

MEDIA RELEASE**EMBARGOED****8 May 2017****THANK YOU #VinniesHeroes**

To mark the first day of **National Volunteer Week** (8th– 14thMay) the **St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria** (Vinnies) is sharing a heartfelt **“THANK YOU”** for its 12,000 Vinnies volunteers across the state who work tirelessly to support people in need.

National Volunteer Week (NVW) is an annual celebration to acknowledge the generosity of more than six million Australians who volunteer their time to strengthen local communities. The personal contributions of Vinnies volunteers - #VinniesHeroes - will be celebrated across Victoria as part of this important initiative.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Ms Sue Cattermole, said volunteers are the backbone of Vinnies.

“We are so proud to have the support of our 12,000 Vinnies volunteers who bring such compassion, commitment and vigour to their work as advocates and support people for Victorians doing it tough,” said Ms Cattermole.

“There are over 725,000 Victorians currently living below the poverty line, forced to make ends meet in the direst of circumstances. Often it is a private conversation with our volunteers, face-to-face across a kitchen table or on a street corner, which can empower people to regain their dignity and independence.”

Vinnies volunteers support a variety of community services including Vinnies Shops, Vinnies Soup Vans, home visitation, tutoring programs, friendship programs for people experiencing mental illness, prison visitation, hospital visitation, financial support services, call centre services, and administration support.

“As a volunteer-run organisation, the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society relies almost entirely on peoples’ generous contribution of time. Our volunteers are out in the community, serving cups of soup. In peoples’ homes, lending their ears to listen. Gifting blankets when it’s cold. Helping with material aid, financial support, or even a place to call home,” said Ms Cattermole.

“In our eyes, and those of people we walk with in their times of need, our volunteers really are #VinniesHeroes.”

National Volunteer Week is marked by thousands of events across the country. Vinnies is hosting a number of morning teas this week to ensure its volunteers have a chance to pause and reflect on how they are improving lives, over a nice warm cuppa.

“One of the primary things we hope National Volunteer Week will bring to communities is an awareness of the benefits of volunteering. Research shows that volunteers live happier and healthier lives and feel more engaged and connected,” said Ms Cattermole.

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria offers a range of volunteering opportunities for those interested to build new skills and social connections in their local community.

If you would like to learn more about volunteering for the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria and opportunities available in your local area, please vinnies.org.au/volunteering-vic, email volunteer@svdp-vic.org.au or phone 1300 736 933.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Nic Horton | nicholas.horton@svdp-vic.org.au | +614 27 341 633

MEDIA CALL: The media is invited to **photograph and interview** Vinnies Shops volunteers across Victoria, during National Volunteer Week:

WHEN: 10:30am, Wednesday 10th May 2017

WHERE: All Victorian Vinnies Shops will be hosting a media call – please visit www.vinnies.org.au/shops to find your local Shop location.

CONTACT: Please RSVP to attend by contacting St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Public Relations Consultant Michelle Henderson via email on michelle.henderson@svdp-vic.org.au or Nic Horton nicholas.horton@svdp-vic.org.au

ABOUT THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY VICTORIA:

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria and its wide network of over 12,000 volunteers provide practical welfare support, advocacy and friendship for the most vulnerable members of our community. On the frontline, face-to-face.

Key services include Vinnies Shops, Vinnies Soup Vans, Compeer support for people experiencing mental illness, home visitation, youth programs, assistance for asylum seekers and refugees, education and tutoring, and a range of other volunteer-run initiatives that assist people in need.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has more than 60,000 volunteers. Internationally, the Society operates in 149 countries and has over 950,000 volunteers. To find out more visit vinnies.org.au.