



St Vincent de Paul Society  
NSW  
*good works*

# Impact

The difference  
you make

AUTUMN 2020  
ISSUE 08

## A ROOF OVER HIS HEAD AND A BRIGHT ROAD AHEAD

FEATURES BUSHFIRE RELIEF • LILY'S STORY  
• SOCIAL HOUSING CHANGES LIVES

VINNIES  
RENEWS  
REBUILDS  
RESTORES



## Dear friends

Since our last issue of Impact, the country has been devastated by a bushfire crisis that has claimed lives, destroyed homes and caused immense heartache for thousands of people.

It can be hard to remain optimistic in a time of tragedy, yet the sight of communities coming together, the generosity of all who have donated to the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal, and the efforts of our volunteers on the ground serve as constant reminders of the human ability to persevere through adversity. It will take many months and years for

communities to recover from these unprecedented bushfires, but as you can read on pages 4-5, we will be there to support them on the long road back.

To everyone who has shown their support during this time, I thank you. It is because of people like you that we are able to continue the legacy of compassion started by our founder Frederic Ozanam over 185 years ago.

Jack de Groot  
CEO  
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](http://vinnies.org.au). Correspondence can be sent to [media.nsw@vinnies.org.au](mailto:media.nsw@vinnies.org.au)

Follow us on:



## Highlights of our work last year

WE RECENTLY RELEASED OUR ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19, FULL OF STATISTICS ON OUR IMPACT AND STORIES OF THE PEOPLE WE'VE HELPED.

Here are some of the highlights – all made possible thanks to supporters like you, as well as our amazing volunteers, members and staff.



**OUR MEMBERS  
HELPED MORE THAN  
61,000 PEOPLE**

with food, clothing, household items, emotional support and financial assistance

**OUR STAFF AND  
VOLUNTEERS  
ASSISTED MORE  
THAN 64,000 PEOPLE**



through services including health support, crisis accommodation & community hubs



**WE RECEIVED 95,000  
DROP-BY VISITS**

to our Night Patrol vans, which provide hot meals, blankets and support

**WE INVESTED MORE  
THAN \$242 MILLION**

in social and affordable housing



Read the full report online at  
[www.vinnies.org.au/nswannualreports](http://www.vinnies.org.au/nswannualreports)

## Messages of thanks

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

○ You've managed to help us through the tough times and we are extremely grateful. – John

○ I couldn't have gotten through this year without you. Your kind heart always lifts my spirits. Thanks for always listening. – Maryanne

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

○ I can't thank vinnies enough for their quick response and willingness to assist the Cabbage Tree Island Community. Up to 100 people needed evacuating because of power failure resulting from fire, and vinnies provided support with personal essentials, including food, when they came into town. – Ruth

○ From the bottom of our hearts, thanks for your support. It's unbelievable what you're doing for us. Our community is absolutely shattered, but it gives us strength to know we're not doing it alone. – Dave





# From paradise to a horror movie

**ON A SUNNY WEEKEND, FAMILIES TOW THEIR BOATS DOWN TO LAKE CONJOLA AND SET THEM OUT INTO THE GENTLE WATER. KIDS RUN DOWN TO THE SHORELINE SHOUTING WITH GLEE. THERE ARE PICNIC BLANKETS AND BEACH UMBRELLAS.**

It's a far cry from the scenes of horror that unfolded here on New Years Eve, though you only have to look across the lake to be reminded. There lie rows upon rows of scorched trees, charred trunks leading up to auburn leaves that could almost trick you into thinking it's autumn.

This lake probably saved Ken and Lorraine Bone's lives. By the time any news or emergency warnings came through to the area on 31 December, it was

too late to leave – they had to find shelter as flames rapidly approached.

You hear one thing repeated over and over again on the South Coast: that getting through the bushfires was a community effort. There are so many stories about the kindness of strangers and neighbours, and Ken and Lorraine's story is no different. Their neighbour took them out onto the lake in his boat, along with two other people and a dog. They sat in the middle of the lake for three hours, at times unable to see the shore through the smoke.

