

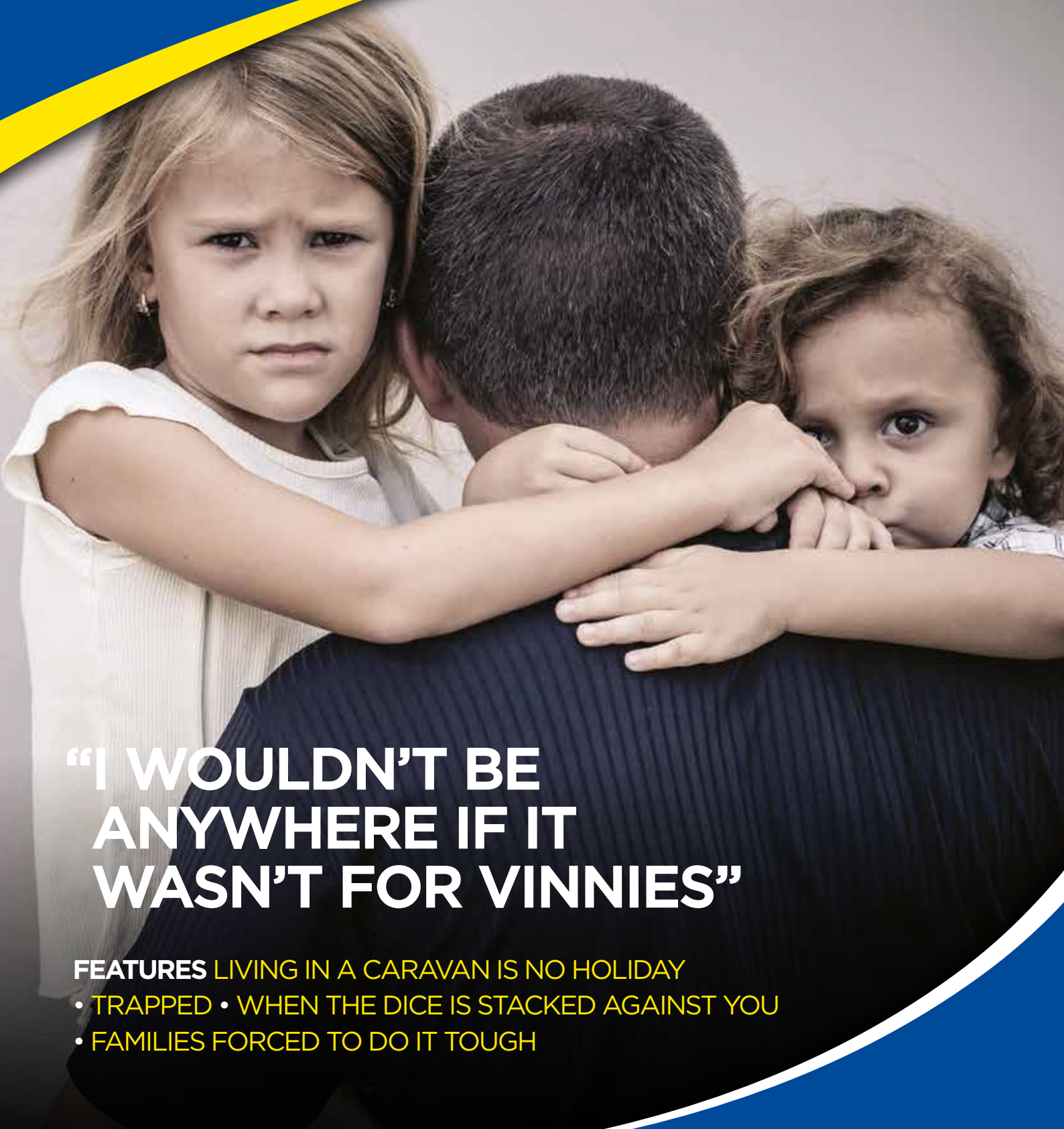


St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

Impact

The difference
you make

AUTUMN 2017
ISSUE 02



**“I WOULDN'T BE
ANYWHERE IF IT
WASN'T FOR VINNIES”**

FEATURES LIVING IN A CARAVAN IS NO HOLIDAY

- TRAPPED • WHEN THE DICE IS STACKED AGAINST YOU
- FAMILIES FORCED TO DO IT TOUGH



Dear friends

Welcome to the Autumn 2017 issue of *Impact*. Yes, after our long, hot summer, autumn is finally approaching. And you may have recently received your energy bill, probably higher than usual for summer, as we kept our fans and air conditioning on into the hot nights of January and February.

