

SPRING 2021 ISSUE 11

RESTORING HOPE IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

FEATURES VACCINATING THE VULNERABLE • PRICED OUT OF HOME • THE POWER OF A CONVERSATION VINNIES RENEWS REBUILDS RESTORES



Dear friends

This latest lockdown is the toughest test we have faced during the pandemic. Having briefly experienced a return to normal after

the upheaval of the past year, the uncertain circumstances we currently find ourselves in have taken a mighty toll.

Over the past few months people have been displaced from their workplaces, students from schools and unis, and frustrations have simmered over the rollout and take up of the vaccines that were heralded to restore certainty to our lives.

It is however in times of such darkness that the members, volunteers and staff of the St Vincent de Paul Society are steadfast – we are committed to being a light for people in need. The way we offer support has changed to be COVID-safe, but as you will see through these pages, we continue to have an impact.

We, the Society, remain willing and able to help people; our generous donors keep donating their essential support and we keep working with the wider community. As you will see on Page 7, we are working with the City of Sydney and St Vincent's Hospital to vaccinate the most vulnerable in our community.

As always, we are all so grateful for the support of you, our donors. Together we can help the whole community to be more loving, just and grounded in compassion.

Kack de Groot

Jack de Groot CEO St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

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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



Messages of hope

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

 Having a stable place to live just holds everything together: it carries over into everything else
work, social life, family - Axle

Since I reached out for help, I actually found some form of self-worth, Vinnies really helped me get back on track - Tyler

I'm making plans for my life now. I'm ticking off my goals and not just trying to manage my life and get by – Chris C.

Before Vinnies, I was off the tracks - now, not that I'm
100%, but I reckon I'm up around
80%, getting to 90. Nearly back on track - Chris P.

If there's anyone out there who finds themselves in that dark place – you'll know when you see it – contact Vinnies. Ask them for help because it's there – Phill

Vinnies renews, rebuilds, restores

THE IMPACT OF OUR MEMBERS

DURING THE PAST FINANCIAL YEAR, THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NSW SUPPORTED CLOSE TO 35,000 PEOPLE THROUGH OUR NETWORK OF MEMBER BASED CONFERENCES.

Located in hundreds of communities across the state, our members provided assistance with food, clothing, household bills and emotional support to people experiencing hardship.



\$7.4 MILLION PROVIDED IN FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL ASSISTANCE

49% of people sought assistance due to a shortage of food

54% of people experienced housing stress

12,000 people relied upon JobSeeker as their primary source of income

To learn more about our members and other good works, see the complete St Vincent de Paul Society NSW 2020/21 Annual Report which will be available online later this year.



The toughest test was still to come

"I'm so grateful for the help and support Vinnies has provided. They are such nice people to talk with and have always shown me empathy and kindness."

There was a sense of optimism in the air at the start of 2021.

After the upheaval of the previous year, life appeared to be getting back to normal as workers returned to offices, faces could be seen without the cover of masks and loved ones living across state borders could be reunited in person.

The consensus was that the worst had passed.

However, in a cruel turn of events, it soon became apparent that the toughest test of the pandemic was still to come for NSW.

In the final days of June, Greater Sydney, the Blue Mountains, Central Coast and Wollongong were placed into a lockdown that forced non-essential businesses to close and left thousands of workers out of work and without certainty.

In response, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW was there to offer a hand up to people like Angela.

Coming to Australia on a student visa several years ago to give her son a better life, the initial COVID-19 outbreak saw Angela stood down from her casual childcare role and facing financial dire straits.

While the government reacted with support payments to cushion the blow for millions of citizens, the same assistance was not forthcoming for the thousands of foreign workers and students who had come to know Australia as home.

Forced to withdraw from her meagre savings in order to get by from one day to the next, the support Angela desperately needed came from a source that recognised her as someone deserving of human dignity during a time of crisis.

"I almost lost my visa because I didn't have the money to pay my tuition; when I spoke with Vinnies they helped me with my rent, tuition fees and provided me with food vouchers," Angela recalls.

