



THERE IN TIMES OF NEED

How Vinnies SA is helping bushfire-affected communities in South Australia recover and rebuild.

As a result of the generosity of the South Australian community, Vinnies has been able to provide:

- Direct cash payments to families whose homes were damaged or destroyed, helping to pay bills, replace lost items and facilitate repairs
- Material assistance including clothing, bedding, homewares and essential items through the provision of Vinnies shop vouchers and grocery vouchers
- Much-needed emotional support
- Referrals to Vinnies' community support services, as well as a wide network of other organisations and specialised services for ongoing support.

As at 30 June 2020, throughout South Australia we have distributed more than

\$2.05 MILLION

in direct cash payments, supporting

629 HOUSEHOLDS

impacted by bushfires.

That equates to 100% of funds donated + interest accrued. Zero admin fees applied.

We also assisted

260 FAMILIES

by providing Vinnies vouchers to the value of

\$58,925

A STATE UNDER FIRE

How the bushfires unfolded in South Australia

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Most people would forget that South Australia's brutal bushfire season started in November, with a blaze breaking out on the Eyre Peninsula and travelling towards Port Lincoln. While two people were injured and six sheds destroyed, fire crews responded quickly and managed to prevent the fire engulfing Port Lincoln, a town of close to 20,000 people. It could have been much worse.

Later in November, fires broke out on the Lower Yorke Peninsula, destroying 11 properties and burning out more than 5,000 hectares. Fortunately, no lives were lost, but 33 people were treated for fire-related injuries. Although the fires were later attributed to a power network fault on the 40 degree, windy day, it was a reminder of the constant threat that bushfires present.

DISASTER STRIKES

20 December 2019, is a day that many South Australians will never forget.

It was a Friday, and many workplaces were in the throes of signing off for the year with Christmas celebrations top of mind. Who could have anticipated what was to unfold?

It was a hot and windy day, with the temperature in Adelaide eventually reaching

43.9 degrees, following extreme temperatures the day before, with a searing top of 45.3.

During the late morning, the CFS had issued a bushfire emergency warning for the northern suburbs near Gawler, with spot fires burning out of control. Fortunately, these fires were contained and the warning was downgraded to a 'watch and act'.

Meanwhile, in the Adelaide Hills, residents and business owners were not so lucky, with fires tearing through multiple townships. High temperatures, strong winds and lightning strikes wreaked havoc on the towns, with more than 80 homes, up to 500 outbuildings, thousands of kilometres of fencing and upwards of 25,000 hectares destroyed. Later, it would emerge that a well-known local resident had died while defending his Charleston property.

20 December was also the beginning of a nightmarish few weeks on Kangaroo Island, with fires caused by lightning strikes initially breaking out on the northern side of the Island. By the time the fires had been contained later in January, approximately half the Island had been burnt, causing widespread destruction to the natural habitat of the wildlife that Kangaroo Island is famous for worldwide. Along with more than 90 homes and countless other outbuildings lost, local father and son identities sadly died in the blaze.

VINNIES RESPONDS

How we helped in the aftermath

ALL HANDS ON DECK

For the staff at Vinnies' head office, the afternoon of Friday 20 December started out like any other, albeit with a view to winding down for the Christmas break.

As news started to filter through about the bushfire outbreaks in the northern suburbs and then the Adelaide Hills, the executive team gathered and started to plan our response. Being the official South Australian Government charity partner to manage material donations in the event of a disaster such as bushfire, earlier planning reaped rewards as staff and volunteers swung into action.

In the immediate aftermath of the fires this meant fielding calls from the general public and businesses wanting to donate items as diverse as unused caravans to bulk food goods. We also managed the overflow of items that were being donated to Kangaroo Island, under the direction of the State Recovery Office. The Mount Barker Vinnies shop (which had closed for the Christmas break), re-opened to take donations and provide support to locals. Staff and volunteers alike put their hands up to do what needed to be done.

APPEAL LAUNCHED

At the State Government's request, we launched a financial appeal online to support bushfire victims throughout South Australia who had suffered loss of property, incurred damage to outbuildings/sheds, or who had lost vehicles, machinery, stock and livestock.

While we continued to manage donations of material goods, it is acknowledged that in times of disaster, financial contributions are most impactful. They allow people affected to buy what they need when they need it, and provide the dignity of choice.

Donations quickly climbed and in less than three weeks after launch, we hit the \$1million mark in public donations.



The South Australian public answered the call for help.

DONATIONS CLIMB

How the community got behind our appeal

CREATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

We were blown away by the interest shown by individuals, community groups, churches, schools and businesses in supporting those affected by the bushfires. There were children holding bake sales and selling lemonade in order to raise funds, long-time Vinnies supporters BankSA took donations in their branches, whole neighbourhoods got behind street fundraisers, and the Cities of Adelaide and Holdfast Bay collected donations at their New Year's Eve celebrations.

