



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

Impact

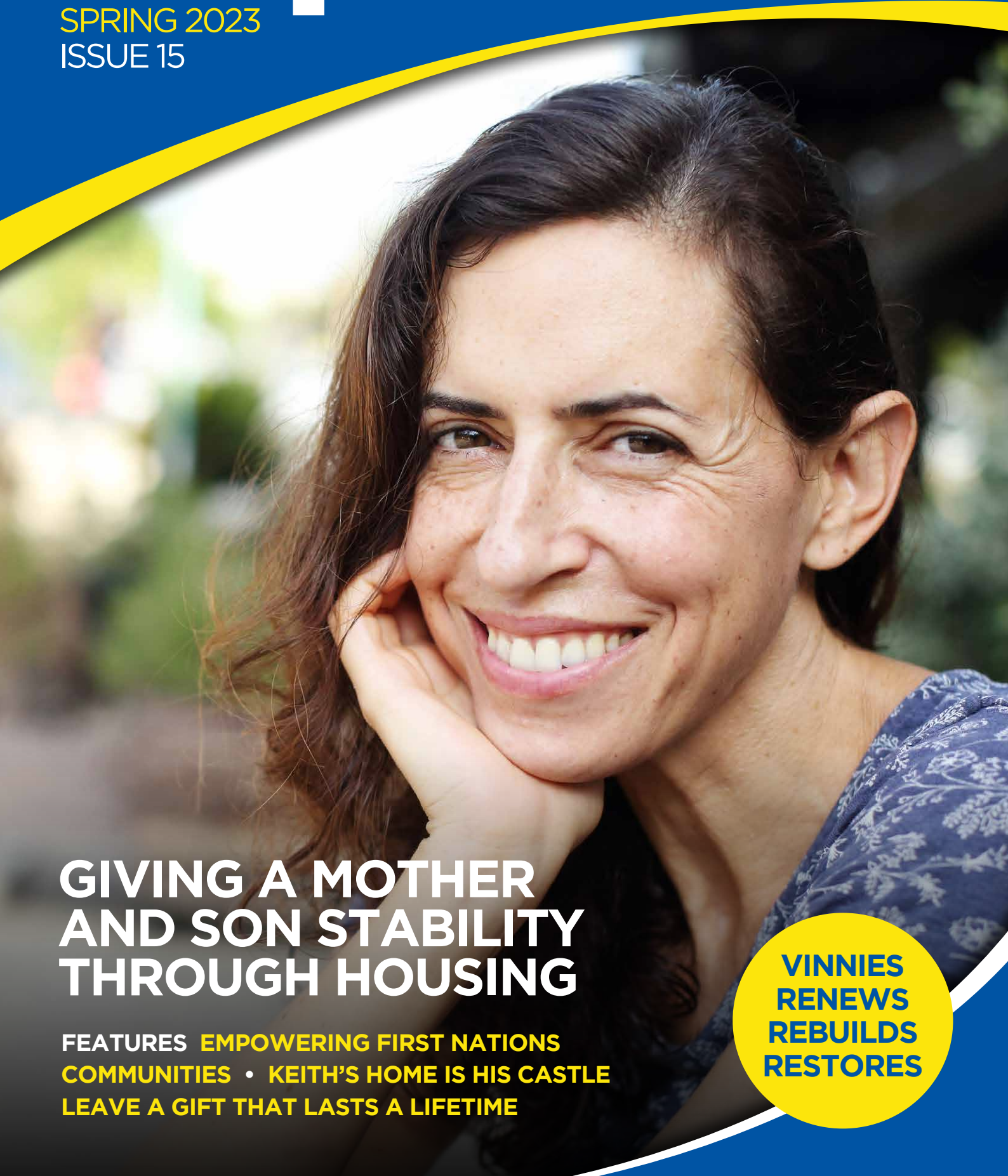
The difference
you make

SPRING 2023
ISSUE 15

GIVING A MOTHER AND SON STABILITY THROUGH HOUSING

FEATURES **EMPOWERING FIRST NATIONS
COMMUNITIES • KEITH'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE
LEAVE A GIFT THAT LASTS A LIFETIME**

**VINNIES
RENEWS
REBUILDS
RESTORES**





Welcome

It gives me great pleasure to address you for the first time since being appointed as CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

I am energised to lead the organisation as we implement our new Strategic Plan. Along with your continued support and goodwill, the new strategy will help contribute to the transformation of the lives of those most in need in communities throughout NSW.