"If it wasn't for Vinnies, my son and I would have been on the streets."

Slowly putting her life back on track during the first half of 2021, Angela was optimistic about the future. Having been unable to make long-term plans due to her limited means during the first wave of COVID-19, a new full-time job at a childcare centre located close to home ensured she was able to spend quality time with her teenaged son.

- Little did she know a more transmissible variant of the virus, known as delta, was spreading throughout Sydney and other parts of the state.
- "When COVID started again and the government declared the lockdown, the number of children going to the centre dropped down."
- "I lost my job, as I was still on my probation period."
- Having been in a sound financial position to pay her bills and groceries prior to the delta outbreak, Angela was suddenly faced with a return to the uncertainty of living one day at a time and ensuring the immediate needs of her son.
- Fortunately, her concerns were allayed by the knowledge that Vinnies would be there once again in her time of need.
- "Vinnies has been a miracle for us I feel very supported and know I can always reach out."
- Gaining support with food vouchers and online counselling, Vinnies helped to negotiate a rental reduction which provided the much-needed certainty of a roof over her head.
- Further financial aid was also offered to cover internet and phone expenses so that her son could keep up with his studies due to the limits of face-toface learning in schools.
- Angela is unsure when the latest lockdown will end or where she will work once businesses reopen.
- In the face of such uncertainty, she takes comfort in the support she and her son have received from Vinnies.
- "I'm so grateful for the help and support Vinnies has provided."
- "They are such nice people to talk with and have always shown me empathy and kindness."
- For the past 140 years the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has been offering a hand up to people in their time of need.
- Angela and her son are some of the many people we have been able to support thanks to your generous donation.
- If you haven't already donated to our Spring Appeal, please make a gift now to support people like Angela in their time of
- need. Donate online at vinnies.org.au/ springappeal, using the form on the back of this magazine or calling 13 18 12.

VINNIES REBUILDS

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"I wouldn't be where I am today without Vinnies"

WHEN ZOIE REFLECTS ON THE ADVICE SHE WISHES SHE COULD HAVE IMPARTED TO HERSELF BEFORE COMING TO FREEMAN HOUSE, SHE OFFERS WORDS THAT ARE OFTEN EASIER SAID THAN LIVED OUT.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help and use your voice. I wanted someone there for me, but I was scared to ask for it."

Seeking assistance from Vinnies following a family tragedy that saw her numb her pain with drugs, the support of staff at Freeman House, a residential rehabilitation service located in Armidale, helped equip Zoie with the skills she needed to confront adversity and regain custody of her children.

"Before I came to Vinnies I was not in a good place and I am glad that they were able to be there for me."

Growing up under difficult circumstances and spending time sleeping rough previously, Zoie was devastated by the news her younger brother had taken his own life at the start of last year.

"I was upset, things were going really, really well – and then my whole life took a backflip."

Dealt a further blow with the onset of coronavirus affecting her ability to seek help in-person to address the grief she was experiencing, the spiral of events led to drug use and, ultimately, homelessness.

"I was trying to deal with my brother – I lost my mind, I lost everything."

"I needed someone to be there for my kids because I needed to go and get help myself."

Unable to turn to family for support and living in her car due to an interstate address that prevented her from accessing accommodation through the NSW Government's Link2Home service, Family and Community Services stepped in to ensure the welfare of her children. "In order to get my kids back, I had to come to a rehab facility and get my mental health sorted."

Spending time in a mental health clinic on the NSW Northern Rivers while regularly contacting various rehabilitation services, a breakthrough occurred when Freeman House - temporarily closed due to COVID-19 - reopened its doors at the end of July.

Sharing her gut-wrenching story during an intake interview, Zoie came to embrace the support of the case workers and the compassion shown by members of the local Vinnies Conference

within the Armidale community.

case workers at

Significantly, the treatments provided helped her to come to terms with the pain that had taken her to dark places previously, along with instilling support mechanisms which could be drawn upon to weather future adversity.