There are too many to mention them all here, but some of the notable contributions from both a fundraising and awareness perspective came from:



Sydney and Cooper got busy baking to raise funds for the Vinnies SA Bushfire Appeal.

Beyond Bank
AUSTRALIA



Our sincere thanks to these organisations, plus everyone who donated to the appeal. Your contributions - large and small - have made a significant difference to the lives of those who were impacted by the bushfires. Vinnies was privileged to play a role in getting your funds to those most in need.

DONATIONS CLIMB

How the community got behind our appeal

SCHOOLS SHINE AGAIN

Vinnies enjoys incredible support from school communities and childcare centres throughout South Australia. Year round, they help Vinnies support people doing it tough by donating material goods such as clothing and food, as well as undertaking fundraising activities such as sleepouts that result in significant financial contributions.

It was therefore no surprise that we were quickly contacted by a number of schools and childcare centres who were keen to offer their assistance by way of conducting fundraisers to support the appeal.

MEMBERS RALLY

The St Vincent de Paul Society, from which we draw the affectionate nickname 'Vinnies', was founded on a simple premise by a young Frenchman and his associates: to put their faith into action and support the poor and needy.

The young Frenchman was founder Frederic Ozanam, a 20 year old law student who was deeply moved by the plight of those living in poverty in Paris during a time of upheaval in the early 19th century. He and some like-minded friends gathered together to see what they could do to assist those in need. Initially, they gave away the remainder of their winter wood supply. Then, under the guidance of

Sister Rosalie Rendu, they began to offer food, clothing and shelter, along with the all-important fellowship that continues to be a hallmark of the Society today.

News of their work spread, and as different groups sprang up, they became known as 'conferences', with the people working voluntarily within them known as 'conference members'. The St Vincent de Paul Society is now active in more than 150 countries and comprises more than 800,000 conference members. In South Australia, there are 60 Conferences that are largely based in Catholic Church Parishes. As a lay Catholic organisation, conference members form a vital link between the Society and parishioners, who support the works of the Society by contributing to the various appeals we conduct throughout the year, so that we can support people in need.

When the bushfires struck, conference members quickly rallied to conduct an appeal within parishes to raise all-important funds for the Vinnies SA Bushfire Appeal. We remain grateful to conference members, and those who donated, for their contribution. Conference members also stood tall when it came time to directly assisting people who had been impacted, by helping them apply for financial assistance, and distributing Vinnies shop vouchers.

REACHING PEOPLE IN NEED

How we got funds to those affected by the fires

A TIME TO GIVE

Necessarily, our initial focus was on raising awareness about the Vinnies SA Bushfire Appeal in order to raise as much money as possible.

We then quickly pivoted to prioritise reaching those whose lives had been turned upside down during the bushfires across the state.

Appreciating that it was a time of high trauma for those who had been impacted, we endeavoured to make the application process as painless as possible, and a simple online form was made available and publicised to get the process underway.

During the initial phase, those who reached out for support were contacted by telephone, and walked through what was required to receive financial assistance. They simply had to demonstrate their losses, which were then verified by the State Recovery Office, a unit of the Department of Human Services.

NOTHING LIKE FACE TO FACE

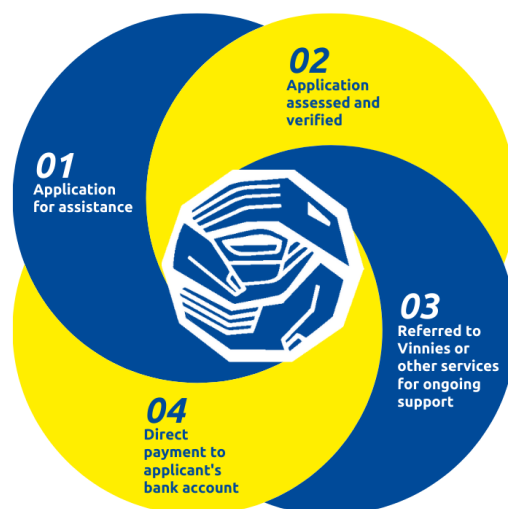
The application process was improved enormously when we gained access to the bushfire recovery centre that was established in Lobethal.

Members from the St Vincent de Paul Society Mount Barker, Murray Bridge and Stirling Conferences, along with volunteers from

our Fred's Van Meal Service, put their hands up to help people complete the necessary application forms and provide a listening ear.

Many of the people we were helping had lost their homes and all their possessions, while others had lost their livelihoods through destruction of farms, wineries and small businesses. This was a traumatic time for all, and conference members and volunteers were able to bring comfort as well as practical assistance. Applicants were also referred to other agencies or Vinnies services as appropriate.