"It was just like sitting in a 3D movie, it was just so thick with smoke and explosions," Lorraine said. "You're hearing explosion after explosion, and we knew we had gas bottles at our place, and just



thought, is that our place going up, or is that our car? 'Cause it just went on and on and on for so long."

By the late afternoon, 89 homes in Ken and Lorraine's small town of Conjola Park had been lost. When the couple could finally come home, they found an utterly different town to the one they'd left just a few hours before.

"We just couldn't believe it when we came back," Lorraine said.

"Drove up the street, and just not a house," Ken added.

Yet amongst it all, their house was still standing – although seriously damaged. For Lorraine, whose parents had built the home based on a design by her brother, it was both a miracle and a relief.

Despite still having part of their home, Ken and Lorraine have been unable to return since the disaster; the house is too unstable to safely live in. They are staying in a villa provided by their insurer, where they expect to be for at least half a year.

While the bushfire has shaken them to their core, it has boosted their faith in their community.

Ken has spent the last three years volunteering as a local Vinnies member, devoting his days since

retirement to looking after people in need. Now it's his turn to receive some of that care and support, and Vinnies has given him and Lorraine \$4,000 to help them back on their feet.

"Vinnies as an organisation has really - I mean, they're great. You can't speak highly enough of them," Lorraine said.

The couple are no strangers to tragedy. Almost 20 years ago, soon after they moved to the Shoalhaven, their son passed away in a house fire. They got to know the local Vinnies group shortly after, when our members stepped in to help cater for the funeral and offer their support.

Now, as they reel from the effects of another fire, Lorraine and Ken find themselves reliving that past tragedy. They're not the only ones who say the bushfires have reopened old wounds.

"The trauma we're seeing, there's still people in shock," said Col Billett, Vice President of the Vinnies St Mary Star of the Sea Conference, which is leading our local relief effort.

"There's still people who aren't able to get out because their cars have been destroyed and things like that. Their habitats have been destroyed, their

livelihoods have been destroyed, that piece of their life has been ruined and for some, I don't know if they'll ever recover."

Col has been leading a group of volunteers, both local and travelling from Sydney and beyond, to give support at the Ulladulla Evacuation Centre and Recovery Centre. In the first week the Recovery Centre was up and running, Col's team helped about 25 families per day and distributed almost \$250,000 in urgent relief payments.

"It's going to take a long, long time for a lot of people to ever recover to what they would consider normality," Col said.

Ken and Lorraine agree – for now they're taking it day by day, trying not to get overwhelmed by what lies ahead.

One thing is certain: Vinnies will continue to be there, our volunteers standing by their own communities as they rebuild and recover.

**VINNIES  
REBUILDS**



**VINNIES VOLUNTEERS ARE ON THE GROUND IN HUNDREDS OF COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, HELPING PEOPLE AS THEY DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH OF FIRES.**

We have provided emergency financial assistance; essentials including food, water, clothing and toiletries; crisis accommodation; emotional support; and referrals onto a wide range of other organisations and services. We will also use generous community donations to fund long-term recovery projects, helping to get people, families and communities back on their feet.

For the latest updates about Vinnies' bushfire relief, and how we're using funds generously donated to the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal, visit our website at [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au) and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.



# Lily's stroke of luck

**SINGLE MUM-OF-FIVE LILY GOT THE SURPRISE OF HER LIFE WHEN SHE WAS RECENTLY GIVEN \$10,000 BY NOVA 96.9 FM'S FITZY AND WIPPA SHOW.**

It all started when Fitzzy and Wippa contacted Vinnies' Client Support Officer, Donna Boyd. They were offering a free trip to Sydney's Raging Waters theme park for a family doing it tough, and Donna was quick to recommend Lily's family.

"I wanted Lily to know there is always hope and that things do not remain bad forever," Donna said.

Lily and Donna first met around five years ago, when Lily was pregnant with her youngest child. She says she's dealt with a few different charities, but none of them compare to Vinnies.

