



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

Impact

The difference
you make

SPRING 2018
ISSUE 05

**"YOU NEVER THINK IT'S
GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOU"**

FEATURES • FINDING FAMILY • ART WITH A HEART
• A WYONG STORY • HANNAH'S STORY

**VINNIES
RENEWS
REBUILDS
RESTORES**





Dear friends

Among the many things that have struck me during my time at the St Vincent de Paul Society, the sheer variety of the work we do never has ceased to amaze.

Yet within that variety, there is always something in common.

From our origins in post-revolution Paris, to the establishment of the first Vinnies conference in New South Wales in 1881, and on to the 21st century, our energy has always gone into helping society's most disadvantaged.

Though society changes and evolves, and with it the many kinds of people we assist, our mission stays constant. And among our intrinsic values has always been service to all, regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions.

This edition of Impact illustrates how our donors help us make these principles a reality. In these pages we will meet people experiencing disadvantage from all walks of life: from a teenage girl fleeing an unhappy home, to a father in crisis

doing the best for his son; from a young man from inner NSW overcoming disability, to a former refugee now escaping domestic violence.

While those stories have happy endings thanks to the generosity of people like you, the number of people in need continues to rise. I'm not going to bore you with the numbers - there are some figures in the graphic below - but much remains to be done before we can overcome the huge problems in our State.

Above all, though, it's important to remember that the people experiencing disadvantage we assist are not statistics. They are individual human beings. And with your support, we can turn their situation into one of hope for better life.

Best wishes,

Denis Walsh
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Trek Larapinta
Join Team Vinnies in the Outback!

Fundraise for a cause and join us as we trek the Larapinta Trail to make a difference for the children who turn to Vinnies.

Save your spot today
Phone 02 9568 0211 or email andrea.andres@vinnies.org.au

Thank you for your support

Thanks to your support, we are able to rebuild the lives of many Australians doing it tough. Your generosity has made sure families receive the basic essentials. Without you, they would have gone without. Every dollar donated makes a difference.

**ACROSS 2016 TO 2017,
VINNIES PROVIDED:**

81,464
BED NIGHTS

274,522
MEALS



Welcome

Spring has sprung, a time of renewal, joy, and celebration. But it is also mixed with anxiety this year, as at – the time of writing – our entire State struggles with drought conditions.

The effects of this drought are far-reaching. From the devastating impacts on farmer's health and well-being, to a reduction in rural jobs, to the increases in grocery and water costs for those struggling to make ends meet, many are affected.

Among the things that makes Vinnies unique are our dedicated members, volunteers, and staff across NSW. These people are part of the local communities that we assist, and as Impact went to print, they were already hard at work in the drought-affected areas.

Meanwhile, across New South Wales they keep doing what they've always done. Assisting people like Hannah, who shares her story on pages 4 and 5. Hannah was able to get the help and support she needed as a teenager, when she was experiencing homelessness and an unsafe family environment.

Thanks to you, Vinnies can continue to support communities across the State, not only with disaster relief but with the ongoing and growing homelessness crisis.

Thank you

Beverley Kerr
President

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services

Messages of thanks

HERE ARE SOME WORDS OF THANKS AND HOPE FROM PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN TURNED AROUND THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT

“I lost myself years ago. I am finding myself again and discovering who I am. And we're together as a family. I couldn't have done it alone.” – Sophie

“It's been a real big change; I've enjoyed the growth, the going on of it, the getting up and doing it... I'd like to say thanks very much to all the donors for helping me on this. I really appreciate all the support Vinnies has given me.” – Jeremy

“Vinnies opened a new perspective to my life, my future. I've learnt to trust myself and I am no longer afraid to take the first step. Now I am on the road to rebuilding a stable home and making it a loving home for my children.” – Jenny

“I can't tell you how much it means having somewhere safe to go every night. That's thanks to you and your support of Vinnies' work. Where would I be without you? I just don't know how to thank you, except to say THANKS SO MUCH!” – Hannah



*"I don't want to
be like them.
I don't want
to do that. I
don't want to
go down that
path. There's
got to be a
better way."*



Hannah's Story

AGED JUST 13: AND HOMELESS. IT'S VERY DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE IT. MOST 13-YEAR-OLDS ARE STARTING HIGH SCHOOL, HANGING OUT WITH THEIR FRIENDS, AND ENJOYING A SUPPORTIVE AND LOVING HOME ENVIRONMENT.

