



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

Impact

The difference
you make

SPRING 2019
ISSUE 07

WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGES IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

FEATURES DROUGHT RELIEF CONTINUES

• THE HOUSE OF HOPE • WWII LETTERS RESURFACE

VINNIES
RENEWS
REBUILDS
RESTORES



Dear friends

As I approach four years since becoming State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, I remain inspired by the life-changing impact our good works make to those in need of a hand up.

In a country as fortunate as ours it can be hard to fathom the disadvantage and poverty that continue to exist.

Stories of families torn between choosing food or keeping the lights on during winter speak to the struggles faced by a growing number of people.

Greater action needs to be taken to address the root causes of these pressures, yet we remain committed to restoring dignity to those in need.

This edition of Impact highlights how your support is changing lives for the better. From school breakfast

programs enabling students to thrive in the classroom (page 12), to farmers being supported in the face of drought (page 4) and men finding their feet through crisis accommodation (page 8).

Each of these cases reveal widespread problems affecting people across the state, however with the support of our donors we are able to give hope to men, women and children dealt a rough hand in life.

Your generosity makes a difference to us, so we can make a difference to those experiencing hardship.

Denis Walsh
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW



Welcome

I was struck by the story of Shelley, who is featured on the cover of this issue of Impact. Her story shows that homelessness can happen to anyone, and it can happen so much more quickly than we think.

In a matter of months, Shelley went from being a happy and stable stay-at-home mum to being forced to flee with her three young kids. Sadly, the trigger for their homelessness was another issue that's on the rise in Australia: mental illness. Shelley's husband had suffered abuse as a child, and the resurgence of his trauma sent him spiralling, destroying their family.

I don't like to think what might have happened to Shelley and her kids, had Vinnies not been there. We've also been there for the other people whose

stories line these pages, and they come from many different walks of life. It goes to show: you never know when you might need Vinnies.

I want to thank you for making all of this possible. Because of you, thousands of people are able to get the support they need without judgement or prejudice. As Shelley said: "[Vinnies has] been the family that I've never had".

Thanks for being part of the Vinnies family.

Beverley Kerr
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services

Turning bottles and cans into helping hands

DID YOU KNOW YOUR USED DRINK BOTTLES CAN BE RECYCLED TO SUPPORT VINNIES?

As part of the Return and Earn scheme, we collect drink containers at our bulk processing sites in Unanderra, South Nowra, Penrith, Cardiff and Wagga, as well as selected Vinnies Shops.

You get a 10 cent refund per container (which you can choose to donate to Vinnies if you wish), we get a handling fee from the government, and the environment benefits from recycling. Everyone wins!

Google "Vinnies return and earn" to find out more.



Thank you for your support

PEOPLE ON NEWSTART ARE EXPECTED TO SURVIVE ON JUST \$40 A DAY - BENEATH THE POVERTY LINE.

Thanks to you, we've been able to advocate for a raise to Newstart payments, as well as providing material assistance to those struggling to get by.

In the last financial year,
**we provided assistance
to more than 20,500
people on Newstart**



Messages of thanks

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

"My wife actually cried. It was the fact that it was so caring and so thoughtful. It's the sense that Vinnies can help with the big issues, but then also on these little issues." - Jared

"I appreciate the food and the help, but I love having someone visit me for a chat. That makes my day." - Ruby

"We've hit the end of the tunnel and we have got light now." - Lauren

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am now in a nice and safe home. Geoff and the other amazing Vinnies volunteers still visit me regularly and support me. It's so nice to know I am not alone and they have got my back." - Margaret

"For myself and my family, having those big ticket items for the year knocked out, that makes a big difference, it's a big help." - Sama

Impact is produced by Fundraising and Communications, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. ABN: 91 161 127 340 Copyright 2019
Because we respect the privacy of the people we assist, some names in this newsletter have been changed 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 communications@vinnies.org.au.

Follow us on:   

Keeping the farming dream alive

NEIL MEDCALF WAS 69 WHEN HE BOUGHT HIS 1,000-ACRE DREAM FARM IN WIRRINYA, 70 KILOMETRES FROM PARKES.

The retired senior police sergeant would have liked to have made the move much sooner, but the global financial crisis delayed the opportunity by the best part of a decade.

"I remember thinking: if I don't get this bloody farm before I'm 70, I'll never get it. That was 2016 and it was a wonderful year, crop-wise, stock-wise. Everything just fell into place," Neil said.

"I thought: how easy is this? I didn't know any better."

In 2017, the drought hit.

"And it just got worse and worse. A lot of the locals are saying this is worse than the Millennium Drought."

For Neil, who is divorced, being on his own is a something of a mixed blessing. While there are definitely times when he could do with an extra pair of hands, the upside is that he only has himself to feed.

"I don't know how a young family would get on," he said.

"The previous owner installed a large rainwater tank, which is plenty for me, but I know they used to run out."

Although he has suffered economically from the drought, Neil says "you've just got to press on and do the best you can".

Neil received drought assistance from Vinnies, thanks to the generous contributions of our donors. Your support helped him to pay off outstanding bills and keep his farm up and running.



