



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

SUMMER 2020
ISSUE NO. 86

Vision



**BUILDING A BETTER,
STRONGER VINNIES**

**SPACE TO CREATE
AND HEAL**

**COMBATTING
HOMELESSNESS
LOCALLY**

**SOCIAL
HOUSING
TRANSFORMS
LIVES**



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Please DO NOT send original printed photographs. Photos should be emailed as high resolution.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear friends,

It is with great pleasure that I present the latest edition of *Vision*, our magazine highlighting those we assist and the inspiring impact we make as a Society.

This is the last issue of *Vision* that I'll be introducing, as my term as President is coming to a close. Congratulations to

Peter McNamara, who was recently elected as the new President of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

The past four years have been a time of great change and achievement for Vinnies, and it's been an honour to oversee your dedicated work as members, volunteers and staff. I have confidence that we are in a strong position to carry on our good works with the implementation of our new Strategic Plan, which you can read more about overpage.

In this issue of *Vision*, we mark the third birthday of our Local Area Coordination program and the opening of several new services including a community centre in Albury, a Container Deposit Scheme depot in Dubbo, a temporary supermarket standing in for the IGA destroyed by fire in Walgett, and an impressive new Vinnies Shop in Thirroul.

I would also like to make mention of those who have suffered as a result of the devastating bushfires throughout the state. Please know that we are here to offer a hand up as you recover and rebuild.

Thank you for the amazing difference you've made for people in need this year, and for showing me such kindness over the past four years as President of Vinnies NSW. Merry Christmas and all the best for 2020.

Denis Walsh
State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

CEO'S MESSAGE



As 2019 draws to a close and we look forward to Christmas, we must still remember the struggles faced by so many across our state.

While many of us will find comfort among our loved ones during the warmer months, a growing number will experience the pain of poverty and

isolation. And for those of us who are lucky to have been spared by the recent bushfires, it's hard to imagine the stress and sadness of Christmas after losing your home.

For those whose experience of this time of year is a negative one, our annual Christmas Appeal aims to restore a sense of hope and dignity. The funds we raise this Christmas will help us to alleviate suffering and continue offering a compassionate 'hand up' in the year to come.

Our Vinnies Bushfire Appeal is also raising much-needed funds to support our hardworking members' efforts in providing food, clothing and other essentials for evacuees. We will also be there to support people and communities throughout the long, hard months of recovery.

As members, volunteers and employees of the St Vincent de Paul Society we have achieved so much this year. I have been personally humbled and moved by the difference you have made during the recent bushfires. I hope you feel proud of your contribution as you read the stories of how Vinnies has helped people.

From all of us, a very merry Christmas to you and yours. I hope you stay safe, happy and healthy over the holidays.

Jack de Groot
Chief Executive Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Building a better, stronger Vinnies



In September, we announced our new organisational structure, part of our journey to the future under our Strategic Plan 2020-2022. These changes are part of the ongoing evolution of Vinnies NSW, putting us in a better and stronger position to put the people we assist at the centre of everything we do.

As part of the organisational re-design, our CEO, Jack de Groot and Executive Leadership Team members travelled extensively throughout NSW to meet with our members, volunteers and staff.

"It's been wonderful seeing the passion that our people have for Vinnies and our mission," Jack said after the roadshow. "Many of you are energised for the future, but we also appreciate that there is some anxiety, which is natural whenever we go through a period of change. We are committed to working alongside you to make the transition as smooth as possible.

"The Rule calls for renewal and adaptation, and I believe this is what we're constantly doing. Vinnies isn't afraid of change; in just the past few years, we've taken on the award-winning Container Deposit Scheme, piloted the Community Hub model seen in Western Sydney and Wagga Wagga, and embraced the NDIS through our Local Area Coordination (LAC) program.

"Our new organisational structure is about drawing from our rich past to make a new future, and most importantly, it's about having the greatest impact on those we assist."

The new structure brings us closer to working as One Society by streamlining all our services through one Vinnies Services directorate. We are combining all of our revenue-generating and commercial operations under one new directorate, and centralising our enabling functions such as finance and technology services. We have also established a new directorate focusing on regional operations and the needs of our members and volunteers, ensuring they are better supported in their work. From an operational perspective, the ten Central Councils are now grouped into five regions: West, North West, North East, Metropolitan, and South. Each region is led by a



Regional Director reporting to the Membership, Volunteers and Regional Operations directorate. The structure of membership, and conferences remains unchanged under the traditional Central Council structure.

Changes to the structure of the Society are just one part of the transformation of our organisation. We're also reviewing how we work, embracing technology and finding new ways of collaborating so we can be more effective in delivering our services to the people and communities that need us.

Not only will these changes help us to maintain a consistent model of care for all those we serve; they will

also help us to build on fundraising and retail performance, securing more support from funders by delivering greater accountability. This will provide critical funds to run our services and conference work.

"Thank you for coming on this journey with us," Jack said. "The strength of this organisation and its wonderful legacy will carry on to the future."

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2022
and organisational structure at
vinnies.org.au/strategicplancommsnsw

THE PRESSURE OF POWER PRICES

A growing number of people are being disconnected from their electricity supply, according to the findings of our second Households in the Dark report.

Using data obtained between July 2015 to June 2018 across NSW, Victoria, SA and south-east Queensland, our research team identified rising power prices, the effects of drought and insufficient income support payments as leading reasons for power disconnections. Around 395,000 households were disconnected over the three-year period.

Here in NSW, regional and rural areas were impacted heavily with Collarenebri, Wellington and Dareton taking the hardest hit. The outer suburbs of metropolitan areas also faced higher rates of disconnections than city centres.

Vinnies' National Council made several recommendations to help reduce the pressure of power prices, including raising the rate of income support payments such as Newstart and providing greater government assistance for remote communities.

Vinnies NSW helps people who are struggling to afford their power bills by providing Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers and additional support from our local Conferences.

To see the full Households in the Dark report, go to vinnies.org.au/disconnections.

THE NSW POSTCODES WITH HIGHEST DISCONNECTION RATES

- Collarenebri (2833)
- Wellington (2820)
- Dareton (2717)
- Ganmain (2702)
- Mungindi (2406)
- White Cliffs (2836)
- Junee (2663)
- Claymore (2559)
- Gulargambone (2828)
- Bourke (2040)



LAC staff looking fantastic in their Vinnies Shops outfits.

LAC turns three

In July we celebrated the third anniversary of Vinnies Local Area Coordination (LAC) program, which supports people with disability through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The LAC is one of our biggest programs, with more than 450 staff assisting more than 30,000 people since the program began three years ago. We work from 22 offices across NSW to support people aged 7 to 65 in accessing the services they need to live a meaningful life with disability.

We held a LAC conference to mark the three-year milestone, where we heard from speakers including Stacey Copas, who spoke out about resilience from her own experience of becoming quadriplegic at 12 years old; Paul Nunnari, a three-time Paralympian and silver medalist; Nathan Basher, a young man with Down syndrome and advocate for the work rights of people with disability; and Aunty Elsie Randall, a Yagel/Bundjalung woman who spoke about the importance of kinship structures for Aboriginal people living with disability.

Showing their Vincentian spirit, LAC staff came to the post-conference cocktail function dressed in fashionable finds from their local Vinnies Shops!

Congratulations to everyone who has contributed to our LAC program so far, and may there be many more great years to come.

Beverley Kerr
(President of Vinnies Services NSW) cuts the cake.



Disaster brings out the best in communities

When bushfires arrived frighteningly early this spring, Vinnies was there to help communities recover.

Initially devastating parts of north-east New South Wales, fires spread throughout the state and into Queensland leaving hundreds of homes destroyed, communities irrevocably changed and most tragically, lives lost.

We were there when the first fires struck Tenterfield, Lidsdale and Drake in September. In early October, our St Therese Conference in Casino sprang into action distributing food vouchers, clothing, essentials and financial assistance for people evacuated from the Rappville, Drake and Busbys Flat fires. They also liaised with Rappville Public School to assess the need for school meals, uniforms and emotional wellbeing support.

For a brief period it appeared the rest of the state had escaped the worst of nature, only for the fires to intensify to unprecedented levels. Our dedicated members and volunteers immediately stepped in to help.