"It's like a family, you get to know them and they get to know you," Lily said. "You don't have to hide stuff. They come to the house, and if you call for help you always get help. I know I can count on them."

After Lily left her abusive husband in 2018, Donna helped her and the kids to find a new home. Devastatingly, the stability wasn't to last: the family lost almost everything in a house fire in August of that year. Since then, they have been living in temporary accommodation, getting by with half the belongings they had before, and wearing clothes donated by Vinnies.

"The children had lost so much in the fire - not just material objects, but also their stability and sense of safety. So much had changed for this family," Donna said.

To help relieve the stress, they've had a couple of trips away to our holiday units on the coast - simple apartments where families in crisis, like Lily's, can get some respite. And Donna has been helping Lily with other day-to-day tasks that she finds difficult, like filling out paperwork for the kids' schools and finding money to fix the car when it breaks down.

Now, the money from Fitzzy and Wippa means those little emergencies no longer have to be a big deal. Lily and Donna knew that Nova was offering a special day out to Raging Waters, but didn't find out about the \$10,000 windfall until the show was live on air.

"They said we've got a present for you and I'm thinking OK, maybe just a ticket to go to the shop and get a \$50 gift card or something. After they said \$10,000 I can't remember any more, I forgot everything! I went blank," Lily said.

Lily is putting the bulk of the money into a savings account and diligently keeping it aside for when the family moves into a new rental property. She hopes to buy furniture and replace some of what was lost in the fire.

With the ongoing care of supporters like you, and the surprise windfall from Fitzzy and Wippa, this young family are rising from the ashes.

**Vinnies' Donna Boyd (left) with Lily.**



**VINNIES  
RESTORES**

# “Vinnies has been a lifesaver for me”



**RAY HAS SEEN MORE HARD TIMES THAN MOST. HAVING BATTLED DRUG USE, HOMELESSNESS AND FAMILY TRAGEDY, THE SUPPORT OF VINNIES HAS HELPED DURING HIS TIMES OF NEED.**

Becoming a father to a son by the time he was 20, while also caring for the daughter of his then-partner, a decline in the relationship saw things take a turn for the worse.

“I experimented with drugs from school but it never got really out of hand until I lost custody of my son. After that I spent quite a number of years lounging between people’s houses before ending up on the streets,” Ray said.

During this time he had his first interaction with Vinnies.

“I learnt on the streets that I could get a food parcel and they would point me in the right direction - in many ways Vinnies has been a lifesaver for me.”

Ray managed to get back on his feet, staying clean for 15 years and reconnecting with his son. But when his daughter suicided, he spiralled back into drug use.

“It started with just dabbling, and the next thing I was stuck in a situation where I was getting so sick that I had to use to function. I wasn’t trying to kill myself

but it was the direction I was going,” Ray said.

“I knew my son was disappointed every day, and that felt terrible. Knowing that there were people out there that cared brought me back on the path to recovery.”

With the support of Vinnies, along with his family and “good medical people”, Ray is now getting back on track.

“At Vinnies I can get real stuff which helps on the spot - a packet of cornflakes, tea, coffee, a bus fare, petrol money,” he said.

“If you’re below par income-wise, it really affects your morale. Vinnies representatives will turn up and unconditionally assist in whatever way they can.

“The visits aren’t just about getting vouchers, it’s about moral support where people are checking in and making sure that I’m OK - it’s just like catching up with some friends.”

Ray is optimistic about the next chapter of his life. It’s because of the generosity of donors like you that he can look to the future, which will hopefully include a return to work as a labourer.

“I’m trying to maintain a healthy routine, eating-wise, sleeping-wise. I’m excited to get back into work.”

**VINNIES  
RENEWS**



# Support to find his own way

## **ANDREW IS INTELLIGENT, OPINIONATED AND AMBITIOUS. AND HE WAS ALMOST HOMELESS.**

Thanks to Vinnies and our generous supporters, Andrew has never had to spend a night on the street. He was only 14 years old when his parents kicked him out and he found himself at our Bowral Youth Refuge.