One of the Society's strengths is our ability to renew and adapt to our changing world, providing support for those most in need. The people who seek our assistance are facing more acute and visible forms of hardship and homelessness. The cost-of-living crisis is now increasing demand for assistance from more

people including those in stable work, which has been quite alarming.

People are being forced to make choices that should never have to occur; deciding between having a roof over their head or putting food on the table; or opting not to turn on a heater because they fear the eye-watering bill that will follow.

I would like to thank you for your ongoing support during these tough times. Your generosity allows us to continue alleviating the pressure that so many people are currently facing in their daily lives and gives them a chance to rebuild their lives.

Yolanda Saiz
Chief Executive Officer
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

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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 media.nsw@vinnies.org.au.

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us on:



New Strategic Plan

THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NSW IS PROUD TO LAUNCH STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES, TRANSFORMING LIVES, OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2024-2028.

The new strategic vision is underpinned by three core goals:

1. Excel: amplify the impact of our service offering

- improve security, stability and social connection outcomes
- ensure the people we assist sustain outcomes over time
- achieve comparable outcomes for the most disadvantaged communities

2. Grow: extend the reach of our services

- ensure more people across NSW achieve and sustain housing security
- increase access to impactful services for the most disadvantaged and hard to reach communities

3. Cultivate: enable our people, operational and financial capabilities so we can deliver more and better outcomes

- a vibrant, skillful and collaborative network of members, volunteers and employees
- change and innovation informed by analytics and research
- increased net revenue to invest in service delivery by excelling in our retail, commercial enterprises and fundraising operations



Extensive consultations were conducted to better understand our aspirations for impact, and to identify the key challenges and opportunities within the Society. We identified three major success drivers that will allow us to achieve our strategic goals and deliver on our mission.

Collaboration

We will increase collaboration between our services, our advocacy and our enabling functions to increase our impact in communities.

Partnerships

We will partner with the people we assist, to co-design services and evaluate service provision. We will work with other organisations; state and federal government agencies; local First Nations communities and our corporate partners, to provide integrated services to the people we assist.

Responsiveness

We will increase our research and evaluation capability to ensure our services are underpinned by data and evidence. We will conduct ongoing community needs analysis, increase our analytics capability and monitor and evaluate the impact of our services to ensure that we are responsive to the needs of the people we assist.

You can see our new Strategic Plan in full at:
www.vinnies.org.au/NSWStrategicPlan

**VINNIES
RENEWS**

Messages of thanks

HERE ARE SOME WORDS OF THANKS TO GENEROUS DONORS SUCH AS YOU FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED IN THEIR TIMES OF NEED.

Nothing has been too hard for my caseworker – dental work, vets, furniture for my home, referring me to all sorts of programs and avenues for help. – Ally

we get gradually to know the different volunteers and they get to know you, so therefore there's a rapport built up. It builds community – we just feel at home here. – Vince

Meeting people at Vinnies, where they cared about you, certainly helped me immensely. – Beau

It goes a long way and helps us out with our kids knowing that in your head you don't have to go through the struggle on your own because there's always going to be help there – it means so much to us. – Carolina

[Vinnies] is a place where there is no judgment. You bring yourself; you do what you do, and you're part of it. – Liam



Without a home, everything falls apart

A BATHTUB, AN OVEN AND A BACKYARD MAY SEEM UNREMARKABLE.

For Emma, the sight of these seemingly ordinary things brought her to tears when she finally received a home after years of struggle and homelessness.

“The housing that we’ve been given, I couldn’t ask for anything more... all those little things, and now stability – my son has just come so far.”