For Hannah this seemed like a fairy tale she would never experience. When they were still children, she and her brothers and sisters were forced to take care of themselves as their home life turned upside down from violence and drugs.

Hannah herself explains. "My Dad went to jail for breaking an AVO [Apprehended Violence Order] against my mum. Then my mum got on drugs and it all went downhill from there. My big sister looked after the smaller kids. I became one of those teenagers who did whatever I wanted, because my Mum didn't care.

"When we were little kids my mum was a great mum, I've never doubted her love for her kids but... when she started hitting the drugs, that's when it all went down."

When her uncle's girlfriend, Susan, offered to take Hannah in, she jumped at the chance of a stable home with a caring adult. But then Susan began using drugs as well. Once again Hannah was living in an awful environment.

Escaping both unhealthy family homes, Hannah spent several years trying to go to school and earn money, all the while couch-surfing, often at stranger's homes.

"I was just couch-surfing from house to house, hoping I'd be safe," she says. "Sometimes I couldn't find anywhere, so I spent the night on the streets."

Miraculously, during this time Hannah managed to study for her year 10 qualifications. She knew in her heart that she could - and would - get out of this situation. She didn't need to go down the same path as her mother and many of those around her.

"I don't want to be like them. I don't want to do that. I don't want to go down that path. There's got to be a better way."

By the time she was 17, Hannah had heard of a place

in Bowral that takes in young people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage. Despite never having been to Bowral she decided to take a giant leap of faith. Hannah jumped on the train and came to the Vinnies Bowral Youth Refuge.

From the very first moment Hannah felt welcomed. However she struggled at first to feel settled and comfortable as it was so far removed from her experience of the world. She found herself wondering: "When am I going to see the people doing drugs, and the violence?"

But it was the first time in a long time that people had shown Hannah sincere kindness and generosity and had a genuine interest in her.

"Eventually I felt like I could live my life down here and start a whole new life," says Hannah.

During her time at the Vinnies Bowral Youth Refuge, Hannah completed her year 10 studies and she joined a special Pathways program for women who had experienced similar situations. With the support of her Vinnies caseworker, she moved into transitional housing, and then into a private rental.

Hannah is now a young adult. She lives on her own and supports herself by working as a cleaner. Her life now is a calm and healthy oasis compared to the trauma of her teenage years.

She has started reaching out to some of her siblings and her father, who is out of prison and trying to turn his life around too. But she found her own way and is comfortable knowing that she will never have to go through the same traumatic experiences again.

Hannah plans to study community work in order to become a youth worker. Her dream is to help children escape violent homes and build new lives for themselves.

Vinnies services assist people like Hannah every day. But there are so many more to help. In New South Wales, one in every 200 people is now homeless. And over the past decade, the rate of homelessness among young people has increased by 92%. A truly shocking statistic - not all of them are as lucky as Hannah.

**VINNIES
REBUILDS**

Part of Cheryl's job is to wash donated clothing



The sorting shed

IF YOU'VE EVER WONDERED WHERE THE CLOTHES YOU GIVE TO VINNIES SHOPS GO, CHERYL HAS THE ANSWER.

She is one of about 20 employees at Castlereagh Industries in Coonamble, a couple of hours north of Dubbo. One of the town's biggest employers, Castlereagh is essentially a warehouse to where donated clothes are delivered by truck. They are then checked over, washed if necessary, and deftly sorted into a multitude of categories: from women's fashion suitable for resale in Australia to shirts and shoes destined for developing countries to different grades of workshop rags.

Some of the workers are specialists, others are generalists and work at several different stations, but every one of them has a disability.

Several of the employees live at the nearby supported accommodation, Greene Villa, set up with funding raised by volunteers at the local St Vincent de Paul Society Conference several years ago. They share communal kitchens and gardens, and each resident has their own room.

The Society's retail effort embraces a whole community of tireless volunteers working across all facets of operations. Sales from Vinnies Shops and distribution centres significantly contribute to the Society's Good Works.