Bill Baragry, Forster Holy Name Conference President, supported locals at the Tuncurry Bowling Club even after being forced to evacuate his own home.

Near Ballina, the mostly Aboriginal community of Cabbage Tree Island had to be evacuated and the local Aboriginal Land Council called upon Vinnies to provide support for close to 100 residents. Members from the Richmond Region Conference arrived at the evacuation centre to offer a hand-up with food, nappies and baby formula.

Left: Bill Baragry, Liz Royal and Marlene McWilliams are just a few of our incredible members who helped out their communities, even while facing the impacts of bushfires themselves.

"I can't thank Mick Albany [Richmond Region Conference President] and Vinnies enough for their quick response and willingness to assist," said Ruth Powis from Jali Aboriginal Land Council. "The help from Vinnies was absolutely fantastic."

In Coffs Harbour, our homelessness drop-in centre Pete's Place became a haven for residents in need of assistance, providing showers, food and help to access the Federal Government's Disaster Recovery Allowance.

"We were the first point of contact for many who'd left their homes," said Pete's Place Manager, Anna

Scott. "Some wanted to use our phones to contact family members, friends or Centrelink. Basic two-person tents brought in by Vinnies' local St Augustine Conference were distributed to those who felt they needed them, as safe camp sites have been set up around town."

In response to the escalating fire conditions, the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal was launched in partnership with Channel Nine. We continue to collect donations online at www.bushfireappeal.com.au, by phone on 13 18 12 and through all Vinnies Shops.

"These events have been deeply distressing, but it's been inspiring to see these communities come together at a time of need," said our CEO, Jack de Groot.

"Thank you to all the incredible Vinnies members, volunteers and staff who have played a part in supporting those impacted by fires. Our thoughts are with those members of the Vinnies community who have been affected by the fires themselves, especially those who have lost their homes."

We'll be right alongside these resilient communities through the months – and likely years – it takes to rebuild and truly get back on their feet.



Anna Scott

DAVID WENHAM'S BRUSH WITH VINNIES

Did you catch the recent episode of ABC's *Anh's Brush with Fame* featuring actor David Wenham? It also featured Vinnies!

As Anh Do painted his portrait, David spoke fondly about his childhood and family history. He recounted that his father had grown up in a foster family during the Great Depression.

"He remembers very clearly one day when they had absolutely nothing, no possessions, no hope, no nothing, coming to the door were two men from the St Vincent de Paul Society," David told Anh. "And those two men had a profound effect on my father's life because they helped him and his family find a way to be able to live."

"And so from that moment my father, in his spare time, was a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society. He would go out at night on what they called 'cases' and help people: deliver food vouchers for people who needed food, or he'd find other people accommodation, or he was just an ear for somebody who wanted someone to talk to."

David's father brought his deep appreciation for charitable giving to his own family, bringing up his seven kids with values of humility and service.



Photo: ABC

"Money never was any sort of interest or motivation for anything that my parents did. They didn't aspire to it at all. My parents got their happiness from giving, far more so than receiving," David said.

The episode is part of Series 4 of *Anh's Brush with Fame*, available to watch online through ABC iView.

Thanks for lighting a SPARK

We said a fond farewell to our SPARK program in September, after 13 years of providing support for newly arrived families of refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

Through SPARK, we worked in partnership with schools and services throughout Western Sydney, helping kids and their families to settle into their new communities and find ways to belong.

We made the incredibly difficult decision to step away from this program as part of the structural changes resulting from our Strategic Plan. We are focusing our work on specific areas where we know we can make the most difference: primarily, supporting adults experiencing social isolation.

We worked closely with the SPARK-participating schools to make sure their students would continue to be supported, and to help the schools to implement their own programs like SPARK wherever possible. We're

happy to say that 75% of the SPARK program will continue to evolve in the hands of community members, who have successfully taken over where we left off.

"I extend my sincere thanks to everyone who made the SPARK program possible, especially the volunteers and members who took part," said Vinnies NSW CEO, Jack de Groot. "We are so proud of our passionate team and the difference they've made for kids and families over the past 13 years."

"We hope they'll continue to make a difference across Vinnies' many other programs as we hand the reins of SPARK over to the schools and communities who've benefited from this program."



FAREWELL TO ABILITY LINKS

After six years of assisting people with disability to connect with their local communities, the Ability Links program came to a close at the end of October.

Beginning as a pilot program through the Hunter and Central Coast, before expanding into the Sydney Metro South region, NSW Government funding for Ability Links ended as part of the transition towards the NDIS.

Since 2013, Vinnies has helped people living with disability, their families and carers achieve their goals through Ability Links, while engaging local organisations and businesses to create socially and physically accessible spaces for all.

"Our Ability Links volunteers and staff have left a wonderful legacy of increased disability awareness and accessibility," said Niamh Mannion, Executive Director of Vinnies Services.

Vinnies remains committed to assisting people connect with the NDIS through our Local Area Coordination (LAC) program, as well as other programs and services.

Return and Earn in Dubbo

We've opened a new Return and Earn site in Dubbo, providing a great way for locals to recycle their bottles, containers and cartons while reaping benefits for themselves and Vinnies.

When you recycle at our Return and Earn sites, you get a 10-cent refund for every drink container which you can choose to keep for yourself or donate to Vinnies. We also receive a handling fee from the NSW Government for every eligible recycled item.

We're proud to partner with Indigenous organisation RED.I.E to run the Dubbo Return and Earn site – just one step of many we are taking under our Reconciliation Action Plan.

So get recycling, Dubbo! Visit us at 25 Douglas Mawson Road. You can find our other sites throughout NSW at vinnies.org.au/cds.

DID YOU KNOW? We've recycled 50 million containers since starting our Container Deposit Scheme!



Open days for ADES

We recently opened the doors to our Australian Disability Enterprises in Coonamble, Stanmore and West Ryde, inviting people to come in and see how our supported employees contribute to the work of Vinnies.

Through Castlereagh Industries in Coonamble and Ozanam Industries in Stanmore and West Ryde, we provide commercial services ranging from textile assembly to bulk mailing, packaging and office cleaning. In Coonamble we even operate a commercial laundry and carwash! And the Stanmore team organise the delivery of this magazine – the copy you hold in your hand right now has been sorted by our supported employees.



Not only does this work generate income for Vinnies; it also provides supported employment for around 100 people with disability.

One of the most loved projects of the Coonamble team is our 'Bespoke Totes': bags made from recycled textiles and sold in a select few of our Vinnies Shops. Search for Bespoke Totes on our website to see if they're available in a shop near you!

On the frontline of the drought

The current drought is now officially the worst on record for NSW. Last financial year we raised or were granted more than \$12 million to support farmers and others affected by the drought, providing food and water, medical support, help paying the bills, and more.

In the tiny town of Cumnock in Central West NSW, our drought relief vouchers are helping to keep the local general store running.

Cumnock General Store's sales have been cut in half since the drought started. "We hardly see people," said Paula Rudd, who bought the 137-year-old business with her husband, Greg, four years ago.

"And when they do come in, they look so tired and careworn."

Country born and bred, Paula describes the two-year drought as the worst in recent memory. "You've got people in their 90s who have never seen anything like it," she said.

"Everybody looks about 10 years older. It's so hard on them. These are people who have spent their lives on farms. They are faced with losing bloodlines of stock they have spent generations developing, but they can't feed them so they have got to go."

The Rudds see themselves as caretakers of one of the longest continuously running businesses in Australia. The store, which doubles as the town's bank and post office, started trading in 1882.

"We definitely feel the pressure of that, that's for sure. We are only the fourth owners. We had very big shoes to fill."

The business had been run into the ground when the Rudds bought it, due to the previous owner's health issues.

"We came into it all guns blazing and we haven't stopped working, seven days a week, 12-16 hours a day."

The Rudds added a cafe and resuscitated the hardware section – along with groceries, fuel, hay, dog food and now alcohol, Cumnock General Store even sells the kitchen sink.

But right now, says Paula, the store is hanging on by "the skin of its teeth". The business survives on passing trade and takeaway food, and Greg has taken on extra work to keep it afloat.



As well as driving the school bus, Greg is Cumnock Public School's student support officer. On weekends, he moonlights as a chef at the local bowling club.

"We were helping out our 86-year-old friend, who ran the Chinese restaurant," said Paula. "Greg, who has never cooked anything apart from a cup of tea in his life, took to Chinese cooking like a duck to water."