"I love my mum and my dad dearly and they do love me too. The problem is I have a very different personality and way of thinking," Andrew explained.

He was seven or eight years old when he was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism that can involve difficulties in communicating and socialising. Despite his diagnosis, his primary school failed to offer him specialised support, and he slipped from being top of his class to hiding away in a corner, afraid to draw attention to himself.

"With my autism, you know, Asperger's, some things I can do really well, other things I don't cope with very well. It's not so much the work that I found difficult; it's everything surrounding it," Andrew said.

Life was tough at school, and home provided little respite. Initially Andrew's mum did all she could to support her son, even home-schooling him for six months before finding him a place in a smaller school for kids with behavioural needs. Yet as time went on, his living situation deteriorated to the point that his dad drove him to our Bowral Youth Refuge with nothing more than a small bag.

"All of a sudden being thrust into a completely unknown environment was very, very surreal," he said.

But his fears were quickly allayed as our caring staff members took him in.

"I was surprised at how nice and how understanding they were, and it didn't take very long at all for me to start to kind of go along with the routine of the refuge," Andrew said.

He met experienced Vinnies caseworkers like Will Fernandez, who immediately set out on a plan to keep Andrew safe in the short term, and set him up for a better future going forward.

"The initial thing is to keep young people safe and make sure they have a roof over their heads, so when they come to the refuge that's our first priority," Will explained.

"Once we've let them settle in, then we start looking at the ten domains of the case plan: health, education, employment and things like that. If they're in school then we advocate on their behalf and put things in place so they can continue to go to school, or if they want to go to TAFE we look at enrolling them, supporting them through, and also trying to get the funds to pay for that."

Andrew's case plan involved keeping him in school and working to repair his relationship with his family. After a few months at the refuge, things improved between Andrew and his mum and dad, and he was able to move home. Yet sadly it didn't last; the family soon found that they could only live together for a few months at a time before the relationship would sour again. Altogether, Andrew has spent two out of the past five years living at the Bowral Youth Refuge.

About a year ago, we found him a place in a small set of units – a traditional accommodation facility designed to help young people move from crisis accommodation towards a stable home of their own. It's been exactly the 'hand up' that Andrew needed to take hold of his future with both hands.



*"I've needed a lot of assistance, but if I hadn't had the help of Vinnies then I don't know what would have happened."*

"Being at the units I am probably the healthiest and happiest I have been since all the time I remember. I really, really enjoy being independent, and the freedom that entails," he said.

Now 19 years old, Andrew is completing TAFE courses in Year-12-equivalent maths and English, a requirement to fulfil his dream of joining the army. Despite the difficulties with his parents, he's growing closer to his younger siblings, who look up to him as their big brother. If all goes to plan, Andrew will be living in private rental accommodation and working in the army within a year.

"I've needed a lot of assistance, but if I hadn't had the help of Vinnies then I don't know what would have happened. My relationship would be so much worse with my parents now if I hadn't had these guys essentially come in and help us out. And in terms of studying, education and just building up living skills, finding accommodation, all that stuff, these guys have had a massive input and effort," he said.

"They've just helped me so much."

If you haven't already donated to our Autumn Appeal, please make a gift now to support people like Andrew to find safety and a path to independence. Donate using the form on the back of this magazine, call 13 18 12, or visit [vinnies.org.au/autumnappeal](http://vinnies.org.au/autumnappeal)

VINNIES  
RESTORES



affordable housing, in large part thanks to donors like you.

So far residents in Dubbo, Albury, Penrith, Campbelltown and Merrylands have moved into their new homes, while by the end of 2020 sites in Lilyfield, Burraneer, Jordan Springs, Maitland, Katoomba and Cardiff will open their doors.

In addition to providing people with housing, the SAHF model incorporates tailored support to address individual

needs and create a sense of community among residents.

Deborah Madden is one of our social housing tenants. As she can attest to, social housing has the power to change lives.

### DEB'S STORY

Having endured a difficult upbringing, the passing of her husband left Deb Madden at a loss.

"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," she said.

