

AUTUMN 2022

VINNIES

Giving Victorian students
the best start for 2022

MOMENTS



Feature

WHY SOME STUDENTS ARE 'NOT THERE YET'

Inside:

HOW OUR DONORS
HELP US CHANGE
LIVES

WHAT'S INSIDE ARE STORIES OF
YOUR SUPPORT IMPACTING LIVES.



St Vincent de Paul Society
VICTORIA
good works

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

We are pleased to share with you our special 'education' issue of *Vinnies Moments* where you can read about how your support and dedication enables us to provide practical assistance to children and young people. As we head into another school year, Victorian children once again face uncertainty – will they be in their classroom with their peers? For how long before they may have to return to the 'virtual' classroom?

As young people across Victoria adjusted to the challenges of COVID, the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) heard and responded to these challenges. Vinnies provided material aid such as computers and books, as well as online after school education support for students during remote learning.

When students were back on school grounds, Vinnies stepped in to provide assistance with uniforms, school shoes and those little touches such as lunch boxes and drink bottles, all the items a young person needs to thrive in their school community. With support from our generous donors, we were able to support more than 2,140 Victorian students throughout the COVID lockdowns of 2021. We are delighted to share with you the story of one of these young people, nine-year-old Hayma*, whose reading and confidence really improved after she attended our after-school educational programs.

Vinnies volunteers across Victoria provide support on a crucial one-to-one basis that makes such an impact to a child's progress. Our volunteers read with students or work through issues that they might be having with homework. The programs are fun and are designed to develop the all-important social and emotional skills like they did for Hayma.

We also feature stories on how, together, we helped other students, such as Nevin, a young man who realised his dreams to attend university, and he attributes much of his academic success to the Vinnies education program in Dandenong. Nevin experienced first-hand how education can break the cycle and, now, he gives his time supporting young people facing similar struggles that he experienced growing up.

With your support, Vinnies Victoria will continue assisting the most vulnerable in our community. We are grateful to have you by our side. Together we are supporting a child's future and the infinite possibilities that a good education can bring.

Thank you for your support.

With my deepest gratitude,



Sue Cattermole

Sue Cattermole
Chief Executive Officer
St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria



KEEPING KIDS CONNECTED

To ease the isolation and loneliness of school closures during the pandemic Vinnies offered weekly online education programs in which thousands of Victorian students attended.

Vinnies volunteers gave their time, love of learning and emotional support to more than 2,000 students who participated in our *Education Zoom* programs last year.

The time and attention of our Vinnies volunteers continues to provide social, emotional and academic support.