When the friend became incapacitated, Greg took over the business.

The Rudds, who bought Cumnock General Store as their "last job", sometimes think they made their decision 10 years too late.

"But even as hard as it is, we love the challenge. And we love the community."

The drought assistance provided to farmers and farm workers in the form of Vinnies' vouchers has helped.

"Is it a good thing? Overwhelmingly yes. It keeps people coming through my door," Paula said.

"We're not going to shut the doors. Not on our watch."

STEPPING UP FOR WALGETT

When Walgett's only supermarket burned down in June, Vinnies immediately stepped in to help.

We offered to relocate from our Vinnies Shop premises so the local IGA could temporarily move in, and the Walgett Shire Council and IGA gratefully accepted. We moved our shop to a smaller rented location, allowing the supermarket to use our larger space for the benefit of the community.

"There was no hesitation – it was just whatever we can do to help the community, looking at the bigger picture," said Phil Donnan, Acting Regional Director, North West Region.

"This is what Vinnies does, we assist people in need, and the Walgett community was suffering anyway. They'd run out of potable water earlier in the year and this was just another

tragedy to occur to the community."

After the fire in June, Walgett Vinnies turned into an IGA the very next month. The use of our building means that people are able to buy groceries and other essentials locally, instead of driving 80 kilometres to the next supermarket.

We're also continuing to support Walgett through the relocated Vinnies Shop, where people can drop by to purchase affordable second-hand goods and access other forms of assistance.

We expect that the temporary building-swap will continue into next year, until the IGA is able to arrange a new permanent location. We'll continue to be there for Walgett.



Nagle Centre opens in Albury

A new community centre was recently opened in Albury to provide assistance for locals at risk of homelessness and disadvantage.

Named in memory of the late Justice John Nagle following a generous bequest left to Vinnies, the Nagle Centre will provide access to a range of services including emergency relief with food and household bills, life skill courses and individual support.

Denis Walsh opened the centre alongside Justice Nagle's daughter, Winsome Duffy.

"The Nagle Centre will have a profound impact for the region in providing assistance to those facing hardship and giving people the capacity to transform their lives," Denis said.

"Justice Nagle may no longer be with us, but his legacy of compassion for the people and community lives on."

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian visited the Nagle Centre in October.



The Nagle Centre will complement the neighbouring Social and Affordable Housing site opened in Albury earlier this year, said St Vincent de Paul Housing CEO Brian Murnane.

"Albury is one of 12 locations throughout NSW developed by Vinnies Housing that will create 500 new, affordable homes for people in need as part of our relationship with the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund," Brian said.

"The Nagle Centre will provide tailored support for residents to connect with the services they need."



“I have angels by my side...”

We received the below heartfelt message from a woman who stayed at Dolores Refuge, one of our accommodation centres for women experiencing domestic violence.

“After 27 years and 10 months I left my psychologically, emotionally, financially controlling husband. I was now homeless. What I believed was normal my entire married life had been given a label, a name... I was a victim of domestic violence. This was a harsh reality.

I had no bruises to show but my scars were far deeper, so deep in my broken brain that I was not sure I would ever feel whole again. I was embarrassed and ashamed.

I arrived at the refuge with red, bloodshot eyes and tears rolling down my face. We were met at my car by a team of earth angels that helped us carry in our heavy bags and showed us to our beautifully prepared room. I was humbled by their kindness when I noticed an entire washing basket filled with everything we could possibly need from shampoos to body lotion, hair ties and makeup wipes. My son's face lit up when he saw a brand-new toy ready and waiting for him.

I was made to feel so welcome; no question was too much. Thanks to the unbelievably kind team, I am feeling so confident; I am happy and excited for my next chapter. I am not alone, I no longer feel panicked and anxious. I get reminded daily that I am brave and strong.”

I'm Australian too!

Our volunteers and staff make a difference for around 80 children from refugee backgrounds who participate in our homework programs in Wagga Wagga.

Two of those kids are Ali and Amir, who enjoyed reading Mem Fox's *I'm Australian Too!* with their Vinnies volunteer.

The book describes the many different cultural groups that make up Australia, sharing the message that we are all Australians and we all belong. Together with their volunteer, Ali and Amir used a globe of the world to find each country from which people had immigrated to Australia.

Inspired by the impact the book had made on the boys, one of our staff members wrote to author Mem Fox. We were delighted when Mem wrote back and included signed copies of the book for Ali and Amir!



Adelaide
April 3rd 2019
Dear Cindy -
The world is a better place with people like you in it. Thanks for all you're doing to help those in need of it.
Enclosed, a book for you and a book each for the boys you wrote about.
All the very best!
Mem Fox

ADAM'S WELCOME

At the darkest moment of Corinne Lindsell's life, the generosity of a complete stranger made her believe in humanity again.

Now, together with the Helensburgh Conference, Vinnies staff member Corinne is extending that generosity to others going through darkness.

Two years ago, Corinne's dearly loved older brother, Jeffrey, died in horrific circumstances. He was killed in a fire, believed to have been deliberately lit.

Jeff lived in a granny flat out the back of his parents' place, and his mum and dad could do little but watch as his home went up in flames. As the whole property became a crime scene, the Lindsells were forced to relocate to a serviced apartment for almost two months.

When Corinne joined her parents at the apartment, she found they had very little from home – not even toothbrushes and toothpaste. She called the hotel manager to explain the family's situation and ask if it was possible to get some supplies from reception. The manager, a man named Adam, said he'd see what he could do.

“So we went down [to reception] in the morning and he had bags of groceries from toiletries to fresh orange juice, cereal, bread, fruit, everything – it was so not what we were expecting, I thought he was just going to give us a bundle of toiletries,” Corinne said.

“We were experiencing the worst of humanity and we were really in the face of what we are describing as evil... and then here we are, some of the best of humanity, just feeding into our lives compassion and generosity. A stranger, a complete stranger, giving us some love.”

Corinne has honoured the hotel manager by giving the name 'Adam's Welcome' to a new Vinnies project, where Helensburgh Conference members provide hampers for other families who have been devastated by homicide.

The hampers are delivered to local respite houses in Waterfall owned by another organisation called the Homicide Victims' Support Group, of which Corinne is a member.

While the project was Corinne's idea, she has been touched by the extra level of attention given by the Helensburgh members delivering the service and the



Corinne and her late brother, Jeff.



Sutherland region in general. Not only do the hampers contain essentials like toiletries and groceries, they also include a message of support from Vinnies along with a \$50 Coles voucher.

“A lot of families are at the houses because they might be going to court, and they might usually be living in rural NSW,” Corinne explains. “Something like a \$50 voucher to get groceries for the week... it's just that little bit of extra support. [The Conference members] have even drawn a map from where the house is to where the nearest Coles is.”

According to the Homicide Victims' Support Group, a new member joins every three days. Corinne says the trauma of losing a loved one in this way is “unlike any other grief”. In the midst of that trauma, the Adam's Welcome team hope that their hampers will make a small but significant difference.



HUBS FOR HEALTH

Our Vinnies Community Hubs in Blacktown, Harris Park and Penrith recently joined with NSW Health to provide food hampers to disadvantaged families dropping into the hub. The hampers contained health tips as well as ingredients for a healthy, simple and affordable meal: 'Easy Tuna Pasta'. Here's the recipe so you can try it yourself!

Easy Tuna Pasta

Cooking time: 20 mins

Feeds: 4

Ingredients:

- 1 x 500g packet short pasta (penne)
- Canola oil spray
- ½ brown onion (chopped)
- 425g canned tuna with a Health Star Rating of 3.5 stars or more
- Jar of pasta sauce with tomato, garlic and herbs, with a Health Star Rating of 3.5 stars or more
- Parmesan cheese, to serve



Method:

1. Cook pasta in large pot of boiling water for 10-12 min until tender. Drain and reserve ¼ cup of liquid.
2. Place a large non-stick pan on medium heat, lightly spray with oil, add onion and cook until lightly browned. Add tuna and jar of pasta sauce, bring to simmer (gentle bubbles).
3. Add drained pasta and reserved liquid to the sauce mix, toss to combine.
4. Serve with a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese.

