

MARCH 2017

# VINNIES MOMENTS

celebrating the  
spirit of giving



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St Vincent de Paul Society  
VICTORIA  
*good works*

A newsletter for supporters of the  
St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

# THANK YOU FROM THE CEO

Thank you. These are the words of gratitude that we want to express to you, our valued supporters. You are such an important part of the many, varied good works that we undertake at the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria and without you, there would be thousands of people simply unable to make ends meet.

Our 12,000+ volunteers spend considerable time face to face, rebuilding lives. This investment of personal time and compassion is becoming rarer and more precious in a world increasingly connected by technology. It is their generosity of spirit that we have sought to share with you in our latest supporter newsletter.

You may notice something a little different about this edition too ... what's in a name? Well, on this occasion, lots. We have moved from calling our newsletter 'Society' to a name that we feel will reflect the work that is undertaken with such care across the state – 'Vinnies Moments'. We are dedicated to capturing just that – the moments that matter in lives that truly matter.

We are currently experiencing growing demand on the services we offer and the number of people that we support. Government payments remain fixed or even reduced while the cost of the basics continue to grow – rent, education, utilities, food, medical, and transportation are all becoming more expensive.

These cost increases are being felt hardest by individuals and families already stretched to their limit. Our Vinnies volunteers help to provide much needed aid, but also help people to take control over their lives, giving them the support and courage to become self-sufficient.

In this edition, we will bring you stories of our Vinnies Volunteers who have walked with people in their hour and weeks of need. Families who have been helped from the grips of domestic violence. Children who have been reunited with their family pets and personal belongings after severe trauma. A family supported as they navigate a one-in-a-million medical tragedy.

These are the kinds of stories that underpin our good works. Importantly too, these are often redefined by moments of action and compassion from our team of dedicated volunteers. So read on to learn how you too can help.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, once again, as without your generosity our works would not continue. You are part of our Vinnies community, for which we are eternally grateful.



With thanks,

*Sue Cattermole*

Sue Cattermole

## VOLUNTEERING ON AUSTRALIA DAY

**VINNIES VICTORIA CELEBRATED THE SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERISM ON AUSTRALIA DAY, AS A REMINDER OF THE SELFLESS ACTS OF KINDNESS THAT REST AT THE HEART OF AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES.**

To mark this special day, our Soup Van volunteers were invited to Government House for the annual Open Day to sell bottled water to visitors. They kept the 17,000-strong crowd well hydrated and entertained with good conversation!



## CHRISTMAS SMILES AT IGA

**THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO PURCHASED A BAUBLE OR A COMMUNITY CHEST PRODUCT AT IGA LAST CHRISTMAS!**

This valued partnership helped to raise over \$346,000 to support the 2016 Vinnies Christmas Appeal. Every dollar will help people in need, Australia-wide. IGA has over 1,400 stores nationally, all committed to helping their local community, just like our Vinnies volunteers!



# WALK WITH KATHY



The Vincentian spirit is alive and well, giving a gentle hand up to people in need right across our country, every day. It's not always easily seen - it doesn't boast or seek the limelight - but sometimes, there is a very critical need to share the work of our dedicated volunteers.



*Kathy is delighted to be back home again with her daughters Shannon, Jaime and Zoe; but still has a long road ahead towards recovery.*

Kathy Jones is a 47-year-old single mother of three girls, Shannon 15-years, Jaime 13-years and Zoe 11-years. They live together in a modest home in Greensborough, Victoria, and enjoy simple family pleasures – tennis, nattering about Shannon's first job, an occasional night out with friends, lively dinners, and compulsory daily cuddles.

There's a lot of love in their house, but two years ago the true scale of their love was tested. Kathy was working four days a week and at the recommendation of a workplace public health campaign, undertook a routine medical procedure. It left her paralysed and unable to move – a one-in-a-million viral reaction that rendered her completely unable to care for herself and her children.

"I thought I was dying, it was just slowly taking over my whole body. I couldn't move, I couldn't talk, I couldn't swallow, I couldn't close my eyes. It affected me head to toe in two weeks," said Kathy.

She was hospitalised for six months, before defiantly returning home to be with her three teenage daughters. Wheelchair ramps were built throughout the house and installed by close friends.

She had the promise of daily support from loved ones, so she could feed herself, do the washing, and take the kids to school; but her dignity and independence were gone.

"Going from being an energetic single mum, working, and running kids around to sports, to being taken away from them for six months was a horrible thing to have to live through. I wouldn't wish it on anyone," said Kathy.