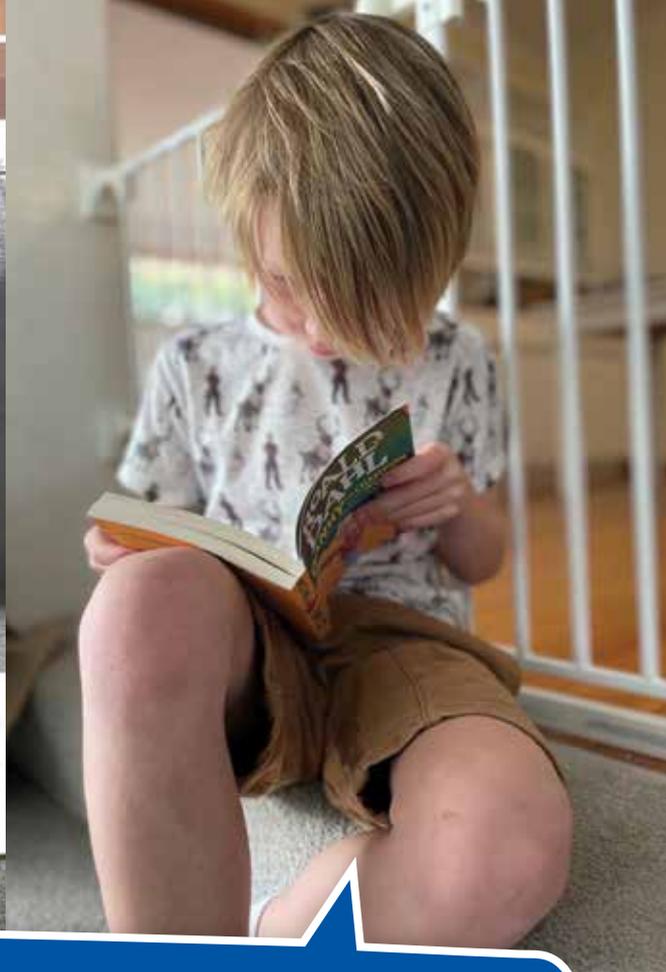


If you would like to contribute and give a student a brighter start to their school year, **donate online now.**

*Name and image (on cover) changed to protect privacy.



"Thank you so very much. We have just received our educational supplies and I can't express how much this means to us and has helped me getting everything Marian* needs for her first year of school! She was so excited to have received this as she is very much looking forward to starting school... As a single mother who has had to rebuild our lives after relocating, again I can't thank you enough."



"I'm writing on behalf of my son Archie* to thank you very much for the book order! Archie was surprised and thrilled to receive the parcel with some great books to read!

"We also requested a couple of books to help with feelings (The Invisible String) as this has been a tough couple of years for primary school kids with lots of disruption as you'd know, and Archie has struggled to settle back into school. Many thanks again, Archie's mum."

DONATIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Vinnies Education team was excited to offer the Victorian families we support with vouchers to purchase educational supplies for their children. Parents and carers used vouchers provided by our generous donors to buy books, stationery, backpacks, calculators and drink bottles.

OUR DONORS ARE AMAZING!

Without your generous donations we would not be able to reach the number of students we assist each day. Your donation goes towards keeping our programs operating. Make a donation to Vinnies today, because 'good works'.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

HAYMA'S STORY



Nine-year-old Hayma* has big ambitions for when she grows up. “I want to become a fashion designer, an artist, a babysitter, and I love gardening.”

Her determination to succeed is born of more than personal dreams. “When I grow up, I want to help my parents. My dad is the only one with a job and, when I’m older, I want to help him. I wish to have three jobs to support them,” says Hayma who was born in Myanmar-Burma and now lives with her parents, auntie and siblings in Melbourne’s west.

She is a confident and animated girl who says, almost unbelievably, that she didn’t speak at all when she was just a few years younger. But Hayma attributes attending the after-school educational programs of St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) for three years, really helped her to develop confidence and find her feet in Australia. Now she even helps interpret for her parents when required.

“When I first went to the reading club, I felt a little bit shy, but after a few weeks I got used to it. You get to play and borrow books and learn and have fun there. I like to read books that are interesting to me, like The Baby-Sitter’s Club series”.

“My reading has improved since being at the club. I learned that you can always be learning things and not be scared,” says Hayma. “I’ve got confidence from the reading group. In grade two I started making friends.”

Hayma heard about the Vinnies education program, which runs reading clubs, at school and first attended in Grade 1. When the programs went online at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, she attended three online sessions each week!

Volunteers provide support on a crucial one-to-one basis that makes such an impact to a child’s progress, but is something that teachers at school just don’t get time to provide. In certain programs volunteers read with students or work through issues that they might be having with homework.

The programs are fun and are designed to develop the all-important social and emotional skills and confidence that research has shown underpins all other learning.

Dr Linette Etheredge, who leads Vinnies Victoria’s Education programs, says:

“Hayma has been a really dedicated attendee of our programs and she has made great progress. Over the past three years her reading has improved enormously but more importantly, her confidence, willingness to contribute, and desire to try new things has become stronger. These things underpin all her learning and have really helped her engagement at school. It’s so rewarding to see the benefits of the tailored, one-to-one work our volunteers do with the young people in our education programs and reading clubs.”