Going from secure housing to experiencing homelessness four times in the past three years due to the housing crisis that has erupted across Australia, the two-bedroom townhouse she shares with her young son, Jacob, has come at the end of a difficult road.

“I was a manager for a retail department store for almost ten years and then relocated and had my son. Unfortunately, the father was not involved, so I’ve had to do it all on my own, which meant losing one property,” Emma explains.

“I owned a house... that’s a hard bitter pill to swallow as well, coming from being a homeowner and a landlord.”

Shifting into the rental market at a time when exorbitant increases have become alarmingly commonplace, the struggle to keep her head

above water while balancing rent, utilities, declining health and raising Jacob led to a sense of helplessness.

The support Emma needed in her time of crisis came in the form of a drop-in service operated by the St Vincent de Paul Society in regional NSW, where she was left with a profound impact from her very first interaction.

“I’d been homeless for two months already [and] been in my car, couch surfing with my son.” Things got so desperate Emma had to send Jacob interstate to stay with relatives while she got her life back on track.

“I’ve been kicking myself ever since that I didn’t come sooner – I was just shocked at what I walked into.

“I think I was directed to the showers first and then to eat... words can’t describe the care that’s given here compared to other services. Everybody treats you the same way. The staff here are amazing – absolutely amazing.”

Gaining a much-needed support system that helped Emma cover expenses like travel, medication and treatment to address cancer and dental issues, most significantly, the service staff advocated on her behalf to secure housing.



With more than 57,000 applicants currently waiting for social housing across NSW and affordable housing in short supply, Emma credits the compassion and understanding of Vinnies for keeping her spirits up in her darkest moments.

"There's so many people out there like me. And there's just so many cracks in the system that we're all falling through; that's where [Vinnies] filled the cracks, where other places can't."

"Every time I've had an issue, or any encounter or service providers let me down, guess where I turn to? I walk straight through the gates, and I come to [Vinnies]."

"Because I know that at the end of the day, somehow, they're going to be able to help. And they have, they literally have."

Demand for assistance from Vinnies' homelessness and housing services has increased significantly across the board over the past year. Concerningly, the lack of available and affordable housing properties has meant the time taken to achieve outcomes for people in need is getting longer and services are being stretched beyond capacity.

Two months on from securing housing, the transformation for Emma has been life altering.

She is currently volunteering in the community and studying, while the newfound routine, structure and stability has Jacob on track to succeed when he begins school next year.

"It sounds so obvious, but with housing, everything comes together."

Having had to share a room with Jacob during their shared periods of homelessness, Emma vividly recalls the glow of Jacob's face on the day they moved into their new home.

"I said, 'You've got your own room and we've even got a backyard.' He goes, 'You've got to be kidding me, mum?!'"

"I'm not kidding you, and it's all yours."

VINNIES
REBUILDS

Our services across the state are seeing an increasing number of people like Emma seeking assistance. Your support plays an invaluable role in ensuring we can continue providing support through food, clothing, case management and a voice to people in need as an advocate.

If you haven't already donated to our Spring Appeal, please make a gift now to support people like Emma in their time of need. [Donate online at vinnies.org.au/nswspringappeal](https://vinnies.org.au/nswspringappeal), using the form on the back of this magazine or call 13 18 12.



←
*or scan
to donate*



From the streets to the stage

THE OZANAM LEARNING CENTRE IS A COMMUNITY INCLUSION SERVICE OPERATED BY THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NSW THAT ACTS AS A LIFELINE FOR PEOPLE REGULARLY OVERLOOKED BY WIDER SOCIETY.

It is a place where people can belong, gain skills and express themselves creatively.

Having been homeless at his lowest point, Russell credits the OLC for changing the course of his life for the better.

"In 2012, I walked out of my house, my job and I walked to a church in Ashfield to get my head down. I was sleeping on the streets for about two years. A music tutor there found that I played the drums, so they got me involved in there and wanted to do recordings," recalls Russell.

It was during this time that Russell met Omar, who eventually became the music program coordinator at the OLC.