...continued on page 4

Readers of Vinnies Moments are encouraged to donate to the **#WalkWithKathy** Appeal to help Kathy and others like her get the medical help she needs to walk again and to ensure her family are well supported on their journey.

**DONATE BY VISITING [VINNIES.ORG.AU/WALKWITHKATHY](http://VINNIES.ORG.AU/WALKWITHKATHY) OR CALL 13 18 12**



DONATE NOW AT [vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au) OR PHONE 13 18 12

# WALK WITH KATHY

...continued

Day by day, Kathy is now slowly regaining mobility. She's determined to walk again, even dance again, and is dedicating hours every week to rehabilitation exercises. Right now though, she's still wheelchair bound.

Walking again isn't her only challenge. Because Kathy's condition is viral, she doesn't qualify for typical disability benefits and is instead trying to support herself and her family on Newstart payments alone. With rent, food, sky rocketing medical bills and the everyday expenses of raising children, she's in desperate need of a hand up.

Help started in the form of a home visit from the St Vincent de Paul Society last year. Members of the Diamond Valley St Vincent de Paul Society Conference,

a grassroots group dedicated to helping locals in need, heard about Kathy's hardship and launched into action.

*"The St Vincent de Paul Society has really been wonderful. They came in when I was really hitting rock bottom. It's been a struggle to get through week to week and to know that they're there and offering assistance is just incredible," said Kathy.*

St Vincent De Paul Society Diamond Valley Conference President, John Ellis, recalled his first encounter with Kathy with a tear in his eye.

"Listening to her story was quite emotional. I couldn't believe that someone like Kathy had fallen through

the cracks. When you hear the story you think how on earth did that happen?"

"We took it one step at a time and decided that the first major thing we could do would be help with the rent. I just admire her so much and to large degree, it's why we're involved," said John.

The emotional, psychological and financial repercussions of this tragic illness are still wearing Kathy's family down, so the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is now taking one step further to encourage Victorians to **#WalkWithKathy** and show their support too.

"Whenever the day is that Kathy walks ten steps by herself, I want to be there at the end of those ten steps to give her a hug," said John.

Readers of Vinnies Moments are encouraged to donate to the **#WalkWithKathy** Appeal to help Kathy and others like her get the medical help she needs to walk again and to ensure her family are well supported on their journey.

DONATE BY VISITING [VINNIES.ORG.AU/WALKWITHKATHY](http://VINNIES.ORG.AU/WALKWITHKATHY) OR CALL 13 18 12



**VINNIES**  
**CEO**  
**SLEEPOUT**  
**22 JUNE 2017**

## FACE TO FACE WITH POVERTY

CEOS. EXECUTIVES. COMMUNITY LEADERS.

Register NOW for the  
**VINNIES CEO SLEEPOUT**

[www.ceosleepout.org.au](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au)



St Vincent de Paul Society  
VICTORIA

*good works*



# GREEN BOOKS

*Mornington Regional President, Michael Quin, is giving old books new life in partnership with his fellow volunteers, Mini Vinnies and Vinnies Shops.*

The St Vincent de Paul Society is well known for its dedication to giving pre-loved goods new life. It has over 100 Vinnies Shops across the state that rely on donations of material goods from generous members of the community, to stock the shelves and generate much-needed revenue for local support programs.

Books are one of the most commonly donated items. They are read, loved and passed onto Vinnies Shops, where they bring much joy for people of all ages. However, sometimes books have had a hard life by the time they reach Vinnies. They have tattered spines or missing pages and in the spirit of selling quality donations to our customers, they often end up on rubbish-row. In fact, crates of them do.

President of the Society's Mornington Regional Council, Michael Quin, recently examined this issue and decided there was a much better way to honour books that were past their use-by date. In partnership with Mini Vinnies representatives at a local primary school, Michael and his fellow volunteers decided to expand an existing recycling program.

"Every Tuesday and Thursday, Mini Vinnies have been spending their own time collecting paper, magazines

and catalogues from the classrooms to recycle. One of our parishioners, a lovely fellow Tony O'Sullivan, then takes them to the recycling depot. There, they bring in around \$1,200 a month to support people in need," said Michael.

After seeing a large bin full of books at the local Vinnies Shops recently, Michael decided they could take the program a step further.