These bills will also be hitting the hip pockets of those who can least afford them. Those families would have struggled to stay cool on those long summer nights. The sad reality is that low income earners have the highest energy costs because their homes are poorly insulated, and their fans are the cheapest to buy but are electricity guzzlers. Their energy bills make up to three times more of their wage than high income earners.

Your donations go towards helping us assist them so that they can pay their bills, have a meal and buy their children a pair of school shoes.

One of the recipients of assistance was Louis: he and his family received assistance from Vinnies to pay their energy bills. You can read about him on page 4.

I keep thinking about the story on page 12 of John Hakes OAM from Maitland. He spent many years assisting the residents of a local caravan park.

Coachstop Caravan Park is not a luxury resort on a beach or riverbank, but a place where rent is cheap. One of John's many achievements was ensuring that the children living there had free passes for the local swimming pool so they could cool off in summer.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of *Impact*. Most of the people we assist are aware that we are only able to stretch out our hand of support because of the generosity of you, our donors. Telling you their stories is our way of thanking you and demonstrating the impact you have had on their lives. Every dollar enables our volunteers and staff to ease the burden and rebuild the lives of the men, women and children who seek our help.

Thanks to your support we are able to rebuild the lives of many Australians doing it tough. Your generosity has made sure that basic essentials are available to many families.

Every dollar donated makes a difference.

Thank you

Denis Walsh
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW



Welcome

Our happy memories of Christmas, a time for relaxation with the family, may linger for many of us. But for others, it's a time best forgotten. A time of isolation, few gifts, and little joy. That is why our Christmas

Appeal is so important and why I'd like to thank you for your donations over the festive season. Your generosity has made a difference to the lives of many of the people we assist. Because of you, they had a Christmas sprinkled with joy and hope.

In this copy of *Impact* you'll read many stories about how homelessness affects children. Jacob and Kaylah, Louis, and Verity – all parents battling the odds, trying to maintain a roof over the heads of their children. And in the end, reaching out to Vinnies for a lifeline.

The story we hear repeated every day is how one thing went wrong, then another and then another, driving a person into a spiral of despair. It may be serious illness, uncertain employment, domestic violence or self-medicating to help cope with personal trauma. Negotiating a way out of adverse situations seems daunting especially when children are involved. For many families trying to protect children is a first priority, like Verity, whose story can be read on page 10.

Vinnies assists in different ways. Our 24,607 members

and volunteers across the state visit people in their homes or meet them at our centres. They provide food parcels and vouchers, financial assistance, help with energy bills and other debt, budget counselling, school items for children, and other material items such as furniture, clothing and bedding.

Importantly, they offer emotional support when it's most needed. And they know when to refer people on to our specialist services.

The Matthew Talbot Hostel, Our Lady of the Way in Western Sydney and McCosker House in Port Macquarie are just some of the places of safety we provide for men, women and children escaping their pasts and trying to rebuild their futures.

But Vinnies is a charity and we could not run our centres and Support Services without donations from you and our other generous supporters. Please enjoy this issue of *Impact* and share it with your family and friends because stories of hope are inspirational to us all.

Thank you

Beverley Kerr
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services

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 we can provide basic essentials to many families. Without you, they would have gone without. Every dollar donated makes a difference.

LAST YEAR ALONE YOUR SUPPORT WENT TOWARDS PROVIDING:

Almost
\$20 million
worth of financial
assistance



Assistance to
300,000
people



3.6 million
hours of
visitation



Impact is produced by Fundraising and Communications, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. ABN: 91 161 127 340 Copyright 2017
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.

Follow us on:



Messages of hope

THANKS FOR SENDING US YOUR INSPIRING MESSAGES OF HOPE. YOUR WORDS CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE.

○ All the very best to you. Keep on smiling. There is lots of hope and many good people out there.

○ Do not lose hope and trust. At the end of the night comes dawn and a new day.

○ Sometimes life is like climbing a hill, but when you get to the top the view is wonderful.

○ Your courage and resilience is inspiring. I cannot give much, but I am giving as much as I am able to and I am glad to know that it will help families like yours.

○ Your tenacity and Vinnies support will ensure you a bright, safe future.