Through Omar's encouragement, Russell has gone on to perform as the drummer for the OLC Music Collective, the OLC's in-house band. This opportunity has allowed Russell to channel his love for music and find a space where he feels appreciated.

"There's not many opportunities on the street for band stuff, so being able to come here is a game changer. I've been coming as soon as I found out that anyone can come up and practice and play," explains Russell.

"I feel like I belong here with like-minded people. I love it here. It's always been a good place for me. It's good for my brain and my soul."

Russell's love of music stems from his family, who

nurtured his talent and appreciation for the art form from a young age.

"My father was into American rock and roll, and my mother was into English rock and roll. I was lucky because when I was a kid, my mother had a big suitcase full of cassettes, all numbered and organised. Sometimes, when we had parties at home, they would make me the DJ."

"My uncle, when I was growing up, always said, 'if you want to play the drums, you have to come to church'," Russell chuckles.

Among various music genres, reggae holds a special place in Russell's heart.

"I love reggae, Bob Marley is my man. I love it because it's all about peace and love. It's all from here," says Russell, pointing to his heart.

After five years of living on the streets, Russell finally secured housing. Having experienced mental health challenges, he values the importance of having a secure place to call home for his recovery.

"I've had mental problems. I've been to psych wards, and there were drugs and alcohol. I'm all clean now, and housing is a big part of it. You've got to have housing because once you are on the street, you just use your money for unnecessary things," he concludes.

Russell, along with the OLC Music Collective performed their latest album, *Alternate Voices*, recently at the Factory Theatre. The album features 12 original songs illuminating band members' personal stories and collective growth through the OLC music program.

You can stream 'Alternate Voices' at www.theolcmusiccollective.bandcamp.com

**VINNIES
RESTORES**

A welcoming place for social connection

“YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN TOMORROW. YOU MIGHT HAVE YOUR FIVE-YEAR PLAN AND ALL THAT SORT OF STUFF, BUT YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN TOMORROW BECAUSE THERE’S NO WAY THAT I EVER THOUGHT IN A MILLION YEARS THAT I WOULD BE HERE.”

Michael never thought he would ever be near the brink of homelessness. He enjoyed a secure and stable life that he could afford from a lifetime of hard work.

“I was a primary school teacher for 16 years, and then I decided to do my own interior design business and owned three properties. I rented them out. I was very, very comfortable. I worked my guts out to get there, but I was very comfortable.”

His life changed suddenly after he left the domestic violence that he had experienced for eight years. The divorce from his partner stripped Michael of all his possessions.

Finding refuge in social housing, Michael was left with only two dogs he loved dearly.

“So, suddenly, I was homeless, and I had no money to access, and I had two dogs, and I had nowhere to go.”

“It was all taken from me, and I did nothing wrong. He seemed to be able to take all my money and put it into bank accounts I couldn’t touch. He had the help of our solicitor.

“I had to sell my Flybuys points to get chicken necks for my dogs at Coles. They’d eat first and then whatever I could eat afterwards was fine.”

“One of my dogs died, and that was traumatic. So now I’ve just got one and she’s old now, so all the money that I had had to go to her to get her heart medication.”

In his time of struggle where he often wondered where he would get his next meal, Michael found respite in the form of our Vinnies Vans.

“It’s absolutely horrible to know that – ‘where am I going to get food from?’”

“Then suddenly I found the Vinnies Vans. I just couldn’t believe that they were giving me food for free, and it was a miracle.”

“It’s healthy, and there’s lots of it. As I said, it’s a miracle.”

Vinnies Vans have not only been providing Michael with food, but also with a welcoming space and social connection.

“I just have my dog, so when I’m at home, I talk to my dog. So, I don’t really have that much human contact.”

“So, when I do come out to get the food, it’s so nice to talk to someone.”

Michael speaks highly of the Vinnies Vans volunteers, whom he describes as always making him feel genuinely appreciated.

“They feel like they’re your friends that you’ve known for years, and they’re really ... when they listen, they listen. They’re constantly looking at you as if they really are interested.”