These distribution centres are part of a Vinnies system that also supports the environment by reselling goods

otherwise destined for landfill. It's no surprise that Vinnies Shops NSW recently won the 2018 National Retail Awards in the category of Social Responsibility Champion of the Year.

Through Castlereagh Industries and Greene Villa, people with disabilities find independence, self-esteem and friendship as well as jobs. And it's all thanks to the dedication and generosity of Vinnies supporters that this dream became a reality.

**VINNIES
RESTORES**



Creating community

PAINT-A-PLATE IS ONE OF THE LONGEST STANDING CREATIVE PROGRAMS AT THE OZANAM LEARNING CENTRE (OLC) IN WOOLLOOMOOLOO JUST BY THE MATTHEW TALBOT HOSTEL.

On a practical level it introduces the glazing and decorative process of ceramics to people we assist. But on an interpersonal level the program provides so much more: social engagement, personal empowerment and a close-knit supportive community.

The Paint-A-Plate program started eight years ago, when Eva (bottom-right) joined the OLC volunteer team, bringing with her a wealth of creative expertise. Eva started volunteering at the OLC as she wanted to combine her recently-completed Social Work degree with her creative endeavours.

Eva has taught many to draw, design and glaze in her program, but one OLC artist's journey over the years stands out for her. Craig joined the Paint-A-Plate program a few years ago. He would not engage with the group and the work he created would depict scenes of violence. Eva supported his creative process, never judging, but focusing on his creative strengths and achievements. She watched as Craig found a sense of joy and catharsis in his creative process, which she says was illustrated in his new art, as well as becoming an engaged and social member of the group.

OLC Woolloomooloo is funded entirely by donations. These crucial funds enable up to 100 people a day to find a welcoming place, participate in structured programs like Paint-A-Plate, and access drop-in spaces. Annually, approximately 1,000 people engage in the centre's programs.

Additional support for other OLCs in New South Wales has recently been secured from corporate donors like Perpetual for OLCs in Wagga Wagga and Armidale, and The Claffy Foundation for OLC Wagga Wagga.

Asked what keeps her coming back, Eva says: "I love the sense of community that has developed in this space... There is a creative dialogue that influences both the artists and my creative practice, where our experiments are continually pushed and the outcomes are often surprising, unexpected and sometimes beyond our expectations."

**VINNIES
RENEWS**



Alan and Charlie's story

“WHAT’S A FATHER TO DO?” ASKS ALAN, RECOUNTING HIS JOURNEY. IT’S NOT A RHETORICAL QUESTION. HE ONCE FACED A NEAR IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE, WHICH ONLY VINNIES COULD HELP HIM SOLVE.

These days, all is well. Little Charlie is a happy and active little boy. His father, Alan, now has work again and a place to call their own.

It wasn't always this way. “I had a good home,” Alan recounts. “I had a good job, I'd been working for 14 years nearly. Things were going really well for me.”

While Alan doesn't like to talk about all the details of how he and Charlie ended up homeless, he does mention that his partner's deteriorating mental health and some terrible luck played a big part in it.

By 2017, facing homelessness, Alan knew that he couldn't possibly take his new-born son to live on the streets. “As a father who wants to look after his son, and wants the best for his son, do I keep the child homeless with me?” he asks. “I couldn't do that. He comes first.”

But the options were very limited. Most accommodation and refuge services in New South Wales are for single men only, or for women with children. Since his situation didn't fit the bill, Alan was on the brink of being separated from Charlie.

Fortunately for both, Alan was referred to Vincentian House, a Vinnies refuge in inner-city Sydney that is one of the only accommodation options in NSW for fathers with children. On first arriving, he was astonished how far the staff would go to help. “I was surprised to the extent that it was humbling,” Alan recounts.

Funded with the support of Vinnies donors, Vincentian House welcomes families (including men) and single unaccompanied women who are experiencing homelessness or are at immediate risk of homelessness. All residents are assigned a highly-trained case manager, who works with them during their stay to help them meet goals such as finding safe and permanent housing.



Alan's case manager Terri made a lasting impression. “She went above and beyond,” he says. “So do the others. They all do ‘little things’ – and ‘little things’ do matter.”