Families forced to do it tough when work is unsteady

WORKING TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE AND KEEP A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS IS SOMETHING MOST FATHERS DO, BUT IMAGINE HOW MUCH HARDER IT BECOMES WHEN YOUR PARTNER SUDDENLY DEVELOPS A DEBILITATING DISEASE.

This means they can no longer work and help with the bills, leaving you the sole provider for them and for your children. Now add to that your elderly mother moving into your house, who also needs your care.

This is the reality for Louis, which is why he reached out to Vinnies when he was faced with an electricity bill he simply couldn't pay. Vinnies recognised the need Louis and his family had and was there to extend a helping hand.

Jacqui is Louis' Vinnies caseworker, and has been instrumental in helping him cover basic costs to keep his family happy and together.

"I have long periods of being out of work and I never know when the work is coming. Food and rent have got to be handled, that's the basics. The next biggest things are the electricity and water and hopefully it's not going to get any worse, but Jacqui has been a lifesaver with that," says Louis.

Jacqui knows that when these bills come up, Louis' anxiety increases as he worries about how to pay them. But Vinnies is there to support him and so far we haven't let him down.

On top of keeping things ticking over as best he can for his family, Louis also has his elderly mother living with him. Despite the full house and her care needs, Louis remains positive about his family.

"My mum...she's been with us now for the last 10 years. She's marvellous and loves to be there with the kids. It's great for them to have their Nana there. It's a really full household but they are all happy."

As housing costs in Sydney continue to skyrocket, Louis is very grateful because his landlord has generously given him discounted rent but he knows it can't last.

"Whilst I'm in a very good relationship with the owner I couldn't blame him for turning around and saying 'I've got to sell the place...' that would be huge. I've got no reserves of finance."

Louis' experience is not an isolated case. Unaffordable housing is one of the main contributors to housing stress and subsequent homelessness.

While there are many stories in the media about housing affordability, it is usually about soaring housing prices for buyers and the more basic need for renters to be able to keep a roof over their heads can become lost. For so many people like Louis, being able to buy a house is not even on the cards: they struggle with basics such as food, electricity and increasing rent prices.

Vinnies is there to help people get back on their feet and to also prevent their situations from getting worse. If Vinnies hadn't stepped in to help Louis, he would have faced power cuts and no food on the table for his family. From here on, we frequently see a downward spiral – kids falling behind at school, marriage breakdowns, and people turning to drinking, drugs or gambling as an escape.

Instead, Louis has been able to remain in his home and continue caring for his elderly mother. His family is very close and supportive.

"The kids are really happy and doing so well at school, getting tops of their classes, so I'm a happy man. As far as the help and assistance that we've been given here, it has been really lifesaving."

Vinnies helps keep families like Louis' together. But only thanks to your financial support.

**VINNIES
RENEWS**



When the dice is stacked against you

THE HASTINGS REGION ON NSW'S MID NORTH COAST HAS SEEN THE DEMAND FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES INCREASE BY 26 PER CENT IN THE LAST TWO YEARS.

To help meet this growing need, the St Vincent de Paul Society runs Hastings Accommodation Solutions (HAS) in Port Macquarie for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Last year HAS provided accommodation, support, material aid and advice to 118 individuals and families.

Part of HAS is McCosker House, seven self-contained units which provide short term housing to single parents, single males, couples with or without children and large families.

"Our aim is to help individuals move from homelessness into employment and education. But we are solely funded by the Society: we do not receive any state government funding," says Carla Wilson, McCosker House Team Leader.

"Donations have funded two onsite case workers who support individuals, families and children at the service: one adult and family case worker and one child and adolescent case worker. Case workers assist people overcome barriers that prevent them from gaining housing and can refer them on to appropriate services.

"Our dedicated outreach case worker continues providing support to people for up to two years after they've left McCosker House. Assisting them in building

their capacity to maintain their tenancy and accessing services they may need, or helping them find employment."

HAS maintains links with the community's rough sleepers and provides them with food and swags, blankets and sleeping bags.

"The festive season can be especially challenging for individuals and families experiencing homelessness as there is a heightened sense of loss of family, friends and a home," says Carla.

Carla is grateful to the local Hastings community because it is very supportive of HAS and McCosker House.

"Each year we are amazed at the generous donations we receive from the St Joseph's Regional High School, Centrelink and our local St Agnes Parish. A local daycare centre gives us toys and we receive fresh bread free from a Port Macquarie bakery. But the people we assist need more than food and gifts.