TIPS:

- Add veggies like tinned corn kernels or diced up carrots for a healthier meal.
- Always check out the Health Star Rating when shopping for groceries, and aim to buy products with a rating of 3.5 stars and above.
- For more healthy tips and recipes, visit makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au

DISPENSING GOODWILL

The St Marys Conference would like to thank a generous member of their local community, who has gone above and beyond to improve the lives of people we assist.

Mujtaba Kazime is a pharmacist at Priceline Pharmacy in St Marys Village Shopping Centre, and dispenses PBS medicines for free to the people we visit. He does this by providing vouchers to the Conference, which are then passed onto the people in need.

Mujtaba and his business partner, Negina Sadr even include delivery if required, and sometimes make part contributions to the cost of non-PBS medications. We sincerely thank them for their ongoing support.



St Marys Conference member Deirdre Miles with Mujtaba Kazime



Homeless Connect

Our team in Orange attended a Homeless Connect expo held by Veritas House back in August.

Homeless Connect events take place in several communities across NSW, and bring people experiencing homelessness face-to-face with a range of service providers in one place. It's a great way to make contact with people needing our help.

We brought free groceries, blankets, clothes and other necessities to give away on the day, and linked people to our many services in the Central West – from the Vinnies Van and Café in Orange to Greene Villa (our disability housing service) in Coonamble.

A farm with a twist

At a 'therapy farm' near Lismore, horses, donkeys and even alpacas help young people gain confidence, become more social and overcome personal problems caused by early-life neglect or trauma.

This year, more than 25 young people from across northern NSW have visited the farm through Vinnies' Breaking the Barriers program.

Psychologist Sally Mills encourages the kids to form bonds with animals they have never encountered previously, outdoors in fresh air and among nature. It's an approach to therapy that's much less confronting than being in a traditional counselling room.

"Interacting with horses and gaining their trust in our leadership creates self-confidence and enables a young person to deal with intimidating and challenging situations in life," Sally explained.

"While it can take the whole course of three to six one-hour sessions for some young people to develop lasting confidence, the change begins from the very first session.

Their supporting adults – parents or a counsellor – describe the changes as almost miraculous."

For young people who feel caught up in their own heads, time at the therapy farm helps them to look beyond themselves and connect to the environment and the animals.

"We work with small ponies, which are quiet and unthreatening, plus our rescue donkey and the very cute alpacas as a focus for their emotions."

Sally said horses have a special ability to "help children work through emotional barriers without shame or stigma".

"This is especially true for children who suffer the effects of trauma, mental health and behaviour issues," she said.



Combatting homelessness locally

Vinnies Community Sleepouts were held throughout August to raise funds and awareness for people experiencing homelessness in their local communities.

Following on from the record success of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout back in June, Community Sleepouts provided people with an opportunity to address homelessness in their own backyards, with all funds raised going towards local Vinnies services.

Parramatta, Maitland, Tweed Heads and Wagga Wagga all held events in the final days of August, with Deniliquin doing likewise earlier in the month.

More than 37,000 people across NSW are currently facing homelessness, many of them sleeping in temporary accommodation such as boarding houses or hostels, or in their cars. We know that many women stay with violent partners in order to avoid the risk of homelessness.

Even though a minority of people 'sleep rough' on the streets, our Community Sleepout participants slept outdoors with a sheet of cardboard as a small way of experiencing this harsh reality. Participants learned more about the facts of homelessness on the night, while asking their friends and family to donate towards Vinnies services.

The events attracted 294 participants and raised just under \$160,000. All funds raised were put back into each community through local services and programs such as Fred's Place in Tweed Heads and Community Hubs in Western Sydney.

Throughout winter many schools and communities also hosted sleepout events in a show of solidarity with those doing it tough. Some of the participating schools included St Paul's Booragul, St Patrick's Kogarah and St Paul's Rutherford.

Thank you to everyone involved in the 2019 Community Sleepouts – the efforts of participants, donors, supporters and sponsors have made a real difference to people facing hardship and disadvantage.



MAITLAND: 29 SLEEPERS



TWEED HEADS: 37 SLEEPERS



WAGGA WAGGA: 67 SLEEPERS



WESTERN SYDNEY: 128 SLEEPERS



DENILIQVIN: 33 SLEEPERS

FUNDRAISING CHAMPION

DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN CREATE A FUNDRAISER ON FACEBOOK TO CELEBRATE YOUR BIRTHDAY?

Two weeks before your big day, Facebook will ask you if you'd like to create a fundraiser to support a cause you care about. If you're feeling generous, this is a great opportunity to invite your friends to donate to Vinnies in honour of your special day.

Facebook doesn't collect a donation fee, so every dollar given by your friends comes straight to us. It's an easy alternative to asking your friends for gifts, enabling them to support people in need with just a few quick clicks.



Andrew Budihardjo completed his fifth Sun Herald City2Surf run this year and generously chose to run as part of Team Vinnies. Putting in an incredible effort and completing the race in under 100 minutes, Andrew was able to raise \$5,625, earning him the top spot on our fundraising leaderboard for this event!

Andrew received a "Charity Superstar" medal for his efforts and hopes that his achievement encourages others to get involved and support Vinnies. We have an exciting new web portal coming in 2020, where it'll be easier than ever to register for our peer-to-peer fundraising events like the City2Surf, Blackmores Sydney Running Festival and Sutherland2Surf. So get your running shoes ready and watch this space!



Sigrid with one of her creations. Photo: Kris Ashpole Photography



PROJECT DRESSMAKER

We were delighted to work with one of our corporate partners, Johnson & Johnson, to pilot a new program designed and delivered by one of their employees.

Sigrid Rijgersberg-von Stockhausen had ended an abusive marriage in the United States and moved back to her native Holland with her 3-month-old daughter when she began to sew. At first it was just a way of making clothes when she couldn't afford to shop, but it became something much more.

"I felt this great sense of accomplishment and pride, especially when people would compliment my work. Sewing really boosted my self-confidence and gave me something tangible to remind myself what I had achieved with just a few metres of fabric," Sigrid said.

Now happily living in Australia and working at Johnson & Johnson, Sigrid had the idea of sharing sewing skills with other women who had experienced domestic violence. Soon, with the help of life coach (and fellow Johnson & Johnson employee) Rosie Dunstan, volunteer dressmaking tutor Caroline Fox, and logistics coordinator Tamara Brailey, Sigrid was leading eight women at a Vinnies refuge through creative workshops.

The six-month program, called Project Dressmaker, culminated in a celebration at the Sheraton Grand in early November, where the women each got to show off their dressmaking on a real catwalk.

After the successful pilot, Sigrid plans to roll out Project Dressmaker to reach many more women in the future. "I have a real passion for uplifting women because I think if we can do this, we can potentially change the world," she said.

How you can support Vinnies this Christmas



VINNIES CHRISTMAS APPEAL

Through our Christmas Appeal, we are sharing the story of single mum Laura and her son Sam, and asking the public to donate so that Vinnies can help more families like theirs.

Laura and Sam fled from an abusive home. After Laura lost her job and struggled to find a new one, it became harder and harder to make ends meet. She quickly found herself caught in the grips of poverty.

After covering rent and bills, Laura had as little as \$30 a week left over for food. She soon started going without so that Sam could eat. The first time she skipped a meal, she told him she wasn't hungry – but he knew it wasn't true.

At 11 years old, Sam was old enough to know something was wrong. He saw his mum crying on the phone and sensed her desperation as she tried to make the most of what little they could afford. All this made him increasingly anxious – a common problem for kids who live with food insecurity.

Going hungry at school, he started to disconnect from his peers.

"I would sit inside while everyone else was playing and pretend to read," Sam said. "I just didn't have the energy to run around outside."

When the school noticed Sam was struggling, they sent him home with a loaf of bread and a phone number for Vinnies. But after enduring years of abuse, Laura found it hard to trust anyone.

Finally, with almost nothing left to feed her son, Laura overcame her fear. She pulled out the piece of paper and dialled the number.

Soon our team were at Laura and Sam's door, bringing a hamper of healthy food items and food vouchers, as well as a non-judgemental shoulder to lean on.

"I would not have survived without Vinnies," said Laura. "I had no idea how I was going to feed Sam. I was in despair.

"They came and listened. It was such an amazing relief to know that someone really cared."

