

**MEDIA RELEASE****UNDER EMBARGO****23 June 2017****15 JULY: PREPARE FOR AN EYE-OPENING NIGHT**

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies) is inviting members of the Diamond Valley Community to rally behind 25 local community and business leaders who are preparing to sleep rough for one night, in support of the tireless efforts of Vinnies volunteers to provide a hand up to local people in need.

The Diamond Valley Community Sleepout, now in its second year, will be hosted at Greensborough Walk on Saturday, 15 July 2017. This is a new venue, designed to cater for more participants and cast the spotlight even further on homelessness and poverty in the community. This year, organisers have recruited 20-25 brave leaders to sleep out in the thick of winter and to raise \$25,000 to support Vinnies' vital community services.

The Diamond Valley Community Sleepout is an initiative of the St Vincent de Paul Society's Diamond Valley Regional President, Mr John Ellis, who said the event is a chance for the community to focus on what's really important—supporting local people who are in dire need of assistance and advocating on their behalf.

“In the last financial year, our volunteers visited 2,923 people and provided more than \$300,000 of assistance in the Diamond Valley Region. Many of our neighbours, whether they make it known to you or not, are doing it tough and it's our duty as community members to look out for them,” said Mr Ellis.

The Vinnies Community Sleepout is an opportunity for business and community leaders to increase the volume on conversations around the direct impact of poverty in the Diamond Valley region and to raise funds that enable Vinnies volunteers to support people experiencing hardship in their local community.

“We have 178 Vinnies conference members in the area who volunteer their time to meet with people face to face in their homes—to listen, to console, to encourage, to empower and to help with the basics that are critical for surviving day-to-day and for regaining their independence. Every dollar donated to our Sleepout will help us to continue this invaluable work.”

Last year, the Diamond Valley Community Sleepout raised \$7,500, part of which used to support a local mother of three, 47-year-old Kathy Jones from Greensborough, who was left tragically paralysed following a routine medical procedure just over two years ago.

“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.

Kathy was hospitalised for six months, before defiantly returning home to be with her three teenage daughters. It was then, that Vinnies volunteers stepped in to help—and have been there ever since as a major source of personal and financial support.

“We took it one step at a time and decided that the first major thing we could do would be help with the rent. We are honoured to be an extension of Kathy's support network and every dollar raised from last year's event has allowed us to provide tangible, meaningful support on some of Kathy's darkest days,” said John.

The Diamond Valley Community is being encouraged to support this event by making a donation and rallying behind local community and business leaders.

Support the 2017 Diamond Valley Community Sleepout.  
Visit [bit.ly/DiamondValleyCommunitySleepout](http://bit.ly/DiamondValleyCommunitySleepout) for more information.

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**RESOURCES:** Other available campaign assets to support Kathy Jones' story (who was personally supported from the proceeds of last year's Diamond Valley Community Sleepout) include:

**High resolution photos:** access [HERE](#)

**Film compiled by the St Vincent de Paul Society:** access [HERE](#) (YouTube) or [HERE](#) (file to embed)

#### **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; Vinnies Shops; youth programs; Vinnies Soup Vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; Compeer for people experiencing mental illness; education and tutoring; and professional accommodation and health services through VincentCare. 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 [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au).