"The dread and desperation confronting children lifts momentarily when they receive a gift or food hamper. But the reality of mounting debts, low paid jobs – or no work – and possibly violence, drug and alcohol addictions and chronic illness may be even more pronounced after the flush of Christmas is over."

Food, including vouchers and hampers, made up nearly 50 per cent of the Society's total spend of over \$2.7 million during the Christmas period in 2015-16. In addition to this, the Society assisted with the distribution of \$920,944 worth of government funded Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers for electricity bills across the state.

The lack of affordable housing is causing an escalation in requests for help which unfortunately are going unmet.

"Every year the number of people needing accommodation that we can't help grows: two years ago we were unable to assist 315 people; that figure has grown to 411 in the last financial year. This is an increase of over 30 per cent," says Carla.

"We are seeing a boom in luxury accommodation and

individuals living in low cost housing like caravan parks and long term motels are being forced out as they close down to make way for new developments. This means families on low incomes are being priced out of the Hastings rental market."

When a low cost property does become available there is a queue of applicants but those on unemployment benefits or single parents frequently get overlooked.

This can force individuals and families to live in a property over their budget, placing them in housing stress.

"At this point, our outreach service is called upon to assist individuals and families with food and material aid to help them meet their living costs. It is crucial to intervene then, before it is too late and they find themselves experiencing homelessness."

HAS relies upon the generosity of the public. Every dollar donated means additional support for those at risk of homelessness in the Hastings region.

VINNIES
RESTORES

Nail polish adds some sparkle

Zarah-Jade was born with several serious medical conditions over a year ago. Since then Jacob and Kaylah and their three daughters have battled increasing rent and medical expenses. Soon after Zarah-Jade's birth they were evicted from their private rental property.

They managed to find temporary accommodation and are now supported by McCosker House.

With the help of case workers, Jacob and Kaylah are looking into more permanent housing, but the struggle of not having references and the 15-year waiting list for public housing means the threat of homelessness is still very real.

"The ladies at McCosker House made sure we settled in. They had gifts for the girls, hampers, new cutlery and crockery, even a little box of nail polish for the girls and I to have some fun with," says Kaylah.

Jacob added: "It's been lovely to see the girls welcomed and made to feel comfortable. That relieves some of my stress."

I wouldn't be anywhere if it wasn't for Vinnies

JEREMY MOVED OVER TO AUSTRALIA FROM NEW ZEALAND LOOKING FOR WORK. AFTER HITTING HARD TIMES HE RESORTED TO DRUGS AND THEN BATTLED SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND HOMELESSNESS. WHEN HE FINALLY DISCOVERED THE MATTHEW TALBOT HOSTEL THINGS TURNED AROUND.

"I spent a few years in rehab, off and on. Got myself straightened up that way but accommodation was the biggest one," explains Jeremy. He spent around 10 years without a home, living in refuges, at friends' places and even on the streets.

"I stayed at a friend's flat for about five years, just sleeping on the couch. We were going to Vinnies to get food vouchers, but we didn't realise there was the accommodation side of it, it wasn't until I came here to the Talbot," says Jeremy.

The Matthew Talbot Hostel provides accommodation and specialised support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These services range from providing nutritious meals, clothing, showers and basic medical to intensive case management, legal and housing support, specialised health care, advocacy and providing a safe, welcoming environment for people who are sleeping rough and have experienced trauma.

When he arrived at the Talbot, Jeremy was given a bed and access to life-changing services. While his case worker helped him access medical treatment and search for more permanent accommodation, Jeremy was able to find his feet again in a safe environment. He joined several classes and workshops to learn new skills and build his confidence. The cooking class and Gambling Anonymous classes were his favourites.

"You have to learn to do things. I did some cooking classes, that was pretty good. I had to sharpen up and get my act together."

Suffering from a mental illness, Jeremy has been unable to keep a job and worries that he will never be in a position to work again.

"I just hear noises and things like that. Sometimes it gives me a fright, things happen and I can't concentrate, they start and I can't think. To do work you need to be

functional and I often am not functional. It's not my choice, it just happens."

Jeremy was lucky that Vinnies found him a private apartment to rent fairly quickly – it took around a year. Many people can be on the waitlist for affordable housing for up to 10 years.

"They furnished it for me and gave me pots and pans, a bed, kitchen table, sofa, TV, coffee table. Basics, but it got me going and I've picked up things ever since and it's a good flat."