"I learnt about mental stability, drug and alcohol knowledge, to be able to find coping mechanisms for myself – in the future I can use distress tolerance and calming mechanisms.

"After losing my brother I turned straight to drugs because that was all of what I'd ever done in my previous years of dealing with pain, loss and hurt.

"To be able to have learnt tools for the future is really good."

Spending a total of seven months at Freeman House – first in the residential area before moving into an adjacent independent unit – Zoie is embracing her new life in transitional housing and has reconnected with her children.

"Things are really positive in my life; I'm looking forward to a fresh clean start and watching my kids grow up to be happy.

"I'm studying Certificate IV in mental health because of my own experience. I want to give back because I know what it's like and I feel I'd be able to be more understanding towards that than if I was to work in another job."

Zoie is one of many people Vinnies has been able to assist during times of hardship. Services like Freeman House are made possible through government funding but rely upon the generous contributions of donors. You can help people like Zoie to rebuild their lives by supporting Vinnies.

"When I was at my lowest Vinnies was there for me – I wouldn't have my kids in my life, but Vinnies was there for me."



Vaccinating the most vulnerable

THE JOINT PROJECT TO VACCINATE PEOPLE IN AT-RISK GROUPS AGAINST COVID-19 AT THE OZANAM LEARNING CENTRE IN WOOLLOOMOOLOO HAS SEEN MORE THAN 200 DOSES GIVEN ON EACH DAY IT HAS OPERATED.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, St Vincent's Hospital, the Kirketon Road Centre, and the City of Sydney have been pooling their resources to make it happen since May this year.

The result has been a very well attended clinic that feels more like a community gathering and one that has people clamouring for their chance to return for their second doses.

Outside of lockdown, it comes complete with a sausage sizzle, gift bags for people receiving the vaccines, and a bright atmosphere that feels at odds with what you'd usually expect from a serious health service.

Because it very much is that – the expertise of the health professionals, the logistics required to move people through the venue in a COVID-safe manner, and the capacity to deal with outside factors like strong interest from the media are all on display.

During lockdown, it's a bit more subdued but that community spirit shines through.

One of the people grateful to have received their vaccination through the clinic is Chloe Cooper, who volunteered to have her immunisation recorded by the Channel 9 News.

"I am doing it to see my Nan," she said, shortly after receiving her first dose.

"The lockdown's been extended, so it's a shame but it is what it is and I can't see my Nan just yet.

"Although, I have made plans for once the restrictions are lifted."

Despite a fear of needles, when offered the opportunity to be vaccinated against COVID, Chloe took it with only a bit of anxiety.

"I'm petrified of needles but it's honestly the smallest needle and you don't even feel the pinch. "So, it's easy.

"It's something that you work yourself up for but it's for nothing because the needle itself is very, very small.

"You just turn away and it's over and done with within three seconds," she said.



Chloe said she's eager to receive her second dose and she's not just doing it for herself or her family but the whole community and she encourages others to do the same when they have the opportunity.

"I would honestly say, just roll up your sleeve - don't panic.

"It does help the community, it does help your loved ones, overall the good outweighs the bad.

"It's very minimal, it doesn't take long, and – if everyone does their part – then we can get on top of this."

Chloe says that having had the vaccine has given her a bit of peace of mind amidst the pandemic.

"I feel, since the vaccine and everything, I'm feeling more relaxed.

"It's still going to be a bit of a panic because this isolation continues and the lockdown – that's where the panic comes from for myself.

"But other than that, once it's all blown over, and I've been fully vaccinated, I'll be pretty good," she said.



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Priced out of his hometown

BARRY CALLED TEMORA HOME FOR MUCH OF HIS LIFE.

Born and bred in the Riverina town located five hours from Sydney, the Vietnam veteran moved around Australia after fulfilling his national service before returning to settle down on the eve of retirement.

