

19 April 2021

Vinnies Victoria officially opens new, larger Assistance Centre to serve the Bairnsdale and East Gippsland communities

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) is delighted to announce the official opening of our new and expanded Assistance Centre in Bairnsdale.

The move has come about due to an increase in demand for our welfare services and assistance following the bushfires as our local volunteer members have helped the community to recover during the last year.

A **special event is being held at the centre this Friday**, to which state and local representatives of Vinnies Victoria, members of the community and dignitaries are expected to attend – and local media is invited.

What: Official opening of the new Vinnies Victoria Bairnsdale Assistance Centre

When: Friday, 23 April. 11.00am -- midday, followed by a light lunch

Where: 92 Macleod St, Bairnsdale 3875.

The building will be blessed, the facilities explained and local Gunaikurnai artist Zion Bradley Brown will unveil and discuss his beautiful artwork created especially for the centre, featuring the blue wren, which is native to the area and significant to the local indigenous community. Mr Brown is also in the process of becoming a Vinnies volunteer in Bairnsdale.

Local member, George Burton, who has volunteered for 50 years this year, will cut a cake in celebration.

A key feature of the centre is **Rosalie's Place**, named after Sister Rosalie Rendu, a pioneering figure in Vinnies' early history. Rosalie's Place consists of impressive shower and laundry facilities -- thanks to donated white goods from Miele to the value of \$10,000 – and is the **first and only dedicated such bathroom facilities for people experiencing homelessness in East Gippsland**.

Soap, towels and new underwear will be provided when people book the facilities and, if in need, they will also be provided with vouchers for the nearby Vinnies Shop to purchase a fresh set of clothes.

The centre is also pleased to have the weekly services of a volunteer from the Good Shepherd finance team who will be able to provide No Interest Loans (NILs) to people needing them to purchase expensive household items.

Vinnies Bairnsdale conference president Cath McMahon says: "This centre is a dream come true for us, and it would never have happened without our amazing team of volunteers dedicated to helping people in need in our area.

"We are especially proud of Rosalie's Place and the dignity that these facilities provide for people dealing with the toughest of circumstances. There is a lot of hidden homelessness in the Bairnsdale area, and while we provide emergency accommodation when necessary and do everything we can to connect people to housing services, in the meantime, these bathroom and laundry facilities are an important way to restore people's sense of self-worth.

"This centre does not just belong to St Vincent de Paul Society, but the entire East Gippsland community."

Since 1 January 2020, when the devastating bushfires hit the area, Vinnies Victoria's Bairnsdale conference has provided nearly \$450,000 of material aid to 5,300 local people in need. This is in addition to the millions of dollars distributed throughout the fire-affected areas from our Bushfire Appeal.

Cath McMahon is available for interview prior to Friday or on the day. Vinnies Victoria would be delighted to know that local media are planning to attend the event and happy to assist should you have any further inquiries.

If so, please contact our media office via the details below.

- ENDS -

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: **Dee Rudebeck** | PR & Communications Coordinator
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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; soup vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; education and tutoring; and professional accommodation and health services through VincentCare. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria has more than 12,000 members and volunteers, and more than 60,000 across Australia. Internationally, the Society operates in 149 countries and more than 950,000 members. To find out more visit www.vinnies.org.au.