Vinnies runs a clinic at the Talbot to help people keep on top of their mental health and other medical issues. Even though he lives in his own place, he regularly visits the clinic.

"I get on well with the clinic. I have chest problems and other things, and they monitor me, at least every two weeks."

Jeremy struggles financially because he is unable to work. Vinnies is still there for him when he needs support.

"I go to Vinnies sometimes just down the road. You go to them and say you are a bit short and they come around with a food voucher."

"I come down to the Talbot for my lunches. Sometimes I come for breakfast, I've got to get out of bed by quarter past six to be here on time. But I don't mind it, if I wake up early I'll go down for a stroll and have breakfast, I like their breakfasts."

Jason his caseworker explained: "We want to keep him in the community and being independent, and helping him out there."

Since finding Vinnies, Jeremy has greatly improved his situation and re-built his confidence.

"I've got a more respectable lifestyle. It's a good lifestyle, I enjoy it. I enjoyed getting my flat together and putting my own little bits and pieces into it, it looks good, I like it."

Jeremy is incredibly grateful to Vinnies and the donors whose financial support makes it possible for services like the Talbot to operate.

"I wouldn't be anywhere near this state of mind or state of place if it wasn't for Vinnies...I'm a different person now."

**VINNIES
RENEWS**



Because of you the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo provided almost 220,000 meals to men experiencing homelessness.

Vinnies helps pick up the pieces

VERITY AND HER FOUR CHILDREN EXPERIENCED YEARS OF TRAUMA FROM FAMILY VIOLENCE. LIKE MANY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS, THE SCARS RUN DEEP.

Verity didn't know where to turn until, while volunteering at the local Vinnies shop, she reached out to Vinnies for assistance.

"These last couple of months, life's looking good. It's looking better and I'm still here! It's great being here," says Verity.

As a young mother in a small, rural town in northern NSW, Verity and her children experienced family violence at the hands of her partner. At the time, she found it very difficult to hide her situation and was reluctant to look for help as she didn't want the whole town to find out about her personal life.

"It was just really hard, with my mental health issues, to even come out and ask for help. And then be an advertisement that I couldn't feed my children and not having anywhere to live."

Her children also felt shame and embarrassment with their situation. "My kids were at the point where they wouldn't go to school because we didn't have any food."

To this day her children still suffer from the devastating impact of domestic violence.

"They all have post-traumatic stress disorder from my ex-partner, from the domestic violence. My 20-year-old calls me every night just to check that his mum's doing okay. Mentally he has had a few issues. My youngest son, he suffers terribly from post-traumatic stress but we're all getting there."

Finally, Verity was able to leave her abusive partner and start a new life. Her situation improved greatly with the help of professional mental health workers. She went on to re-marry and things were looking up until tragedy struck once more – her new husband developed cancer.

"My husband wasn't able to work and then I wasn't working because I had a breakdown."

At this point Verity was volunteering at the local Vinnies shop. It was here that she learnt about the work Vinnies does with those facing disadvantage. But she never imagined that they could help her until her colleague Laura, a close friend whose support and assistance she had come to rely on, suggested that she reach out to Vinnies for support for herself.

"Laura used to work behind the counter and she's gone



up in her position now. We were neighbours many, many years ago and then I volunteered with her at Vinnies... being a small town you get to know each other pretty well.

"Vinnies offered me some help because we were really struggling to feed the kids and pay the bills. They have basically extended their hand since then and kept us going. They have been very generous which I felt a bit uncomfortable with at first because I didn't want to take advantage. But Laura made me feel very comfortable and understood my situation and they just let me know that this is what Vinnies is here for and they were amazing.

"They were able to buy a mattress for my son because he didn't have a mattress. And recently they purchased a fridge for me because ours had died. They very generously were able to do that and it all helps with your mental health as well. I mean what would I do without a fridge? Vinnies makes the recovery just that much easier.

"Every little piece makes a difference and I am glad I am in a better position now mentally so that I can accept the help that's there and not feel embarrassed or ashamed. It all fits together. Every part helps you.

"These people that are donating – I just don't know if they will ever really realise just how much of a difference they make to someone's life."

VINNIES RESTORES



Trapped

ANNA SITS NEXT TO YOUR BED IN THE HOSPITAL. SHE'LL TAKE HOLD OF YOUR HAND, SHE IS PATIENT, AND SHE LISTENS TO YOUR CONCERNS. YOU FEEL SAFE. SHE WILL WALK YOU TO THE DOOR WHEN YOU'RE BETTER, WHEN IT IS TIME TO GO HOME.