For students who don’t quite fit the learning model at school, one-to-one support can get them ‘switched on’ to a particular subject in which they might have been struggling to develop skills and confidence. So often we see students who initially think they aren’t good at a subject, but with support, encouragement and patience from our volunteers end up loving it and then excelling at it!

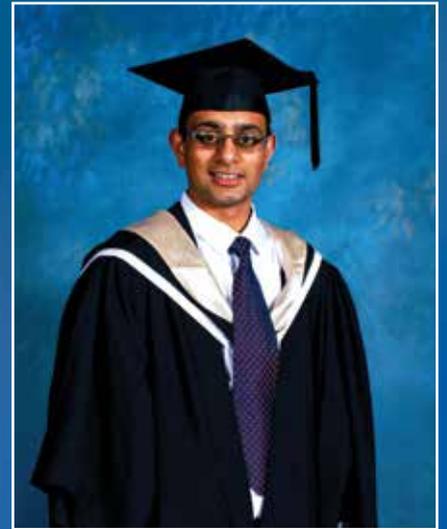
“Our dedicated volunteers are passionate about learning and often subject experts. At the eight Vinnies education program now running across Victoria, we welcome all students into the program. Our client survey results indicate that we are making a real difference to their academic capacity and life in general, by building skills and confidence,” says Dr Etheredge. In addition, Vinnies education programs supported many young people to participate in schooling during the pandemic by gifting them a laptop.

*Name and image changed to protect privacy.



NEVIN KOTHAINAYAGAM

Nevin Kothainayagam has a bachelor of pharmaceutical science from RMIT and has just completed a masters in pharmaceutical medicine from UNSW. Imagine, if you can then, that when the 25-year-old was a year seven student at school, he was "a bit below average in maths," as he puts it. "I found it confusing."



One of Nevin's teachers suggested he attend the Vinnies education program at St Mary's in Dandenong. "I was very quiet and shy when I joined the program, but within weeks I had a solid friendship group there. It really helped me to develop social skills and confidence," he says.

Nevin also met an inspirational volunteer there whose love of maths was infectious. "She was amazing and passionate about it. She illustrated practical applications about why it was important.

"There is no chance I would be here in my profession now without the club," says Nevin.

Nevin attended the program Saturday mornings all through high school until year 11.

He improved in English, too. "The volunteers helped me with reading and comprehension, grammar, understanding a question, critical thinking and formatting essays," he says.

"It was also a really nice environment and a happy place to be, so I was motivated to attend," he says. "I had friends there and I enjoyed playing games with the volunteers, it wasn't always strictly about the work. It was about fun and learning. There was also cordial and biscuits!

"I would have had a really tough time keeping up to date at school if I had not found the Vinnies education program, and I would have been more anxious. I felt a bit left in the dark at school."

What makes this story even more inspiring is that Nevin has wasted no time in becoming a volunteer himself at the program now that he is established in his own career. "After I completed my studies, I wanted to help students like myself uncover their potential, too," he says.

"If a student isn't sure about something in their schoolwork, they talk to us without judgment or pressure. You can feel pressure at school if you don't 'get' things."

Nevin has encouraged his friends to join up as volunteers too.

Nevin is a remarkable testament to the impact of the Vinnies' after-school learning clubs and sums them up simply as follows: "It's important work. The programs really help to change young people's lives."

When home schooling commenced in 2020 due to COVID restrictions, Hayma didn't have access to a computer, so Vinnies provided her and two of her siblings with reconditioned laptops donated by one of our valued corporate contributors, energy company Jemena. Jemena provided 50 laptops so many students assisted by Vinnies could continue their schooling at home. Now that Hayma is back at school, Vinnies' programs will focus on helping students like her make up for the precious time and social and emotional development that had been lost due to the lockdowns and school closures.

Hayma said she was keen to get back to the classroom:

"I missed school and my classmates!"

Going forward if she does find anything at school difficult, she knows where to turn for support.

"It's helpful to have the Vinnies volunteers to talk to about my school work because I worry so much about it," she says. "There isn't really anyone at school I can talk to like that, except for maybe one teacher."