“They’re very sweet people, and they’re there because they want to be there, and they’re there because they’re taking a little time out of their lives to help me.”

“If the van wasn’t here, I don’t know what I would do.”

**VINNIES
RENEWS**





Remembering Andy Chechlacz: A Life of Passion, Generosity, and Kindness

ANDREW CHECHLACZ, AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS ANDY, LIVED WITH PASSION, KINDNESS, AND GENEROSITY IN ALL ASPECTS OF HIS LIFE. HIS UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO FAMILY, LOVE FOR BUSES, AND DEDICATION TO THE COMMUNITY WERE THE DEFINING PILLARS OF HIS 65 YEARS, WHICH LEFT AN UNFORGETTABLE MEMORY ON ALL THOSE WHO KNEW HIM.

Andy's grandmother was booked to sail aboard the Titanic in 1912, but a stroke of luck made her cancel the ticket one day before the ship departed. Had she boarded the ship, Andy's life as it was would not have been possible.

Born in 1955 at the Mater Hospital in North Sydney, Andy was the son of Polish refugee parents who settled in Australia after the end of World War II. Spending his life with his parents in Condell Park, he had strong family values and was a devoted son. He cared deeply for his mother, Henryka, who passed away with him by her side.

Andy's greatest passion in life was for buses. He was one of the founders and much-valued member of the Sydney Bus Museum at Leichhardt, where he dedicated the skills gained from studying Transport Management at the University of Sydney as Operation Manager for the museum for over 38 years. Andy's passion for buses was so deep it did not end with his work; he transformed his family home into a museum filled with unique and rare bus collectables.

Andy's caring nature and generosity were great; he also shared them with his church and the Polish community. He enjoyed attending mass

and even helped the priest deliver the service. Andy had a natural gift for helping others and hosted many fundraisers.

Despite Andy's immeasurable impact on those around him, he was a quiet achiever who never sought the spotlight but was always willing to lend a helping hand. He had a tremendous sense of humour and was always happy to pass down his knowledge with a warm heart, earning admiration and respect from those who knew him.

In memory of his brother Henry, who died of tuberculosis in 1953, Andy made a bequest to St Vincent de Paul to give back to the Society that had helped his family when Henry fell ill soon after their family arrived in Australia.

Andy's life was one of purpose and significance, and his legacy continues to inspire and enrich the lives of those he touched.

**VINNIES
REBUILDS**

Andy leaves behind a generous bequest to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW which will be used to enable programs and services providing a variety of assistance to people experiencing hardship and disadvantage.

We thank Andy for his generosity and extend our sympathy to his loved ones for their loss.

If you would like to leave a lasting legacy through a bequest to the Society, please contact our Bequest Manager, Cherie McKenna. Phone: (02) 8622 0387 or Email: cherie.mckenna@vinnies.org.au

“It’s not just a roof over my head, it’s my castle now”

“I NEVER EXPECTED TO BE HOMELESS. I WAS ABSOLUTELY DEVASTATED. THE POOR PEOPLE OUT THERE LIVING ON THE STREET, SLEEPING WITH ONE EYE OPEN AND ONE EYE CLOSED. YOU NEVER KNOW IF YOU’RE GOING TO SURVIVE THE NIGHT SOMETIMES.”

Keith was a merchant seaman his entire adult life, he went to sea when he was 15 and retired when he was 62. After getting divorced, Keith lost the majority of his Superannuation. When he had spent what little was left, plus his savings, he became homeless.

Keith shares, “I lived on the trains running to Northern New South Wales for several months. I’d get on a train, sleep for 10 hours and then get off. I’d hang there for a couple of days and then get another train back.”

“I slept in parks, in football stadiums, wherever I could get my head down, wherever I thought safe. And then got back on another train and headed somewhere else. It was a bit hairy at times. Sometimes you have to sleep with one eye open, lots of scallywags, lot of desperate people.”

After being referred to Link2Home, Keith eventually got access to government housing. Despite being over the moon, Keith spent the first three nights sleeping on the floor.