Laura and Sam are doing well, but it's a confronting fact that many other families will go hungry this Christmas. Even here in Australia, the 'lucky country', one in six children live in poverty and one in five don't have enough to eat.

Please help us spread the word about our Christmas Appeal. The festive season is a crucial time for our fundraising, bringing in vital funds that support families like Laura and Sam's for the year ahead.

Donors can visit www.vinnies.org.au or call 13 18 12 to make a gift to Vinnies this Christmas.

TAP-AND-GO DONATIONS AT AIRPORTS

Planning a trip anytime soon? You and your travel buddies can make a quick and easy donation to Vinnies at Lagardère Travel Retail shops in airports across Australia, including NewsLink, Relay, Watermark, Bijoux Ternier, tech2go and more.

All these shops will be fundraising for the Vinnies Christmas Appeal using collection boxes and Quest Tap Machines, pre-loaded with a \$2 or \$5 donation, ready for your VISA or Mastercard. An easy and convenient way to support people doing it tough through the Christmas period, we're excited to see how this inventive way of donating can help us to help those who need it most.



GIVE A BURGER TO SOMEONE GOING HUNGRY WITH GRILL'D

We have joined forces with Grill'd to provide meals for the many people we assist through the Grill'd "8 and Donate" loyalty program.

Grill'd loyalty members are entitled to receive a free burger after eight burger purchases and can choose to donate their freebie to Vinnies, providing a meal to someone in need through our Sydney Night Patrol service. If you are a Grill'd loyalty member, please consider donating your free burger to help someone experiencing homelessness.



IGA DROUGHT APPEAL

This Christmas we are proud to be partnering once again with IGA and, for the first time, Drought Angels, to support Australian farmers and communities affected by some of the harshest drought conditions on record.

Australians have consistently shown their generosity when it comes to natural disasters and this Christmas will likely be no different when it comes to giving back to those who provide for us all year round.

Head into IGA this November and December and help spread the joy of Christmas by purchasing a Christmas drought token or products with a Community Chest ticket. Funds raised from the sale of these products will be used to ease the financial and emotional burden of the drought, while taking away the pain of isolation that can often be felt by those less fortunate at this time of year.




THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

In the thankful spirit of the season, we'd like to give a shout-out to the corporate partners who have supported Vinnies this year, including Abergeldie Complex Infrastructure, Australian Stockbrokers Foundation, Blue Star, Board Directions, CEO Institute, City of Fairfield RSL, Coca Cola Amatil, COS, Festival Hire, Genworth, Grill'd, Grinders, Hilton Sydney, Hotels Have Hearts IGA, Janssen Cilag, King Living, Lagardère Travel Retail, Mount Franklin, Nine Cares, Nous Group, Ooh! Media, Our Big Kitchen, Pin Stripe Media, Port Authority New South Wales, Rapid Relief Team, Sky News, The Australian, TVSN.


It's so important that businesses focus on people as well as profit, and use their enormous power and influence to do good. We're so grateful to the many businesses that have taken up that responsibility and helped us to make a difference for people facing poverty and hardship.

ABERGELDIE

 Abergeldie Complex Infrastructure has been a sponsor of our Vinnies Van services for 11 years, helping to provide food and companionship to people experiencing poverty and homelessness in the Parramatta and Mount Druiitt areas.

Abergeldie's passionate staff members volunteer their time monthly to support this service, and this Melbourne Cup Day they presented a sponsorship cheque to Vinnies. A sincere thanks to Abergeldie for standing with Vinnies to support people in Western Sydney who are experiencing poverty and isolation.


GENWORTH

 Genworth continued its generous support of the newly named V4You program (formerly the KEEP Program) at Vincentian House, providing \$50,000 for this program as well as a \$10,000 donation to support the Vinnies Christmas Appeal 2019.

Genworth has partnered with us on V4You since 2013, with staff regularly volunteering to help us run a school holiday program and purchasing Christmas gifts for the parents residing at Vincentian House to give to their kids on Christmas Day.

A heartfelt thanks to Genworth for their ongoing support of the families, children and young people we assist.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS

 Staff from our corporate partners Johnson & Johnson, Genworth and Hilton Sydney have made significant volunteering contributions in 2019.

In addition to their regular shifts at the Sydney Night Patrol, Genworth generously created an outdoor courtyard at The Marian Centre, a crisis accommodation centre for women and children escaping domestic violence. Genworth staff purchased \$1,500 worth of outdoor furniture and plants from Bunnings and dedicated a day to creating a lively and beautiful space which will help provide some peace and comfort to those who need it most.

Continuing from the success of Project Dressmaker (on page 17), Johnson & Johnson recently hosted a resumé-writing workshop for women at our crisis accommodation services.

Hilton Sydney staff volunteered as part of their global month of giving in June to support the Sydney Night Patrol and the Vinnies CEO Sleepout. As well as giving the time of their employees, Hilton Sydney regularly donates food to the Sydney Night Patrol and Matthew Talbot Hostel, as well as providing dinner for staff and volunteers working at the Vinnies CEO Sleepout and catering for our annual thank you event for Vinnies donors.

We are also very excited to be organising our largest corporate volunteering activity to date, which will involve a team of 50 Johnson & Johnson staff, who will be upgrading and renovating another of our crisis accommodation centres. Watch this space!



The house of hope

SIXTY PER CENT OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN NSW ARE MEN, YET THEY CAN STRUGGLE TO FIND SERVICES.

John Purcell House is the only crisis accommodation service for single men in the Shoalhaven region. The Vinnies service opens its doors to all men over 21. The service prides itself on zero tolerance for violence, and respect is given and expected in return.

John Purcell House has been running since 1984, but a few years ago the building was levelled and rebuilt from scratch, using funds generously contributed by Vinnies donors.

The result is a modern and bright facility that looks just like any other apartment block in Nowra. There are 17 individual rooms. There's a kitchen, a dining room, a

computer lab, a laundry and space to mingle outdoors. In short: it's a space that allows people to live with dignity.

Chris is on his third stint at John Purcell House. He's only 26 but has the wry outlook of a much older man.

He was kicked out of his dad's place when he was 14 and diagnosed with stage-four cancer at 18 (somewhat miraculously, he's in remission). His mum was never really in the picture, and their relationship is rocky at best.

When Chris was in his early 20s he lived on the Gold Coast and worked in the construction boom. It was the highlight of his life so far. But as he says, all jobs must come to an end, especially in construction. When the contract ended, it wasn't long before he fell back into the habit that has defined his life on-and-off since he was 15: ice.

Chris says that Geminis have two personalities, and his are when he's taking ice versus when he's clean. He says he can't hold down a job while he's on ice, but he can make his way on the street.

And that's exactly where he's been for extended periods of time since his teenage years. Every now and then he manages to quit the drugs and hold down steady employment and housing, but it never seems to last. A few months ago, Chris was stabbed and robbed while living on the streets. That led to his latest attempt to clean up, and he hopes this time it'll stick.

He's living in John Purcell House while waiting to go into a 12-month residential rehab program. He's all too aware that the odds are stacked against him; even if he manages to stay the course of rehab, he's awaiting sentencing for a slew of driving-related charges and might go to prison. He wants nothing more than to go back up to the Gold Coast and work in construction again, but his good behaviour bond is likely to keep him in NSW.

Yet Chris is cautiously optimistic that when he's broken free of his ice addiction, he can start to piece his life back together.

The staff at John Purcell House will keep in touch with Chris for at least a year after he moves out, as they do with all the people they assist. There may only be 17 residents in the house itself, but the caseworkers provide support to around 60 men through outreach work in the community at any one time.

Over the past two years, only two have fallen short of the goal that Vinnies has for all residents; to find and sustain a safe home in the community.

Chris and John Purcell House will feature in the third season of *Filthy Rich & Homeless*, coming in 2020 to SBS TV.

Hillary with one of her artworks at the OLC Art Show.



SPACE TO CREATE AND HEAL

For people who come up against barriers to participating in society, the Vinnies Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC) is a place where those walls come down.

It's a welcoming space where people can access employment assistance, learn how to cook, attend mental health support groups, and gain valuable life skills in order to get back on their feet.

In our many decades of working with people on the margins of society, we've found that creative expression can play a huge role in wellbeing. Music, writing and art help people to express themselves, feel empowered by telling their own stories, process what they're going through, and become part of an artistic community.