Spending the past 13 years re-establishing roots in the community while living in the private rental market, Barry was handed a rude shock in the wake of his landlord selling the house he had come to know as home.

"I went through all the real estate agents in Temora and there was only one place with two bedrooms for \$270 per week," said Barry.

"I'm on an age pension of \$540 a fortnight which makes that sort of cost out of my league – that was the only place available in the whole town."

Seeking alternative accommodation down the South Coast only to come up against steeper prices – "\$320 for a one-bedroom unit" – a call to Veteran Affairs in his time of need led to a lifeline from Vinnies.

Offered a place to stay at Edel Quinn, a crisis accommodation and case management service predominantly supporting men at risk or experiencing homelessness in the Wagga Wagga region, the shock of being priced out of his own hometown made real the housing crisis faced by thousands of people living on low incomes.

"Accommodation is so scarce; I couldn't believe it."

"If it wasn't for St Vincent de Paul, I wouldn't have a roof over my head or anywhere to sleep.

"The greatest worry when you're renting is 'will I still be here in ten years' time' because, as you get older, slower, and weaker you've got to turn around and pack all the furniture up again.

"There's nothing worse than packing up and moving from one place to the next – it's very depressing and expensive."

Currently working with the case management team at Edel Quinn to find a new place to live, Barry is looking forward to a future where he can plan beyond one day at a time.

"Vinnies have been wonderful – I get three meals a day, my own room, the TV room where I can have a cup of tea – I'm fortunate that such a place like this exists.

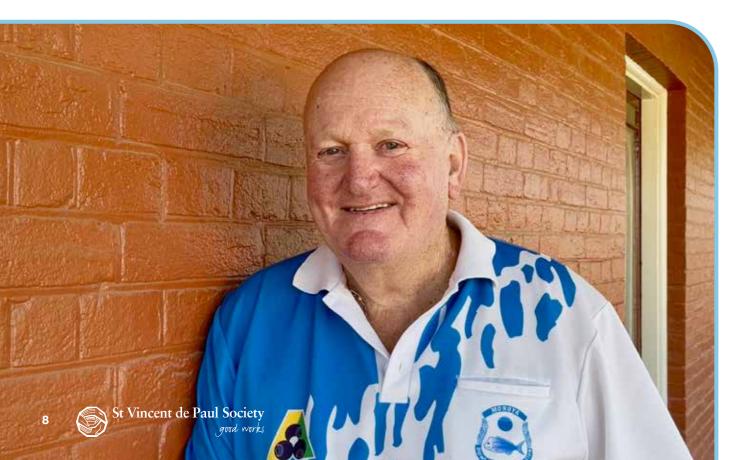
"I've got all my own furniture in storage here in Wagga, hopefully when I get out of here I can get it out and put it in permanent accommodation."

Sadly, Barry's story of being priced out of his hometown is one that is becoming increasingly common.

With rising rents and a shortage of social and affordable housing across the state, services like Edel Quinn are seeing an increase in people left with nowhere else to go.

By supporting Vinnies, you can restore hope to people like Barry and help them find the security of permanent housing.







A chance to make better memories

"BEFORE I CAME TO VINNIES I WAS DESPERATE TO ESCAPE MY HUSBAND – THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, ALCOHOL, GAMBLING, ABUSE – I HAD TO ESCAPE TO KEEP MY CHILDREN SAFE."

For years, Amy presented a brave front to family and friends.

However, away from the eyes of the world, she and her three children were subjected to a life of hell.

"My ex was very verbally abusive towards me, but it was the boys who were going to get the belt or spoon," Amy recalls.

"He would put my eldest son in the corner and hold up his fist.

"He would smoke and drink in the house and didn't care that my kids were drinking alcohol and unable to say no."

Trapped in a volatile environment that included resistance whenever she wanted to see her family, a life-altering choice arose when her mother became aware of the untenable situation.

Faced with an ultimatum to leave or have her children removed through FACS, Amy plotted her escape with assistance of the family that she had



been deprived of for too long. "I took what I could and made out that I was staying at my sister's [place] for a night."