“If you move into a flat with no furniture, it’s just like staying on the train. You’ve got a roof over you, but nothing else. You can’t buy food because you don’t have a refrigerator. You can’t wash the clothes because you don’t have a washing machine. If you don’t have money for the electricity, they won’t turn the electricity on.”

Keith’s case worker referred him to the St Vincent de Paul Society in Redfern who were able to help him by supplying a washing machine, fridge, chairs and a kettle, things he would never have been able to afford.

“If Vinnies weren’t able to help me I’d be living in an empty flat. I couldn’t be more grateful for what they’ve done for me. They certainly helped me



immensely, that puts a bit of dignity back in your life. You can hold your head up a bit further.”

“Once you’ve got a roof over your head, well then you can start putting things together. You’re clean, you can have a shower every day, you can go for job interviews. Your opportunities are multiplied as soon as you have a secure place to live.”

Keith believes that Australia shouldn’t have homeless people. “There are people who worked all their lives and just got that far behind in debt that they can’t help themselves and they’re homeless. Those people are good decent people and now they have nothing. And in this country, we can’t do that. We must help them.”

Despite still living pay-to-pay, Keith is feeling secure and looking forward to his future. “I look forward to now trying to get a job maybe or looking after my a little flat here. This is my home now. It’s not just a roof over my head, it’s my castle now. I can have visitors and I have that security that I know I don’t have to get out, as long as I can pay my rent, I’ll be all right.”

**VINNIES
RESTORES**



First Nations Conferences to care for local community

THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NSW HAS ESTABLISHED FIRST NATIONS CONFERENCES IN WALGETT AND MOREE TO EMPOWER AND MEET THE NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

The word Guniinii translates to queen bee in the language of the Gamilaraay traditional custodians. The word carries additional meaning as the name representing the St Vincent de Paul Society's newly formed First Nations Conference in Moree.

"The whole idea being that the queen bee looks after the whole community and it grows, provides," says Phil Donnan, St Vincent de Paul Society North West Regional Director.

Conceived by a group of three First Nations women, working in coordination with the Society's membership team, the Conference which aims to serve the needs of the community has since grown to eight members.

A naming and blessing ceremony for the Guniinii Conference was held at the St Pius X Chapel in March with members of the Conference coming from all three distinct parts of the First Nations community in Moree.

According to Phil Donnan, the success of the initiative is in combining the Society's resources with people understanding the needs of where they live.

"Rather than us saying, 'this is what we think you want', it's them saying 'this is what we need'. We're allowing them control of their own destiny using our resourcing and within our mission."

"It's incredible to see the energy and enthusiasm and we're thrilled to be able to resource them to make a change in their community."

The initiative to establish First Nations Conferences originated in Walgett after the previous Conference had been disbanded for a number of years.

After establishing relationships with the local community, an inaugural First Nations Conference was established in Walgett in late 2022, which has seen people reach out for assistance for the first time due to the connection of the conference to the community.

By establishing First Nations Conferences, the Society aims to increase cultural knowledge across the wider membership base as a whole.

"One of the issues for us is to be culturally appropriate with First Nations people. We'll be engaging with these Conferences to train and educate our existing members on being more appropriate and relatable, so there will be better engagement at all levels of the organisation."

The establishment of First Nations Conferences is one of the actions the Society has taken as part of the current Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations people.

Plans are underway for the Guniinii Conference to complement the existing St Therese Conference by establishing a drop-in centre and offering financial aid programs such as EAPA and NILS in Moree, while members in Walgett are engaging with local elders to formally name their Conference.

The Society is currently developing a new Reconciliation Action Plan that will be unveiled in the coming months.

VINNIES
RENEWS

Advocating for change

SHELLEY IS MAKING STRIDES FOUR YEARS ON FROM WHEN WE FEATURED HER STORY IN IMPACT.

"I know what it's like to be alone and have no family and support. I don't want anyone to feel the way that I felt."

Using her story to advocate for change in her local community, Shelley was recognised with a Citizen of the Year award during the most recent Australia Day honours.