Case managers like Terri work in conjunction with other staff who specialise in assisting children and young people. In this way, Vincentian House helps the younger residents with education, emotional and other support as required.

There is room at Vincentian for several families, who each have a self-contained apartment with a kitchen and bathroom, but can share other facilities such as the rooftop garden. Residents also have access to a range of onsite services including: a mental health and wellbeing



clinic; a Centrelink outreach service; counselling, parenting and education programs; supported playgroups; financial counselling, and life skills such as cooking and budgeting. Having decided to accept help from Vinnies, Alan began turning his situation around. About 12 months on, his life is back on track.

"I didn't want Charlie to grow up like I did," says Alan as Charlie scampers around a local playground. "He's the happiest, most loving little boy. He's my best mate. He just means the world to me. I can't imagine life without him now. To be honest, he saved my life. We're in a good place now."

Vinnies runs numerous supported accommodation

options for people experiencing homelessness across NSW and sadly stories like Alan's are becoming more common. Since 2011 there has been a 37% increase in homelessness rates in NSW according to the ABS census results. In fact NSW has the worst rates of homelessness in Australia.

"You never think it's going to happen to you," noted Alan. "And when it does, it's scary. It's real scary, especially when you've got a baby." Fortunately, thanks to you, Vinnies services like Vincentian House can continue to address the causes of homelessness - and to offer people like Alan and Charlie a welcome hand up.

**VINNIES
RESTORES**



Finding family far from home

A FORMER JOURNALIST AND REFUGEE, AMBER HAD THOUGHT HER LIFE WAS TURNING AROUND UNTIL SHE MARRIED INTO AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP. BUT FINDING FAMILY IN THE HEARTS OF VINNIES WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS, SHE IS FINALLY AT HOME IN AUSTRALIA.

Fleeing political unrest in her home country, Amber began life in Australia seeking asylum, eventually attaining a working visa after months of struggle. Studying to learn English, she picked up odd jobs cleaning and anything else to get by. "I did this for a few years, just to survive. I got citizenship in 2008 and it was like, 'Now I can start my life.'"

Working her way up in the aged care industry, Amber began to feel at home in her new country. "I was happy, much better, I had friends, I knew English, I had a job. My life was very settled up until then." She then married, but something didn't feel right.

When pregnant with her daughter Farah, Amber noticed the once subtle verbal and physical abuse beginning to worsen. "And I was thinking, all the time, he will change one day, when we have a family, when we have friends". Amber was left to pay the bills by herself while her husband went out and didn't work. To support the family she worked two jobs until just three days before giving birth.

Now reliant on her husband to work while she looked

after their child, Amber found herself trapped in a violent cycle. When physical abuse led her to the medical centre, she finally called the police and was connected with a Vinnies Emergency Refuge Centre. "I took two pairs of pyjamas and what I was wearing... I didn't have time to think. I just needed to go."

Supplied with accommodation, clothing, services and support for her and her daughter, Amber transferred to the Marian Centre, a Vinnies crisis centre specialising in supporting women and children displaced by domestic violence. They helped her apply for a unit. "I was lucky, it was like I had family," she says.

With assistance at every step of the way and encouragement to achieve, Amber moved into her own unit and began studying Early Childhood Care.

With the support of Vinnies and her case worker, Amber found the strength to cut off her abusive relationship. "I found support that I would never find perhaps even inside my family."

Slowly rebuilding, Amber is taking the next steps for a happy and settled life, with her daughter now at school. She says that if she knew about Vinnies refuge centres earlier, she would have left a long time ago, "I didn't know that there is help like this, that they help you and they care... So I will ask anyone who can help, if they don't know where this money is going or the people who need it ... They change a life. With everything, they change a life."

**VINNIES
REBUILDS**



Vinnies Volunteer Highlight

KEVIN IS ONE OF THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS OF THE VINNIES ROOFTOP GARDEN PROJECT. THE PROJECT TEACHES PEOPLE ORGANIC GARDENING SKILLS WHILE BUILDING A GREEN - AND EDIBLE - SPACE FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE MATTHEW TALBOT HOSTEL IN WOOLLOOMOOLOO.