"He said I could stay for the weekend but I had to be back on Tuesday at 5 o'clock.

"When I wasn't back at 5, he called Where are you? Why aren't you back at home?'

"I said, 'I'm not coming back'." Spending two weeks with her mother and sister before moving between a number of refuges, Amy eventually landed at the Marian Centre – a service run by Vinnies for women with children escaping domestic and family violence – where slowly things began to improve.

"It was very hard on the boys at first; they weren't sleeping and it took a few months until they were settling in better."

"The staff genuinely cared and helped me with everything – furniture, food – every support needed was there.

"The kids made friends and got to see that they weren't alone; there were other people – unfortunately – going through the same thing."

After spending several months at the Marian Centre acclimatising to life away from her ex, Amy was able to secure a house of her own and develop a sense of community within her new neighbourhood.

"Now that our house has been set up, I feel more in control and it's starting to feel like home."

"The boys are in a really good school and pre-school which makes a huge difference getting that support.

"There are really no words to describe the support I've been given – a lot of it – people have been amazing and so generous."

Now living life without fear after years of torment, Amy is determined to make a better life for her children.

"We're doing really well now in a routine and getting some normal back into our lives.

"I'm planning with my sister to take the boys to see the snow for the first time.

"It's a chance to make memories - better memories."

Each year more than 24,000 people experience domestic and family violence in NSW. Your

support allows Vinnies to be there for women and children in their time of need through services such as the Marian Centre.



Hello, it's Vinnies calling...

"HI! MY NAME IS MARISSA, I'M **CALLING ON BEHALF OF ST** VINCENT DE PAUL TO CHECK IN, HAVE A CHAT AND SEE IF WE CAN HELP YOU IN ANY WAY. IS NOW AN OK TIME TO TALK?"

This was my fifth and final call for the day and, for the most part, I had been told; "I'm all good, thanks for calling."

As part of the ongoing collaboration between the Sydney Youth and Young Adult Conference and Vinnies' Sydney region, I had been volunteering with the Redfern Centre to engage in welfare checks.

It would be this phone call, however, that would lead me to truly understand the value and good work that Vinnies is able to do.

The lady on the other end of the line had seemed to be holding in her story for a while, waiting for a moment just like this. Her name was Sonya.

Sonya let me know that she was all alone, that one of her sons was in hospital and that her other son wasn't able to check in often because he lived so far away. Sonya told me she was ill. That she had no food in her fridge. That she was too scared to leave the house because of COVID-19.

After speaking with the Regional President, we managed to contact Sonya's son just before he was due for surgery and determined that he would be out of hospital by the end of the week, that hospice care had been organised for Sonya and that her other son was due to visit the following evening.

This all seemed promising, but Sonya would still be alone for the immediate future. Her fridge was still empty. That I could solve: "Hi Sonya, this is Marissa again from Vinnies, I was wondering do you like spaghetti bolognese and can I get you a grocery pack?"

Shortly afterwards I headed off to see Sonya with a bulk load of bolognese and a haul of groceries in tow.



Wearing a mask and gloves, I delivered the packages to Sonya at her door. We both smiled (through our masks) and that was that. Sonya and I spoke a few times after. Her son was recovering well and able to visit more and her hospice care was helpful. Sonya was no longer alone.

One phone call. A few groceries. A home cooked meal. These solutions definitely didn't solve all of Sonya's problems, but they helped.



In Memorium -Mary Philomena Patricia Muus

A LONG-TERM **EXECUTIVE OF** WESTPAC BANK, THE LATE PATRICIA MUUS, like her husband Bill, knew she could

count on the St Vincent

do the best it could to

help people in need. As

de Paul Society NSW to

a result, the couple decided to make provision for Vinnies to be a major beneficiary after they had passed.

Patricia passed away on 4 September 2020 at the age of 84 after suffering illness for some time. Bill had already passed away a few years earlier.