Vinnies wishes Hayma and her family the best for the future and we're confident that our education team will be there to help her realise her dreams and fulfil the enormous potential she has shown in the most difficult of circumstances.

HOW MOE SOUP VAN HELPED STUDENTS FOCUS

Margaret Wilson, co-President of the Vinnies Moe Soup Van, has been a Vinnies volunteer for 24 years. With the Vinnies Moe Soup Van halting operations due to COVID-19, Margaret and the volunteer team from Moe thought up new ways to support the families they had previously assisted.

Margaret approached several local school principals with the offer to provide lunches for the students who would often arrive at school without a snack or meal. With the support of local fruiterer (Moe Fruit Market), who generously donates fresh fruit every week, our Vinnies volunteers would make a variety of sandwiches in the St Vincent de Paul Society kitchen hub located in Moe.

Government, independent or Catholic schools in and around both Moe and Newborough were provided with around 80–100 lunches each week. When a local resident heard of these lunch packs being distributed at the schools, they offered to also donate juice boxes for students every week.

Rebecca Harkensee, Primary Welfare Officer Moe (Albert St) Primary School, says, “A sandwich can mean the difference between a hungry and unmotivated student, to one who thrives and focuses. We truly value and appreciate everything Vinnies has done for our school.”

Your donation provides practical assistance and helps our Vinnies Soup Vans operate 365 days of the year across Victoria.



Vinnies Moe Soup Van Tonia, Anton, Rita.



If you would like to support Vinnies so we can provide more meals, donate online now.



A SPECIAL WAY TO GIVE

We all know how vital education is to help break the cycle of poverty, so it is important that no child is left behind when it comes to learning.

When our very own State President, Kevin McMahon, joined the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria he began volunteering at a reading club, at a school located in a disadvantaged area where English was a second language in many homes, or where the parents didn't have time to sit and read with their kids.

Kevin reflects, “[The West Heidelberg Education program] is an incredible program that has helped so many kids over the past 15 years, and it was started by a legacy left in the Potter Family Will”.

Students who attend the program have the opportunity to develop social, emotional and academic skills as part of a positive learning experience.

The West Heidelberg Education program is still active today. One family's decision to leave a legacy towards education has not helped just one child, but many children and illustrates the true meaning and value of what it means to 'leave a legacy'.

To find out more about how to leave a legacy for good visit www.vinnies.org.au/bequests-vic or contact Sharon Wangman on 03 9895 5821 or bequest@svdp-vic.org.au.

BRAEMAR COLLEGE STUDENTS SLEEP OUT FOR KIDS DOING IT TOUGH

With the uncertainty that the pandemic brought into the classroom, last year was another tough year for students. Braemar College Principal Russell Deer knew his students were facing their own challenges, but he also knew that there were many other Victorians experiencing a hard year and some were experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Once students could be back on the school premises, Mr Deer galvanised the students, together with Ros Shipp (Head of Braemar College Middle School), to hold a Vinnies Sleepout to raise funds.

Middle school students attended the sleepout along with several older students and they turned their onsite van into their own 'Soup Van' serving students soup and a bread rolls.

Students were engaged with activities focused on the real cost of living with questions raised by these young people who wanted to build their awareness and know how else they could assist people experiencing homelessness.

"The sleepout became a support thing for us and a focal point" said Mr Deer.

The students discussed how complex homelessness is and that they were highly aware of the hidden homelessness which is more prevalent in their local area. Mr Deer mentioned how the complexity of homelessness and poverty makes it hard for young people to process, so they need practical actions and experiences like volunteering and taking part in awareness activities like the sleepout that also raises money.

Through their Vinnies Sleepout, Braemar College students raised an amazing \$9,513! This equates to more than 300 food hampers with each hamper providing three days worth of meals.



