for the most vulnerable members of our community. Key services include home visitation; youth programs; soup vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; compeer programs for people experiencing mental illness; education and tutoring; and a range of professional accommodation and health services through the VincentCare network. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has more than 40,000 members and volunteers. Internationally, the Society operates in 149 countries and has over 950,000 members. To find out more visit www.vinnies.org.au.