

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 4 May 2022**

## **Vinnies launches new super kitchen Soup Van hub to serve 400,000 a year as people ‘desperate for food’ in inner city Melbourne**

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) is proud to announce an innovative new kitchen with state-of-the-art cooking facilities able to produce 60 litres of soup or pasta servings in minutes. The new Inner City Soup Van hub is based in Kensington and will be serving hot food throughout the coming winter to people in need in the CBD and on the streets of the inner city to answer an increase in demand due to rising costs of living.

The recent near-record inflation rise to 5.1% and data showing food prices are surging and almost half of low-income renters are experiencing rental stress reflect the growing need that Vinnies has seen on the street for some time. The demand for Soup Vans doubled during COVID to 550,000 meals a year at all eight hubs – and is still rising.

The kitchen facility, which amalgamates the former Collingwood and Fitzroy hubs, is believed to be the first of its kind fitted out inside two reconditioned shipping crates, one housing a commercial-size cooker and oven, and the other holding a cool room and storage areas. The project was primarily funded from a generous bequest (whose family wish to remain anonymous), and this drove the inspiration for the shipping crate innovation so that Vinnies’ capital investment in the high-spec kitchen could be placed on a flat-bed truck and reinstated in a different building should Vinnies have to move premises. We hope to expand the shipping crate model so that facilities can also be transported at short notice to an emergency situation, such as a bushfire or flood.

A special event is being held to officially launch the Inner City Soup Van hub in its new home on Wednesday 4 May 2022 at 75 Bakehouse Road Kensington.

The project is the joint brainchild of the late State Soup Van President Leo Holt – who set up the Collingwood run in 1998 and died during a volunteer shift in 2021 – and Vinnies’ GM of Membership and Special Works Sarah Cromie. “It is exciting to launch the hub after two years of planning and production, and of course, Leo’s sad death. He would have been so proud of what we’ve achieved,” she says. The cooking facility will be called ‘Leo’s Kitchen’.

The facilities illustrate Vinnies’ responsiveness to the people we serve. “There is an increased need,” says Ms Cromie. “We’re seeing people come to us who are really desperate for food. It’s a different demographic to what we’ve seen in the past – we’re seeing young families and older women coming to us for food who are experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, due to the rising cost of living.”

The Inner City Soup Van hub will serve 400,000 meals annually to thousands of individuals and families experiencing homelessness or struggling to afford food. “This is a new concept. We’re not aware of another organisation running facilities for vulnerable communities on this scale. At Vinnies, we’re focused on sustainable solutions and in terms of our Soup Vans, this is it. The new ‘super kitchen’ facilities are going to make a huge difference to the amount of hot, nutritious food we are able to get out to those communities quickly and efficiently this winter,” says Ms Cromie.

Vinnies Victoria CEO Julia Cabbage says: “We are so very proud of this innovation at our much-loved Soup Van services that will give a significant boost to the volume and quality of meals we provide to people in need. Vinnies is focused on solutions that best serve the community and create the biggest impact from our donors’ much-cherished gifts.”

Vinnies Victoria Soup Vans would like to acknowledge with appreciation the support of the Cities of Melbourne and Yarra, along with significant contributions from corporate partners IGA, Woodards Foundation, Talaria Capital and Grill’d, whose invaluable in-kind and financial gifts keep many of our Soup Vans on the road every night of the year.

*The event will also host a number of valued fundraisers and ambassadors from the [Vinnies CEO Sleepout](#) event that this year aims to raise \$1.5 million, a third of which will support the sustainability of the Soup Van service. The Sleepout will be held on 23 June 2022 at the Timber Yard in Port Melbourne. Registrations are open.*

**- ENDS -**

*For any further inquiries about this story or to arrange an interview with Sarah Cromie or Julia Cambage, please contact our media office via the details below.*

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES:** **Dee Rudebeck** | PR & Communications Coordinator  
**dee.rudebeck@svdp-vic.org.au** | **0438 804 023** | **03 9895 5915**

**or**

**Jen Vuk** | Communications Manager  
**jen.vuk@svdp-vic.org.au** | **0418 863 719** | **03 9895 5877**

#### **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](http://www.vinnies.org.au).*