Anna is a ward assistant in a Sydney city hospital. When she finishes her shift, she doesn't go to her own home. Anna is homeless.

Anna and her husband moved to Australia from Russia. They'd lived in Australia for years, and felt part of the community. Then the abuse started. Small, at first. But as time passed, the violence worsened. Anna was living in a dangerous relationship. She'd listened to the patients in the hospital tell her about their experiences and it seemed to her they were describing her own world.

Aged 53, Anna could take no more; she fled from her husband and in doing so, left her home behind. She managed to find a vacancy with Our Lady of the Way, a crisis service in the Western suburbs. Vinnies has been trying to move her to a city residence, but each time a vacancy appears, the request is declined. Anna feels worthless, no longer able to help others.

Her role at the hospital is permanent part-time, 20 hours

a week. When offered the chance to cover sick leaves, she jumps at the opportunity. As a single, older woman, she knows she cannot survive in Sydney on her wage of under \$600.

It is a long, costly commute to the city. Anna doesn't mind the time but it is expensive, and she counts every cent. Vinnies assisted her in applying for a concession travel card. But Anna's wage is above the threshold and so her application was denied. She exceeds the eligibility level for Housing NSW assistance by a mere \$15 per week. Anna just can't afford to travel to work. She is trapped, unable to get the housing assistance she so desperately needs, and unable to afford the rent in the private market.

"I am working, I am a good person. I am a victim, but no one wants to help me because I have a job. Should I quit my job so I can get more help?"

Anna feels irrelevant, as though she is just a number, lost in the system. But she is not just another statistic – Anna is a person and she is determined to achieve a better life.

Our Lady of the Way, a Vinnies crisis accommodation service for single women aged over 55 years, is there to help Anna and women like her until they can find permanent accommodation. The service receives no government funding, so we rely on the community to provide the finances to stay open.

VINNIES REBUILDS

Living in a caravan park is no holiday

RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS ARE OFTEN THE POOREST AND MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY.

John Hakes OAM was recognised recently for his work in assisting the residents at Maitland's Coachstop Caravan Park but recent poor health has forced him to cut back his involvement.

"John's contribution in creating an atmosphere of companionship and friendship at the Park over the last 15 years has been outstanding," said Peter Fishlock, Maitland/Newcastle Central Council President.

In 2000 the local Community Health Service initiated a project at the Park to provide support to some 150 disadvantaged residents who were living there in poverty and isolation. John stepped in in 2002 and by offering the Society's support, a flourishing partnership began.

John has been tireless in improving the residents' lives and is highly regarded by all.

He regularly brought in fresh produce and telephone cards so the residents could call home.

He gave the children swimming pool season passes and even arranged holidays for families, for whom a vacation



had been an impossible dream.

He connected the residents with services in town, set up an arrangement with a local pharmacy and obtained a grant so residents had access to free dental care.

"John's ongoing efforts have earned him the friendship, trust and deep gratitude of the residents. In recognition of his contribution, he was awarded Life Membership of the Society and an Order of Australia Medal in 2016," said Peter.

But John doesn't work alone. Thanks go to everyone like you whose generosity makes the good works of Vinnies possible.

**VINNIES
RENEWS**

\$30 can provide three days of groceries for a vulnerable family.

\$50 can provide blankets for a person experiencing homelessness.

\$200 can provide a safe haven for a woman and child escaping domestic and family violence.

\$1,000 prevents a family from being evicted from their home.

WITH YOUR HELP WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Supporter No. _____

Title _____ First Name _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Suburb/Town _____ State _____ Postcode _____

Tel _____ M _____ Email _____

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

OR ☐ I would like to increase my regular donation by \$ _____ per month

OR ☐ I would like to make a single gift of \$ _____ (donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

Please debit the amount indicated to my credit card: ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ Diners

Card Number _____

Card Holder's Name _____ Expiry Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

OR ☐ I would prefer to donate by **Direct Debit**, please send me the Direct Debit Form.

If you wish to pay by **cheque** (marked 'non-negotiable') or **money order**, please make payable to 'St Vincent de Paul Society'

☐ 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 and keeps donor information private. If you do not wish your details to be used for future fundraising activities please tick this box. ☐

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

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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 OVER 300,000 PEOPLE WHO WERE ASSISTED BY VINNIES LAST YEAR...
THANK YOU.**



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works