We recently celebrated the creativity of the people we support at our fifth annual OLC Art Show and the launch of our first CD, *Through the Ages: A Folk/Rock Compilation*.



Terry at the OLC CD launch.

TERRY'S STORY: FINDING HIS VOICE THROUGH MUSIC

From the time he first picked up a guitar as a 12-year-old, music and songwriting has provided Terry with a voice.

"It's really good for getting stuff out; creating stories – even if they're not about me," he says.

"I think about a phrase or something that relates to my life. It starts with a sentence – usually something about my feelings, relationships, society – it could be anything really."

Playing in bands throughout his 20s and 30s, his ambition to emulate the artistry of musical idols such as The Beatles came to an abrupt halt upon being told "you're too old to do music anymore".

When he stopped performing, he found himself lost and lacking the sense of identity he had always had through his music. "I was in a pretty bad state of mind, I have to say. I reached a pretty low point in my life," Terry reflects.

Burdened by decades of "self-sabotage" with personal consequences and a toll for those around him, he found his way to the OLC three years ago, where he rediscovered his passion and his sense of self.

Gaining support from staff, he felt his spirits lift as he built an idea scribbled on a notepad into a fully realised song.

"Once I started recording here, it really gave me a new lease on life and now I'm still recording elsewhere."

Going on to record seven songs at the OLC, including a contribution to the first CD compilation *Through the Ages*, Terry has continued writing and recording. Now that he has renewed confidence, it's onward and upward from here.

"The Ozanam Learning Centre has been great. This whole thing has been fantastic – it's people expressing themselves that wouldn't otherwise have a voice."

HILLARY'S STORY: FINDING A COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

Hillary's life has been full of twists and turns.

After growing up in remote Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory, she moved away to boarding school at 11 years old. From there her path has gone through Canberra, Port Macquarie, and a few women's communities, where she helped grow vegetables and tend the land. She's worked in transport, in a laboratory and in a timber mill.

Her thirst for knowledge has seen her gain two bachelor's degrees, a diploma and a master's degree. She's studied everything from art to government and social work.

Yet Hillary's life has often been derailed by mental illness. She was first diagnosed with schizophrenia at 21, when studying for her first degree. As her health crashed, so did her grades. She also struggled with a drinking problem.

Hillary persevered, as she always has; she's now many years sober. She's also been able to hold a steady part-time job for the past 25 years, so she's getting by financially. Finding social fulfilment has proven more difficult, and that's where Vinnies comes in.

"I appreciate St Vincent de Paul services a lot, they're really good," Hillary says. "For someone with a mental illness it's very isolating living in Sydney; it's really hard to meet people. And I get along fairly well with people socially, but for friendships where you meet up or ring each other regularly, it's been hard to make friends."

Hillary attends painting and "mindful making" classes at the OLC on Tuesdays and Thursdays, where she says an informal peer-support group has flourished between the regular participants. The art classes give her structure and a chance to get out of her social housing unit, where she lives alone.

Hillary is also involved with the Vinnies Compeer program, which supports people who are isolated due to mental illness. She and her Compeer buddy meet after work once a week and go walking around the local oval. They've been meeting regularly for more than five years.

Hillary was one of 25 artists featured in the OLC Art Show. She chose to display paintings and drawings fondly remembering the landscape she grew up in: the bush around Tennant Creek.

THROUGH THE AGES: A Folk/Rock Compilation is available on iTunes. Terry's song is under his performing name, Space Engineer.

THE OLC ART SHOW is an annual event at 107 Projects in Redfern – look out for the next show in 2020!

Living in poverty on Newstart

At 64, Pam Markiewicz should be preparing to enjoy her golden years.

Instead she finds herself trapped in a vulnerable position where her age makes it nearly impossible to find work, yet marginally too young to receive the age pension. In the meantime, Pam is getting by on the Newstart allowance and a meagre rent assistance payment which leaves her with just \$145 per week after paying rent.

For a grandmother who has raised a family and worked since the age of 15, her current reality has led to feelings of hopelessness.

"I tend to sit at home alone feeling as though I should be out there, walking around, enjoying life at my age. Even if I wanted to go out and have a cup of tea, I can't afford that," Pam said.

Living below the poverty line has taken a toll on her health.

"I live on a very poor diet - usually porridge or different forms of eggs. There are nights where I go to bed hungry because I don't have any food," Pam said.

"I've got high blood pressure and joint pains - I don't think it's my age, it's because I'm not on a proper diet. Even some medications I can't afford. I go without it and it's detrimental to my health. But you've got no choice - if you can't afford it, then you don't get it."

As heartbreaking as Pam's story is, it's not unique. Most people receiving Newstart or Youth Allowance live under

the poverty line. In the last year alone, Vinnies NSW provided assistance to more than 20,000 people in this situation. Almost half came to us because they were running out of food, while a quarter were living in temporary accommodation or experiencing homelessness.

During Anti-Poverty Week in October, we took the opportunity to again call on the Government to raise the rate of Newstart and related income support payments.

"Our social security system is meant to be a solution to poverty, not a cause of it," said our CEO, Jack de Groot.

For now, Pam is getting by with assistance from Vinnies, while also volunteering with us at the Nagle Centre in Campbelltown.

"I've been with [Vinnies] for two years and absolutely love it," she said. "People rely on me to be at a place at a certain time - that gives me a purpose to head out the door."

"If I'm feeling down or fed up, Vinnies will pick me up. The support is fantastic."



Pam puts her skills as a former full-time receptionist to good use as a Vinnies volunteer.

After loss and loneliness, finally a home and community

Deborah Madden's apartment looks like a display home, decked out in neutral whites, greys and bursts of bright yellow. Everything is perfectly positioned, not a speck of dust to be found.

Yet this isn't a display home - it's Deb's own home, one that she waited and longed for while living on the brink of homelessness. The apartment is one of hundreds of brand-new, fully equipped units built by Vinnies and partly funded by the NSW Government, provided for people who can't afford to rent or buy on the private housing market.

"If it wasn't for Vinnies, I would still be on the street," Deb said.

Before she received her social housing apartment, Deb stayed for months at Our Lady of the Way, a Vinnies refuge for single women over 55. Before that, she had slept in a park and on a friend's couch.

Deb was one of an increasing number of older women with nowhere to live - in the latest census, women over 55 were the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness. For Deb, it all began when her husband was diagnosed with cancer. When Rick passed away, Deb was distraught.

"I just couldn't cope because he was my family. That's all the family I had... once he was gone, my family was gone. Completely gone."

The tight-knit couple had been married for 40 years. After growing up in harsh government 'care' homes and enduring abuse from her birth parents and others, Deb had very few people she could trust and rely on. The loss of Rick left her alone in the truest sense of the word - and unable to afford the rent on their apartment.

Deb couldn't have imagined it then, as she looked down the barrel of homelessness and battled severe grief - but 18 months later, she is independent and thriving in her very own apartment. That all became possible when Vinnies came into her life.

"They have helped me a hell of a lot, they really have," Deb said. When she first saw her new home, she said "it was like heaven".

Deb contributes an affordable amount of rent from her Centrelink payments. She has used what's left over to furnish and decorate the apartment with entirely second-hand items



- though you wouldn't be able to tell by looking at them!

At Vinnies, we believe secure housing is a right, not a privilege. Yet more than 100,000 people here in NSW are currently waiting for social housing - they've been approved and added to the government waiting list, but there aren't enough properties to actually house them.

We're calling on the NSW Government to urgently build more social housing. We want to see more people like Deb given a home and hope for the future.

Will you join us to build homes and build hope? Please sign our petition at <http://vinnies.org.au/socialhousing> or talk with our social justice team about getting some hard-copy petitions mailed out to you, so you can collect signatures from your family, friends and colleagues. Get in touch with the team at social.justice@vinnies.org.au.

JOIN THE NEW VINNIES SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Do you want to take an active role promoting social justice in your community and beyond?

We've started the Vinnies Social Justice Network, a community of people committed to building a more just and compassionate society here in NSW.

Members of the Vinnies Social Justice Network take actions big and small, from collecting signatures on petitions and organising events to meeting with local political representatives.

Our network is for everyone. No matter your experience, location or availability, we have meaningful ways for you to get involved.