*"I saw some books in a recycling bin, old books, and I thought, 'why can't we have those too'? So our Vinnies Shops team arranged for several crates of old books to join the Mini Vinnies recycling run and we boosted our revenue to over \$3,000 a month. The program is now growing to include other schools and Vinnies Shops in the area too, which is wonderful," said Michael.*

The money raised has now helped to secure a home for a local mother and her 15-year-old son who were left homeless after a death in the family.

"We had a call from one of our local members about a lady who was sleeping with her son in a car and desperately needed our help. She told us that her husband had died 12-months before and she'd been evicted from their property. Now, with no income and no references she couldn't get a place to live," said Michael.

"So we offered a local agent a letter of support saying we would back her rent payments for a period of up to 12-months. Now, she's in a unit and back on her feet."

This is a wonderful example of the many ways donations are honoured and given new life at Vinnies, all in the name of helping people in need.



# AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE

An individual's home and sense of belonging is ever so precious. Home is a place where one should feel safe, loved and free to be themselves. It is a place where families should find their feet and grow together.



Diana Connell with her beloved new housemate, Oreo.

This may sound aspirational, but in the eyes of 44-year-old Diana Connell, it's also rational. She had a dream of moving from New Zealand to Australia to purchase and run a dairy farm with her husband and two young children. Fifteen years ago, that's exactly what she did.

Living in regional Victoria had its charms and challenges. Life in the country was everything they'd ever wanted; but a period of intense drought eventually brought the family to their knees.

"We got caught up in a horrible drought and started slowly going backwards. Being from New Zealand, we couldn't get any government support. Eventually, we had to sell the farm and just broke even," said Diana.

"Shortly after, I also fell ill with cancer."

It was enough to rock them all. A mother requiring intense medical treatments and a father undergoing a period of major career readjustment, now working for another property owner on their turf and on their terms.

"He couldn't handle the pressure, it really got to him. I saw signs earlier, but as he got older his behaviour got worse. He couldn't handle other peoples' opinions. Eventually, he turned to family violence," said Diana.

Diana puts his behaviour down to mental illness and recalled how he would withdraw from family time. Even so, she always made a considered effort to always have dinner around the kitchen table with her two children and there, they made many happy memories.

*"It's a beautiful wooden table that we got when we were first married 20-years ago. It's where we used to sit together as a family. My children have even engraved their names in it - it just means everything to us," said Diana.*

Diana tried and tried to keep the family together, but when her husband started turning his aggression to their son she could no longer cope.

"He started to confront my son about things that made him unhappy and tried to hurt him. It was the worst timing ever, with him trying to finish school in grade 12, and so stressful," said Diana.

With her son tied to the local town to finish school and her daughter now living away completing her first year of university, Diana had limited options to leave.

"My husband ended up kicking us out, so eventually we had to leave. We had nothing, we didn't even have a car. The next day I rang a friend who came and got us. Then I rang the police to help us get a car and my son's school uniform. There was lots of things we just weren't prepared for," said Diana.

With that, they entered a dark chapter of rebuilding their lives. Diana and her son lived out of the car for three weeks and used the facilities at a local fast food restaurant. They soon started investigating emergency accommodation; but the only available house was two hours down the road and without access to the family bank accounts, they couldn't even afford the commute to school.

*"I cried every day. I was not with it at all at this stage. It was so hard," she said.*

Her son ended up moving in with a friend so he could attend school and Diana's daughter moved home to be with her mum in the temporary accommodation. Her husband tried to make things hard, racking up enormous bills listed in her name and cutting her off from support networks. But it was there, Vinnies stepped in to help.



# A ROAD TRIP TO REMEMBER

The work of St Vincent de Paul Society volunteers knows few boundaries. They are known for their ability to see people in need and to find a way, or indeed make a way, to alleviate their hardship.

Just ask one of our volunteers, Bob Dempster.

Around nine years ago, Bob, his wife Mary and their late friend and fellow Vinnies volunteer Aileen, met a young local family who needed their help – with food, petrol, school fees, and more intangible support too, through face-to-face advice.

Shortly after the birth of their youngest child, the young family experienced a severe period of domestic abuse and substance abuse perpetrated by their father, who simply wasn't coping. It impacted the entire family. With five kids aged 4 to 14 years, the St Vincent de Paul Society felt compelled to answer their call for help.

"We'd helped the family on and off for years. The father was an alcoholic, so one of our volunteers spent time with him to get him off the alcohol. But when he started taking ice, things went downhill," said Bob.

For most of a decade, the volunteers offered support. Through the highs and lows of their marriage; helping the father into rehab and dealing with relapses; sourcing an intervention order when it became essential; and finally, helping the mother and kids to relocate to not one, but two safe houses.