The gardening program continues over at the Vinnies' plot at the Bourke Street Community Garden where the participant's seedlings are growing happily and healthily, ready to produce some fruit and veg in the spring.

"I've been volunteering with Vinnies for five years," says Kevin. "I volunteer because I can, and it's an opportunity to give back."

He explains further: "I started volunteering at the Matthew Talbot Kiosk, and then two years ago I started to volunteer with Ozanam Learning Centre. I have volunteered in a number of different roles there, including providing support to the Men's Space and more recently supporting the community garden projects."

The Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC) is located next door to the Matthew Talbot Hostel and offers early support for people at risk of homelessness or experiencing disadvantage. Its innovative approach promotes healthy, independent living.

The gardening program is just one of the many amazing and uplifting ways Vinnies assists people who are experiencing difficult circumstances. And the work of volunteers like Kevin is possible thanks to donors like you.

**VINNIES
RENEWS**

Why I'm leaving a gift in my Will

INCLUDING A GIFT IN MY WILL IS JUST ONE SMALL WAY IN WHICH I CAN ASSIST THOSE AUSTRALIANS WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE AND GREATLY DISADVANTAGED BY THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES.



There are a variety of complex reasons why people find themselves in this position and for many it can be difficult to ask for help. Past traumas, losing a job, mental illness, domestic violence or a serious health diagnosis can all contribute to a change in personal circumstances and a loss of control and dignity. It is reassuring to me that Vinnies will be there for all of those people in their time of need but they can only do this with our support.

Writing a Will is a private matter. Homelessness, poverty and disadvantage are public issues.

I hope you will join me along with others in the community in remembering the St Vincent de Paul Society in your Will. Together we can make a positive difference to the thousands of people who turn to the Society for help each and every day.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Buffier AM

LEAVE A GIFT TO VINNIES PLEASE CONTACT

Cherie McKenna, Gifts in Willis & Estates Manager, if you would like information about including a gift to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW in your will.

Call: 02 8622 0387

Email: cherie.mckenna@vinnies.org.au



Shane's story

SHANE IS A 30-YEAR-OLD MAN WHO NEVER IMAGINED HIS LIFE WOULD HAVE LED HIM DOWN THIS PATH HE HAS TAKEN.

Shane has been homeless for many years and had minimal support and accommodation options until he came to St Vincent de Paul Society Wyong to ask for food assistance.

St Vincent de Paul Society Wyong have been assisting and supporting Shane since September 2012. He has identified as homeless for many years, receiving ongoing support assistance such as accommodation, food, food vouchers and men's toiletry packs.

Shane had slept in various places including train stations, parks and beaches, and has also 'couch surfed'. Housing NSW provided temporary accommodation for short periods.

Shane also has a dog, his constant companion. "She has really helped me push through each day," says Shane.

He was recently able to secure permanent accommodation at Bateau Bay and has shown constant appreciation and gratitude for the hand-up to get his life back on track. He often calls in to update the Wyong staff and volunteers on his circumstances and to continue with his case management support.



Shane's story is sadly not uncommon as the housing crisis in Australia deepens for affordable rentals and emergency housing. The NSW Government waiting list for social housing is now up to 60,000 households. Your donations help us to find accommodation for the people who turn to us for help.

VINNIES
RESTORES

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Because we respect the privacy of the people we assist, names in this newsletter may have been changed, stories summarised and pictorial models used. For more information about the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, contact: (02) 9568 0262 or vinnies.org.au. Correspondence can be sent to publications@vinnies.org.au.

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us on:



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OR ☐ Please find enclosed my Cheque/Money Order made payable to 'St Vincent de Paul Society NSW'

☐ Please tick here if you would like information about remembering the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW in your Will

☐ I have already left a gift to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW in my Will

All communications are treated in the strictest confidence. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW follows the Australian Privacy Principles.
If you do not wish your details to be used for future fundraising activities please tick this box. ☐

SVS18/MTS18



To make a regular or single donation, simply complete your details and post to:

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Donation hotline: 13 18 12
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ON BEHALF OF OVER 300,000
PEOPLE WHO WERE ASSISTED
BY VINNIES LAST YEAR...
THANK YOU.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works