READY TO CREATE CHANGE?

Join us! Visit socialjustice.vinnies.org.au to sign up and find out more.



NEW DROP-IN CENTRE COMING TO BALLINA

Members of our St Francis Xavier Conference in Ballina have teamed up with our North-East Region staff to develop a new homelessness facility, currently under construction.

Coastal Ballina may look like an affluent town, but the last census recorded more than 500 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. They sleep rough, live in their cars, couch-surf in crowded households, or stay in low-cost caravan parks, motels and boarding houses.

Many locals experiencing homelessness go to our St Francis Xavier Conference for support. Members identified the need for more local services and sprang into action, helping to develop a new homelessness facility that combines a three-bed transitional unit with a weekday drop-in service.

The transitional unit will be known as Harmony House, with the name for the adjoining drop-in centre still being decided. The space will offer breakfast and snacks,

bathrooms, a laundry, scheduled healthcare appointments and referrals to legal, financial and government services. It will have a large, landscaped backyard which will create a welcoming social space for those we assist. The new twin facilities will open in early 2020.

There has been strong community support for the project, with Ballina Shire Council assisting with fee relief, State MP Tamara Smith offering help, service clubs showing keen interest, and local media putting their weight behind the concept.



Financial Wellbeing Conversations

Many members tell us of the predicament people find themselves in, having to turn to Vinnies on a regular basis for help with the bills.

The recurring nature of bill stress is often unavoidable, especially for those living in poverty, including people on Newstart.

The Commonwealth Bank assisted us to develop a training program for Vincentians called Financial Wellbeing Conversations. It is available to our members, equipping them to have conversations with the people we assist, helping them to take greater control of their finances.

We provide full training for members as well as two booklets to take home: a "Financial Wellbeing

Conversations" booklet, and a "Financial Wellbeing Activities" booklet, to provide to the person we are assisting.

"It's not about providing financial advice, but about opening up a conversation where you can explore financial options and priorities with the person you're supporting," said Vinnies NSW Training and Development Officer, Suzanne Schmitz.

"Like all our Conference work, Financial Wellbeing Conversations are about providing a compassionate space to connect and seek support."

For more information on the Financial Wellbeing Conversations, please get in touch with sara.jameson@vinnies.org.au or call 0434 470 734.



On the journey with Night Patrol

Peter Marshall was one of our original Night Patrol volunteers. He recently re-joined Vinnies as a member of our Sydney Harbour North Conference and wrote the below message of support to our younger volunteers, reflecting on his journey.

Fifty years ago, young university students went out into the streets of Sydney and found homeless people who were in need of companionship.

We started off using our families' cars. We headed off from Matthew Talbot with an urn of hot water and gave out coffee to those who were sleeping out in the streets. It was pretty basic and I don't think we had any grand plans.

Then St Vincent de Paul gave us a second-hand light blue Holden station wagon – it wasn't a great vehicle, but at least it meant we weren't driving our families' cars. In time the station wagon was replaced with a van.

When it all started, no one was recording what we were doing, we were just getting on with things. I did not expect that the night patrol would continue; we were just a handful of students filling in the night patrol with study and other activities. At that time we were more concerned about being called up in the draft for Vietnam, the politics of the day and trying to complete our university courses!



Today there are still homeless people on the streets of Sydney and thanks to the Vinnies Van, young people are still going out and showing compassion and companionship. We are all human and the call on our humanity remains.

Thank you to young volunteers for giving up your time to help someone else in need. Keep up the good work until it's time to pass it onto a new group of young volunteers!

I have now returned to Vinnies after 50 years. I was asked and immediately said yes. We have so much for which to be thankful.

*Buen camino,
Peter Marshall*

WHEN A WASHING MACHINE MEANS THE WORLD

Our members are great at making things happen for their communities, and that's exactly what happened with the establishment of a community laundry in Guyra.

With the regional town suffering through the drought, household water shortages have left locals struggling to do their washing. After a hard day's work on a dusty farm, community members were finding themselves unable to even put on a clean shirt.

Our local St Mary of the Angels Conference came to the rescue, advocating for a community laundry facility and then supporting its establishment. The NSW Government provided funding for the facility and it was constructed by the Armidale Regional Council – a great joint effort between government, the community and Vinnies.



L-R: Vinnies' Paul Burton and David Kanaley, together with Chris Hietbrink from The Hub at Guyra and The Hon. Adam Marshall, NSW Member for the Northern Tablelands.

What Mini Vinnies means to Mishka

Thank you to Mishka, a student at St Paul's Primary School in Rutherford, for writing in about her work as part of the school's Mini Vinnies group.

When I heard of the Mini Vinnies, I joined up as quick as I could!

The first thing I was a part of was the nursing home visit. We went to a local aged care home to do activities with the residents. We played a lot of ball games like bowling and quoits and had a nice chat with the residents. I hope they enjoyed it as much as I did.

The next thing the Mini Vinnies did was help collect money for Project Compassion. The money raised goes to other disadvantaged countries. The class who received the most donations got a pizza lunch. Mini Vinnies weighed the money. To be able to help made me feel proud.

The most recent was the Mini Vinnies sleepout. Year 5 and 6 had a sleepover at school and students had to bring toiletries for the homeless people and pack them into packs. We talked about what we'd pack if we were about to be homeless.

These experiences for me have meant that I can help people less fortunate rather than watch them suffer without doing anything about it.



Congratulations to the Mini Vinnies group at St Clare's Narellan Vale, who collected almost 1,600 cans of food for local families! We were extra impressed with the kindergarten class, who collected more than 200 cans all by themselves. "We know how lucky we are and how hard it is for some other families, so we wanted to do something practical for them," said the school's Mini Vinnies President, Lia.

Go Mishka and St Paul's! Any primary school can start a Mini Vinnies group – it's a great way to get students involved with social justice issues and develop leadership skills.

Young and ready to make a difference

Youth representatives and staff from across the state came together for our first ever Vinnies youth retreat in August.

The weekend getaway was the first face-to-face meeting for our youth representatives in some time, and created a great opportunity to connect and spark ideas.

"Our youth are powerful and talented. They are present and emerging leaders of Vinnies," said Courtney Deighton, State Youth Engagement Coordinator.

"We are determined to make Vinnies an even better organisation for young people to get involved with and make a positive difference."



Courtney gave special thanks for the leadership of our State Youth Representative Michelle Chahine and Deputy State Youth Representative Madeleine Sarris, who are sparking great energy for our youth initiatives.

TO GET INVOLVED WITH VINNIES' YOUTH INITIATIVES OR FIND OUT MORE, please contact Courtney Deighton, State Youth Engagement Coordinator at courtney.deighton@vinnies.org.au.



Step into our newest Vinnies Shop

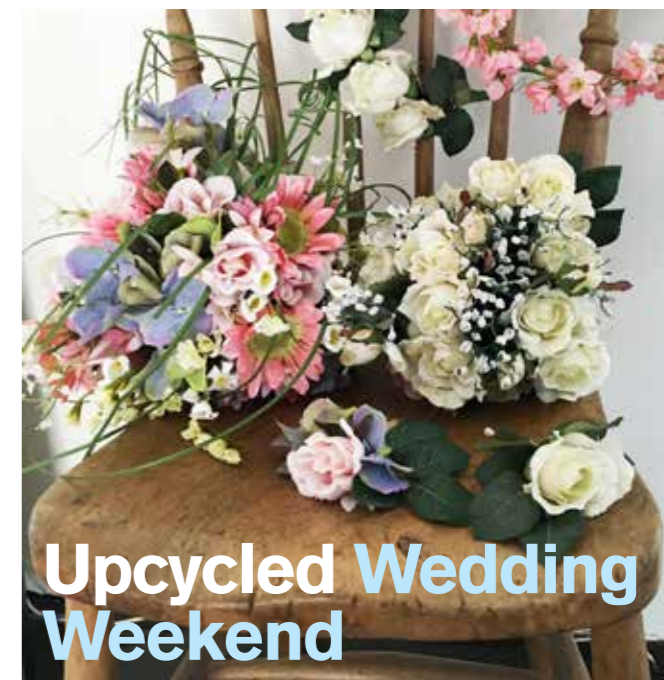
In September we proudly opened a new Vinnies Shop in Thirroul, just north of Wollongong.