*"She talked of leaving him and then she just thought 'no, I can't do that to the kids.' But he was so verbally abusive. One day she just crumbled, and said 'I can't do it anymore. I've wasted 20-years of my life trying to stay with him, I just can't,'" said Bob.*



*Vinnies volunteers travelled more than 900km across Victoria to ensure the young family were reunited with their belongings and beloved pets.*

A safe house was quickly arranged by the authorities; but it was far too close to home and it didn't take long for them to be found.

"One night after tea, the father went down and started knocking on the door. Everything was locked up and he went around and tried every door and window. Eventually, he climbed up onto the roof, pulled off tiles and dropped down into the roof space. The whole family was forced to lock themselves in the bathroom until the police arrived," said Bob.

After this terrifying ordeal, the authorities arranged another safe house 450km across the state; but logistically, this was extremely difficult. The family had all their belongings and family pets to move.

"Initially, one of our volunteers took in their pets to feed them and care for them – two cats, a guinea pig, a bird and a dog. But this wasn't a long term solution," said Bob.

Bob, Mary and Aileen organised for the family's furniture and personal belongings to be packaged up ready for relocation. Then they hired a truck and completed two 900km round trips to make sure the family's pets and their comforts from home arrived safely.

"As we were unloading the truck all the kids came out. They were so excited to see their pets again. They were pulling at all the boxes and sifting through them, delighted," said Bob.

The kids were so thankful and to this day, they still write letters to the Vinnies volunteers expressing their gratitude.

"They helped to find us secure accommodation, they helped with protection orders for me and the kids, they even gave me the basics like food vouchers and helped to pay utility bills," said Diana.

*Two years on, Diana has now managed to navigate the court system and to fund a proper separation from her estranged husband with the support of Vinnies volunteers by her side. Unsurprisingly, the one thing she insisted on during the court proceedings, was to get her kitchen table back.*

"There's no way I'm ever getting rid of that table. We're just so attached to that table. It means everything to us," said Diana.

She still welcomes Vinnies volunteers into her home to sit at her table and to give her a hand up from time to time; but mostly to share cups of tea and cake, as Diana is an avid cook.

"They are just so caring, I'm so grateful for their support," said Diana.

Her next chapter will be to spread books across that very table, as she completes the last year of university studies to obtain a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Sociology.



# I'M STILL TRYING

A story of hope from Sharon 'Shazie' Sheppard who was supported for over seven years by Vinnies volunteers in Drouin. They hadn't heard from her for over two years, then she sent them this note...

Hi John, Cathy and the St Vincent de Paul team  
I hope you are well. It's been so long since I've seen you!  
Things have improved in my life, I've put on lots of weight, I was under 4-stone and now I'm well over 10.5-stone. I've learnt to budget – I'm not great at it but it gets me from fortnight to fortnight.  
Every Friday I cook a healthy lunch for the parent group at Ramahyuk House. The lunch is for 20-30 people, plus 6-12 children. I'm also a public speaker for MIND Australia, the group is called Ambassadors of Hope. We give talks to groups such as the police, drug and alcohol counsellors, and schools.  
I'm still not doing great around the house, but it has improved somewhat. Somewhere there was a glitch in my therapy and the chaos in the house is stuck. My therapist had to resign, so it's a tough problem, I'll just have to keep working at it.  
I'm also planning to write a book as many people have suggested it. I've done some fact gathering and I will see how it goes – hopefully someone will publish it.  
There's not much more I can tell you, except I'm still trying.  
Yours  
Sharon 'Shazie' Sheppard

Sharon Sheppard is pictured above, sharing her story at a recent Frederic's Fellowship bequest function. If you would like more information about our bequest program, please email [bequests@svdp-vic.org.au](mailto:bequests@svdp-vic.org.au) or call our Bequest Manager on 03 9895 5821.

**A GIFT IN YOUR WILL CAN HELP PEOPLE LIKE SHARON TO GET BACK ON THEIR FEET.**

## YOUR SUPPORT IN ACTION

### IN 2016 YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS HELPED US:

■ **\$11.6 MILLION**



Provide over \$11.6 million of emergency assistance to people in need.

■ **255,000 MEALS**



Serve over 255,000 meals on the Vinnies Soup Vans.

■ **6,600 HOURS**



Dedicate 6,600 hours to help students with their studies.

■ **44,000 CALLS**



Answer over 44,000 calls for help via our Welfare Assistance Line.

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