Emotionally devastated and with few people to call upon, Deb faced the added burden of being unable to afford the rent on her apartment.

She became one of a fast-growing number of older women experiencing homelessness – but was saved from the street by Vinnies. We gave her a room at Our Lady of the Way, a refuge for single women over 55. She lived at the refuge until we were able to find her a permanent place to live, in our brand-new social housing site in Penrith.

Eighteen months on, Deb has a newfound sense of self and is thriving in her home thanks to the support

# Changing lives through social housing

**RIGHT NOW THERE ARE MORE THAN 100,000 PEOPLE WAITING FOR SOCIAL HOUSING IN NSW.**

Some have been approved and on the government waiting list for over 10 years - but due to a shortage of properties, they are left in limbo.

At Vinnies, we believe everyone deserves the safety, security and stability that a home brings.

Through our partnership with the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF), we are delivering 500 brand-new, fully equipped properties built by Vinnies and partly funded by the NSW Government, for people who can't afford to rent or buy on the private housing market. Last financial year, we invested a massive \$242 million in social and





provided by Vinnies and our incredible donors. "If it wasn't for Vinnies, I would be on the street," Deb said.

"When I moved in it was like heaven. It's brand new. I've got the scenery, a beautiful balcony – I've got everything that I wished for."

Having experienced the benefits that a stable home has brought to her life, Deb hopes further investment in social housing does likewise for others.

"With a home people can feel good about themselves. They can start looking for jobs, building a relationship with their family, living in the community as a proud person."

**VINNIES  
REBUILDS**

## YOU CAN HELP CHANGE LIVES

Thanks to your support, we were able to give Deb a secure place to live. But we're not stopping with her – we want to see all Australians enjoy their right to a safe, stable home.

We're calling on the NSW Government to invest in more social housing and reduce homelessness. 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](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au).

## A lasting legacy

**LEAVING A GIFT IN YOUR WILL IS A POWERFUL WAY TO GIVE TO THE FUTURE, WITHOUT TAKING AWAY FROM TODAY.**

Aileen Delaney was one person who chose to make this incredible gesture. Born in Brisbane, she had lived in Sydney for more than 50 years when she passed away on 7 January 2018.

She was an accomplished biochemist during her lifetime, as well as a longstanding and generous supporter of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Aileen chose to remember us in her will because of our

extensive services for people in need. She was particularly fond of the work we do to support men facing homelessness at the Matthew Talbot Hostel, but also wished to give to our work supporting women and children.

We thank Aileen and remember her as an impressive woman who made a difference both during and after her lifetime.



## LEAVE A GIFT TO VINNIES

### PLEASE CONTACT

**Cherie McKenna**, Gifts in Wills & 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](mailto:cherie.mckenna@vinnies.org.au)

# Reaching out to youth

## VINNIES OFFERS A RANGE OF SERVICES SUPPORTING KIDS AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO GROW UP SAFE AND ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.

On Sydney's Northern Beaches, our Youth Reach drop-in centre welcomes 11- to 24-year-olds, giving them a free space to access support, activities and opportunities. Over a recent six-month period, we had 335 young people come through the Youth Reach doors.

The centre offers everything from gym equipment to help young people stay fit, to a music studio to harness personal expression, and a fully-equipped café to help them learn barista skills and boost their employability.

Those who drop into Youth Reach have a lot of fun, but they also gain important support to address any mental health, drug or alcohol, education or employment issues they may be facing.

"It's a safe space where young people can socialise and participate in constructive activities," explained Youth Reach Manager, Rhonda Moore. "We help disconnected or disengaged young people back into their families, education and training, and their community."

VINNIES  
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## WITH YOUR HELP WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Supporter No. \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ I would like to make a regular donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month

OR ☐ I would like to increase my regular donation by \$ \_\_\_\_\_

OR ☐ I would like to make a single gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**DONATIONS  
OVER \$2  
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Please debit the amount indicated to my credit card: ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ Diners

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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. ☐

SVA20/MTA20



**To make a regular 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 LAST YEAR...  
THANK YOU.**



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