As the Society does not have a presence on Kangaroo Island, we engaged with fellow not for profit - Junction Australia – to assist people with the initial application process on the Island. The ongoing liaison, assessment and payment was conducted by Vinnies.



100% OF DONATIONS DISTRIBUTED

We gave everything we got, and then we gave some more

ZERO ADMIN FEES

For more than 135 years in South Australia, the St Vincent de Paul Society has supported people doing it tough - whether it be by helping them to navigate the daily challenges of living at or below the poverty line; providing shelter during times of crisis; or access to food, clothing and household items. We have also been there helping people to pick up the pieces after extreme events such as bushfires, droughts and floods.

While it takes a lot to mobilise a workforce to respond to a natural disaster, and there is a very real cost to the organisation, St Vincent de Paul Society has never taken administration fees from public donations to disaster appeals. Nor have we ever kept funds from disaster appeals for any other work or cause.

We would like to reassure the community that absolutely every dollar that was raised via the Vinnies SA Bushfire Appeal has gone directly to those who were impacted. In fact, with accrued interest, an amount greater than that which was donated has been distributed.

We are very proud of the difference we have been able to make to those whose lives were indelibly changed by the events of last summer, and consider ourselves privileged to be in a position to draw on our 135 year history and trust within the community to step in when people needed us most.

BENEFICIARIES GIVE THANKS

Despite the traumatic circumstances many of the bushfire fund beneficiaries found themselves in, and facing many years of recovery, we were humbled by their gratitude.

Here is a small sample of some words of thanks.

"Kindest thanks for personally contacting me in order to initiate my phone application for assistance from Vinnies as a result of the Cudlee Creek Bushfire. It is with grateful thanks and heartfelt appreciation that we acknowledge the funds that were recently deposited into our bank account. Thank you for being God's hands, feet, voice and heart to our family after the bushfire crisis which has offered us hope for the future. Blessings as you minister to so many through your generosity and compassion." - Annette Schild

"Hello, just wanted to say thank you for your patience and support, it is very much appreciated. Although it has been a while since the fires, some things stay with you and it's a long road to recovery. Knowing that organisations like Vinnies really do want to help keeps us going." - Danyella

"Thanks very much for the financial assistance you provided to me and my family. The cash gift was wonderful to receive, and we are yet to use the vouchers but are eager to do so. I was also contacted by Vinnies volunteers at Stirling asking if I needed any other immediate financial assistance. The assistance and further offers are – it's hard to find the right word – lovely. They bring joy when offered, when received, when used, and continue to make a difference."

- David Scullen

BILL'S STORY

When life changes in an instant

A MAN IN A HURRY

In 1960, Bill McWhinnie entered the world in a hurry, born on the side of the road on the way to Kangaroo Island Hospital. In those days it was a long gravel road into town, and Bill just couldn't wait.

Fast forward 60 years, and these days Bill isn't in quite so much of a hurry. Since the devastating bushfires destroyed his family property at Karatta on the south coast of Kangaroo Island, he has been patiently working to get the land to a level of repair that will enable him to lease it out.

Having lost his home, shearing shed, two other sheds, 35 kilometres of fencing and his entire stock of merino sheep - all 1,040 of them - Bill is ready to move on.

The property was his parents', and over the past few years Bill split his time between his home on the Yorke Peninsula and the farm, returning regularly to tend to it as his ageing parents struggled to keep up. It was part of his retirement plan, to make a bit of money from grazing sheep. But that dream's gone now.

It all sounds tragic - and it is - but in talking to Bill you would have no idea that his life has been turned upside down. He speaks with an upbeat tone and is quick to acknowledge that it could have been worse.

"Of course it took me a while to get my head

around it. I was away from the property when it burnt down, but my neighbours told me what had happened. So while it was a shock to see it all gone, at least I was a bit prepared."

Bill says the worst thing was the loss of the sheep. But in an incredible display of neighbourly spirit, a gang was organised to euthanase those that were injured, and to bury the stock. He says it was a 'weight off his shoulders' knowing they were put down humanely as soon as was possible.

In the immediate aftermath of the fires, Bill relocated his caravan to the farm as he spent his days removing rubble, and tending to the burnt fences. He is now being accommodated in a 'recovery pod' supplied by the Minderoo Foundation Fire Fund. When he moved in to his pod, Bill was delighted to enjoy a hot shower for the first time in many weeks.

"It's the simple things in life," he said.

Bill has been 'blown away' by the generosity shown by people in the community, and organisations such as Vinnies.

"Receiving funding from Vinnies has made all the difference," Bill said. "It was enough to give me some breathing space, and take care of some important bills. And it was nice to know that people really cared. I really can't thank Jude, Barb and everyone at Vinnies enough for extending the hand of friendship during some very difficult days."