Bill Muus had migrated to Australia from war-torn Europe, delighted at the opportunity to establish a new life in a peaceful country. After they married, the couple spent many happy years together, with highlights including a love for international travel and for ballroom dancing, in which they were highly accomplished.

In the words of close relative John Kelly, the couple's admiration for Vinnies community support came from "their recognition of the great assistance the Society gives the needy."

Both Patricia and Bill Muus were generous donors to the Society for decades and decided to leave a significant legacy after their passing. The Society is immensely grateful for both their generosity and their commitment to helping ensure the durability of our good works.

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

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Helping fire-hit communities recover and rebuild

AMIDST THE PAIN CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IT IS EASY TO FORGET THAT MANY REGIONAL COMMUNITIES ARE STILL **STRUGGLING TO RECOVER FROM THE IMPACT OF THE DEVASTATING BUSHFIRES** THAT HIT EASTERN NSW IN 2019-20.

Vinnies is making major contributions to the recovery effort through two major initiatives, the Bushfire Community Grants Program and the multi-year Bushfire Recovery and Community Development Program (BRCD).

The BRCD, budgeted to outlay \$2.2 million until the end of 2022, has a longer-term focus on rebuilding community cohesion and improving the individual sense of wellbeing of local residents, as well as helping communities to be better prepared for future disasters.

So far, the program has been rolled out in four local government areas and been well received.

"The strength of the Vinnies brand was apparent in the first six months of the program," said program manager John Fenech.

The BRCD program will be working closely with Vinnies Conferences in targeted areas such as Kempsey, Grafton, Nowra, and Ulladulla, with more to come in the future

One of the activities supported by the BRCD is the Willawarrin Women's Group - it's knitting woollen teddy bears for not-for-profit StandBy Inclusion, which visits households affected by the loss of family or community members to suicide.

One member of the 'teddies' program says, "The message is that people in communities who don't know you still care about your loss. Our experience shows that the teddies are as appreciated by adults as by children."

Meanwhile, the Bushfire Community Grants program offers project grants of up to \$30,000 to help restore bushfire-affected communities, and at the time Round 3 closed in May some

46 applications had been submitted by 'grass roots' organisations, totalling \$987.657.



A lifetime of service

BRINGING UP A COMBINED 130 YEARS OF SERVICE WITH THE ST **VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY THIS**

YEAR, three members from the Maitland/ Newcastle Diocese were given a deserved moment in the spotlight as part of the 2021 Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

Like all Vinnies members, Joy Loas, Margaret Wheeler and Barbara Strang regularly go about their Conference work with little fanfare.

However, on the night of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout, the long-serving trio were featured as part of the state-wide livestream, where they shared their experiences

with participating business and community leaders sleeping out in Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong.

Starting out as founding members of the all-female St Therese Conference back in 1971, Joy and Margaret have volunteered as Vinnies members for the past 50 years, while Barbara, the 'newbie' of the team, has put in 30 years of service.

"It's very rewarding because we are an emergency service, and if you can help them in the first place, they are able to have the 'hand up', which is what we're all about."



St Therese's Conference is based in the Newcastle suburb of New Lambton where it continues to hold a close relationship with the neighbouring parish and primary school, which has an enthusiastic Mini Vinnies group. Their community support work includes service at John Hunter Hospital as well as at several women's refuges.

Our members make a difference in communities across the state every day. With your support they will continue being there for people in times of hardship.



WITH YOUR HELP WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

TitleFirst Name	Surname	
Address		
Suburb/Town	State	_Postcode
TelM	Email	
I would like to make a <u>regular</u> donation of \$	per month	DONATIONS
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OR I would like to make a <u>single gift</u> of \$		DEDUCTIBLE
Please debit the amount indicated to my credit card: MasterCard Visa Amex Diners		
Card Number		
Card Holder's Name	Expiry Date	
gnature 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		

Supporter No.



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.

St Vincent de Paul Society acod works

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. SVS21/MTS21

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