Our local staff and volunteers worked extra hard to give the store a 'boutique' look and feel, appealing to fashionistas and thrift shoppers. We've received great feedback from visitors to the store.

We rely on Vinnies Shops to raise around a third of our income, making them vital to our services supporting people experiencing disadvantage.

Over the past six months, we've said goodbye to our stores in Wentworthville, North Wollongong, and Old Northern Road Castle Hill (our Victoria Avenue store is still in place). We remain extremely grateful to the volunteers, members and staff that contributed to the running of these shops.

Last financial year, more than 7,000 retail volunteers devoted over 1.5 million hours of service to support our shops across NSW. Thanks to you, Vinnies operates more stores in our state than any other charity. We think that's something to be enormously proud of.



Upcycled Wedding Weekend

Wedding dresses, suits and accessories were given a new lease of life as part of the inaugural Vinnies Upcycled Wedding Weekend held at Picton.

Showcasing a wide range of pre-loved items and clothing to help couples bring a distinct feel to their special day, the event placed a major focus on sustainability.

"Savvy couples are increasingly finding ways to hold weddings with a social conscience," said Kerrie Meehan, Vinnies Retail Area Manager for the South Region.

"There has been a growing trend towards adopting environmentally friendly behaviours throughout society. Event such as the Upcycled Wedding Weekend play a part in helping to reduce our impact on the environment, along with allowing Vinnies to continue doing good work by assisting people facing hardship," Kerrie said.

Among the items featured as part of the Upcycled Wedding Weekend, recycled artificial flowers were transformed into eco-friendly bouquets, table decorations made from pre-loved crockery provided unique centrepieces, while an assortment of dresses allowed new brides to experience the same happiness as those who previously wore them.

Second-hand plates styled into tiered high tea platters – just one of the upcycling tips shared over the weekend.





Peace and STILLNESS

Magnificent clouds of jacaranda are hanging overhead as people rush down city streets, barely looking up at the beauty during their busy day. Stores are abuzz with shoppers, caught up in the Christmas-season frenzy of commercialism.

All this seems a far cry from the 'reason for the season': our celebration of that calm, silent, holy night on which the Christ child was born. In the Christmas liturgy, we read:

"While God is always present in the midst of our daily lives, it is in silence that we become aware of that presence and draw needed nourishment. Following the mighty wind and fire and earthquake, it was in a sound of sheer silence that Elijah knew the presence of the Lord and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave where he heard the voice of God." (1 Kings 19:12-13)

Meister Eckhart, monk and theologian of the Dominican Order in the 1200s, wrote that "nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness". And the psalms remind us too: "Be still and know that I am God."

In this society that moves at warp speed, has an opinion on everything, and tries to do it all and have it all and record it all on Facebook, Instagram and

Snapchat, it's just so hard to be quiet. Yet God knows the power of silence.

Our most profound moments in life are marked by silence:

- The anxious silence as parents await their newborn's first cry.
- That panicked silence as the one we love considers our nervous marriage proposal.
- The respectful silence as we remember those who have died.
- Our silent presence when we simply have no words to ease someone's pain or deep sadness.
- The silent promises we make when looking into the eyes of someone we love.
- The silence that stretched across the world when Pope Francis first asked us to pray for him as the new pope.

- The silent beauty of God's creation witnessed as we watch a falling star streak across the night sky.

Yes, the precious moments, the holy moments, are marked by silence.

It is not beyond any of us to find moments of stillness where we can recognise the presence of God.

It could be in those moments of wonder and awe, when the sheer beauty of creation strikes us. Or in the intentional exercise of five minutes of quiet mindfulness, allowing ourselves to receive each breath as the gift of the life-giving Spirit.

As we prepare to make room in our lives for the coming of the Word Incarnate during this Christmas time, may the words of Australian poet, Noel Davis, be our Advent prayer: "Let tiny drops of stillness fall gently through my day".

Elijah found God not in the strong winds, nor earthquakes, nor fire, but in the silence (1 Kings 19:11-12). God is inviting us into the silence; what precious, holy moments await us there through this Advent and Christmas time of the year?

Adapted from a reflection by Sr Catherine Slattery SGS

A friendship fondly remembered

Gayle Radmann was a survivor; a gentle soul who protected herself with a tough exterior, laughed uproariously and swore like a sailor.

This is how she is fondly remembered by Cherie McKenna, Vinnies NSW's Gifts in Wills and Estates Manager. For the past six years, Cherie has been one of Gayle's closest friends.

Their friendship started when Cherie began working at Vinnies and met Gayle, who was volunteering in our State Support Office. Gayle came to Vinnies after a lifetime of domestic violence, finally finding safety in one of our women's refuges.

"At first she'd be a little bit scary, but she was so vulnerable and gentle on the inside. That was how I saw Gayle," Cherie says.

"I learned more from her than she learned from me. I learned not to judge people, especially."

Gayle didn't let many people into her inner circle. Volunteering was a way to get out of the house and be around people she could trust, while gaining an opportunity to use her administration skills and enjoy access to a computer.

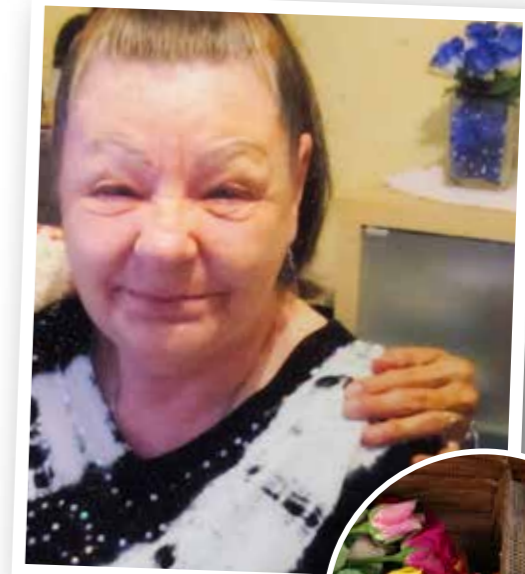
"I think it brought meaning in her life and a purpose," Cherie says.

Although Vinnies helped Gayle with the cost of transport and lunch, she found it difficult to get from her public housing flat in Parramatta (where she had moved after the refuge) to our office in Sydney's inner west. So Cherie started driving her part of the way, and the two women got to know each other by chatting in the car.

"She was very funny; we used to laugh a lot," Cherie says. "She loved TV. She introduced me to Gogglebox... she would start texting me while it was on, and I had a lot of laughs with her."

Recently, we were able to find Gayle a ground-floor apartment in a Vinnies retirement village right next to our office. It would mean no more time spent on trains, and no more struggling to get up the stairs to her third-floor flat in Parramatta. Gayle was thrilled.

Sadly, the joy wasn't to last. Not long after, she was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.



Above: Gayle Radmann. Right: Flowers provided for mourners at the Interment of the Homeless.



Cherie takes comfort that her friend got to live out her final days in a comfortable place, where she was near her friends at Vinnies. "The last year was a blessing and she loved it there," she says.

As Gayle's health declined, Cherie and other Vinnies staff helped her travel to and from doctor appointments, and then to settle into hospital.

Cherie also tracked down Gayle's estranged family – two sisters and a daughter – and attempted to reunite them. It meant a lot for Gayle to speak with her sisters on the phone before she passed away, aged 66.

Gayle was from South Australia and after her death, Vinnies offered to send her ashes interstate. But as Cherie recounts, "[one of the sisters] actually said 'I can tell that you were closer to Gayle, and it would be nice if Gayle was nearer to where you are'".

So in August, a small group of Vinnies people and other well-wishers gathered to farewell Gayle as part of our annual Interment of the Homeless – a service where we provide a funeral for those who might otherwise be forgotten. Gayle was one of five people memorialised that day.

She now rests along a sunny garden path, Charles O'Neill Walk, in Rookwood Cemetery. She is also lovingly remembered at Cherie's desk in the Vinnies State Support Office, where a couple of photos are pinned to the wall – the smiling face of a friend who won't be forgotten.

Mum didn't eat
last night
so I could.

You can help a
family put food
on the table
this Christmas.

HELP END THE PAIN OF POVERTY. DONATE TODAY.
Please give through your parish, call 13 18 12 or visit vinnies.org.au



Vinnies Christmas Appeal



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works