"My story is that it can happen to anyone. Domestic violence has no boundaries – and homelessness as well – what I need people to do is listen, understand," says Shelley.

First coming into contact with Vinnies several years ago after taking out an apprehended violence order to ensure the safety of herself and three young children, she was left homeless when her then-husband retaliated by cutting off her phone, finances and severing the lease.

Having been born overseas and with no family connections to call upon in Australia, the support Shelley desperately needed in her time of crisis



came in the form of Vinnies members who helped with accommodation, bedding, everyday essentials and the compassion to move forward.

"They came around to my house, they didn't know me, they weren't my friends, they just [every two weeks] had a conversation and checked in with me," recalls Shelley.

While Shelley has come to maintain a stable lifestyle in the years since her most acute period of hardship, she continues to keep in contact with Vinnies as a support system.

"It's more the relationship than financially these days, but they certainly helped me with moving costs and definitely around Christmas with presents or food cards when I struggle the most.

"It's the support emotionally and mentally; just knowing that if I do get into crisis that I have that partnership with them that they understand."

**VINNIES
REBUILDS**

Give Voice to a more just and compassionate society

THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NSW HAS RECOMMITTED SUPPORT FOR THE FIRST NATIONS VOICE TO PARLIAMENT AND THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART.

"We believe that advancing the cause of the First Nations Voice to Parliament is a tangible step that can help to move towards the change we aspire to see," said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

"At the core of our vision is to respect human dignity and encourage people to take control of their destiny, and, as such, the Society supports the Uluru Statement and the Voice as matters of social justice.

"The Voice to Parliament is one of the three asks put forward by the Uluru Statement, followed by Treaty and Truth.

"Establishing a Voice is the first step towards advancing First Nations' leaders calls for truth-telling and treaty making," said Ms Saiz.

The Society has produced a series of resources outlining its position on the Voice to Parliament and the Uluru Statement From the Heart that are available at: www.vinnies.org.au/ulurustatement

"We believe the upcoming referendum is an important moment in our shared history that requires people to make an informed decision," said Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.

"Our support for the Voice and the Uluru Statement From the Heart is driven by our mission as a lay-Catholic organisation.

"We encourage everyone to be informed and engage in this important discussion respectfully.

"This opportunity is to bring about First Nations justice and move towards a more just and compassionate society," said Mr Burton.



Support for the whole family

PETS ARE MORE THAN JUST COMPANIONS TO THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND DISADVANTAGE - THEY ARE A SOURCE OF LOVE, COMFORT, AND UNWAVERING LOYALTY; THINGS THAT ARE MUCH NEEDED IN TIMES OF HARDSHIP.

However, with the ongoing cost of living crisis, caring for pets can be challenging for those already struggling to make ends meet.

As part of our approach to meet the needs of the people we assist, the Redfern Vinnies Support Centre staff and volunteers supported over a hundred people accompanied by their cherished dogs, cats and even parrot to mark National Pet Day earlier this year.

Attendees were delighted to discover an ample supply of essentials for their pets, including pet food, treats, bowls, flea treatments, collars, leashes, toys, and pet beds.

Gehard, came to the pet day with his moodle, Heath, who has been his loyal companion for almost thirteen years.

"We [Gehard and his partner] got Heath since he was eight weeks old from Queensland. Since then, he's been everywhere with us. He's been through the hardest part of our transition which is being homeless, he came every step of the way."

"You [Vinnies] have been really good. Helping us with dog food and things like that - [it's] much appreciated."

Gehard was almost lost for words when asked about the importance of Heath in his life.

"Oh.. he's like our child. That's how important he is."

**VINNIES
RESTORES**



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SVS23/MTS23



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

St Vincent de Paul Society
PO Box 19
Petersham NSW 2049
(02) 9568 0262
vinnies@vinnies.org.au
vinnies.org.au
Donation hotline: 13 18 12
ABN: 91 161 127 340

**ON BEHALF OF ALL THE
PEOPLE WHO WERE
ASSISTED BY VINNIES...**

THANK YOU.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works