YOUTH TEAM SUPPORTING YOUTH

Imagine what it would be like to watch as your friends set off for school camp while you stay back simply because there's just not enough money at home for you to attend. Vinnies Youth Officer Tanya Ferguson says that's the reality for many young people.

Generous donations help subsidise and provide these opportunities for kids who miss out.

With the support from our dedicated Vinnies volunteers, Tanya and the Youth Engagement team at Vinnies, provide programs and camps for young people who don't have the same opportunities as their peers.

The majority of these camps take place in regional Victoria where we know these students are already doing it tough. Most of the young people we support come to us as their families are being supported by the local St Vincent de Paul Society, while others are referred by the Victorian Department of Family, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) as they don't have a permanent or stable home.

Along with our regular donors, Amazon also provided Vinnies with vouchers which we put straight to use to give young people a positive start to their school year. Items like notebooks, pens and backpacks mean these students can begin their year without the worry of how they can do their school work.

Tanya said "We are so grateful for the amazing donations from Amazon. We have been able to purchase so many resources for children supported by our youth programs.

"One of the parents we contacted was so overwhelmed and excited for her son to be given the tablet and stationery required for his schooling. For many students getting the standard items on the booklist is just the norm, but it is costly and for those doing it tough it really does set these kids up for a successful school year."



To find out more about our youth team, go to www.vinnies.org.au/vinniesyouthvic

Thank you to all our generous donors. You can make a difference to a young person starting school this year by donating.



AMAZON REACHES OUT

For two years now, Amazon has led the way in the corporate world generously providing practical support to students returning to school. Amazon understands the pressing issues in Victorian communities and contacted Vinnies wanting to give a hand up to families who just don't have the money to fully equip their kids for school.

With the unprecedented strain of the pandemic, starting the school year can be a tough financial time for many Victorians. Once again, Amazon donated thousands of dollars worth of vouchers for the *Vinnies Back to School Appeal* which Vinnies used to purchase tablets, educational books, educational toys, reading materials and those simple items such as lunch boxes, drink bottles and a backpack to store it all in!

AMAZON'S 'SMALL GESTURE' MAKES BIG IMPACT

Children escaping family violence have a whole set of challenges to deal with before their school day even begins. Olive's Place, run by VincentCare, provides support to adults and children from all backgrounds escaping family violence.

Olive's Place provides high security refuge accommodation where adults and children receive intensive case management support to establish a life free from abuse and achieve a maximum level of self-reliance and independence.

A strong focus of the program is ensuring children remain engaged and connected to their education and have access to a safe learning environment. This helps children to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem and creates a sense of normality during a difficult time in their lives.

With the majority of parents seeking refuge being between 24–38 years old, Olive's Place finds the children seeking support are often quite young (under 12) and, in many cases, have had to leave all of their belongings behind.

That's where Amazon came in to assist. Knowing that not all young people start off the school year on an equal footing, Amazon donated thousands of dollars of vouchers to Vinnies Victoria to provide a brighter start for many of the students we assist. The donation enabled the team at Olive's Place to purchase backpacks, lunch boxes, drink bottles, writing and drawing materials for the young children and their families who arrive quite suddenly, uprooted from their homes seeking crisis accommodation.

Michelle Olley, Olive's Place Manager Specialist Family Violence, says, "Starting the school year off with brand-new items that are essential for learning, helps a child feel confident on their first day – particularly when they're going to a new school. You want to fit in as best as possible.

"With so many changes in their young lives, this is one less thing for children to have to worry about. It might seem small, but it is a big gesture."

We can't thank Amazon enough for their generosity and our generous Vinnies supporters who appreciate the change education can make. Your donation can also support a young person escaping family violence receive the right start for this school year.

At Vinnies, we value the support we receive from all our corporate donors. Your kind donation of material aid – no matter how big or small – enables us to continue our good works.

If you're a business owner and have some ideas how you too can support Vinnies, please contact Corporate & Community Relations Manager andrea.reginato@svdp-vic.org.au



DONATE TODAY
VISIT vinnies.org.au
OR PHONE 13 18 12



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