"If things are tight, that \$1,000 or \$500 goes a long way," he said.

"I used the money to pay my power bill. And just last Sunday, I had to buy some oats for the sheep. I've destocked to a certain extent but I still have about 300 head."

Even though things are difficult, Neil has no regrets.

"I have always had a dream of owning a piece of land. I have friends who when they retired, decided to travel, but I knew what I wanted to do."

Working in the shearing shed is his favourite job.

"The noise, the smell. In the evening, sometimes, you'll be out in the paddock and it will be starting to get dark, and you will look at the sunset and think: it doesn't get much better than this."

VINNIES
REBUILDS

You're helping people get through the drought

The current drought is shaping up to be the worst on record for much of NSW and there is no drought-breaking rain expected over the coming months.

Over the past year, Vinnies NSW has raised more than \$12 million for drought support from government, businesses, other community organisations, and generous individuals like yourself.

Your support has assisted farmers and regional families with living expenses and the costs of keeping farms up and running. Thanks to you, we've been able to provide assistance including:

- Food and clean water
- Medical support
- Help with energy bills
- School fees
- Car expenses
- Agricultural supplies
- Veterinary care

We've helped more than 3,000 families in the past year.

We are looking to continue our drought relief programs, as 96% of the state is still in drought and we know there are many farmers and families still needing our help.



The Vinnies NSW Drought Appeal continues to raise money to assist farmers facing hardship.
You can help at vinnies.org.au/drought or call 13 18 12.



In the blink of an eye

IT'S NOT HARD FOR SHELLEY TO CHOOSE THE BEST TIME OF HER LIFE.

"I think the greatest years were when my kids were little, and you'd go to playgroup. I used to run the playgroups and I had my house full of people, so I'd be helping all the mums," she said.

Shelley was happily married, a devoted stay-at-home mother and community volunteer. She and her husband had three young kids and were planning for another baby.

"I helped lots of single mums and I remember never thinking I'd be in that situation."

Before long, everything changed.

Shelley's husband had been abused as a child and his trauma resurfaced without warning. He fell into the grip of severe mental illness and became suspicious and aggressive towards his own family.

Shelley fought hard to save their marriage and get her husband the help he needed. But when he turned

violent, she had to take out an apprehended violence order (AVO) to protect herself and the children.

"Within 24 hours he'd cut off my phone, he'd cut off all my bank accounts, because obviously sometimes in a marriage the man is more clued up with finances. So I lost my connection to people and we were then contacted by the real estate to say that he had severed the lease," Shelley said.

"We lost our house, our possessions; it became a very desperate position within a week. I think at that point that's when I was beside myself trying to contact the government and certain people, but no one could help. We were desperate, but every door was closed to us."

In the blink of an eye, Shelley had become a single mum with three toddlers to care for (including one child with disabilities) – without a home, money or belongings.

"Everything had been stripped away. I felt like a complete failure," she said.

She had no one to turn to. Her own family live overseas. That's when she found Vinnies and met our team members Fran and Brian.

"With Vinnies, I wasn't just a number, I was a person," Shelley said. "There's been no judgement, no strings attached... I just feel accepted."

Thanks to your donations, we were able to provide Shelley and her kids with essentials like food, clothing, bedding and school fees. Your contributions meant that when the family's car broke down, we could be there to help get it fixed. Because of you, the kids didn't have to miss out on school camps, and the family could take a much-needed break at Vinnies' holiday units (basic accommodation which we provide for families who couldn't otherwise get respite).

And Shelley says that relying on Fran and Brian for a coffee and a chat has been just as powerful as the material support we provided.

When they first became homeless, Shelley and her children found shelter in a caravan park. After that they lived with another family for a while, sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

Finally they moved into a tiny flat – it was meant to be for just six weeks, but years later, they're still there. Shelley has casual work as a disability support worker, but it's not enough to afford a bigger place. She can't take on more work because her son, who lives with autism and intellectual disability, needs her at home. Her ex-husband has never paid child support.

"I think there's a lot of stigma around homelessness, but what people need to know is that homelessness can happen to anyone," Shelley said.

"Vinnies for me have been, in a weird way, the husband that I've never had. They've been the family that I've never had," she said.

Fran feels just as fondly towards Shelley.

"I think Shelley's the most amazing person you could ever come across," she said. "She's amazed us for seven years now. With all these knocks, she just steps back up again. She'll do anything for her children."

Yet the knocks keep on coming. Shelley was recently diagnosed with cancer and needs to take precious time off work to undergo radiation treatment. But she says cancer isn't as bad as divorce or homelessness.

"There's support for cancer, but there's no support for those other things in the system," she said.

Despite everything, Shelley keeps pushing on.

"No matter your circumstance, everybody has value. You can't predict what's going to happen in life, so I choose to be positive," she said.

Thanks to your support, Vinnies has been there for Shelley through thick and thin. She still needs us, as do many other people like her.

VINNIES
RESTORES

If you haven't yet had a chance to donate to our Spring Appeal, there's still time. Your gift means the world to people like Shelley and her kids.

Please donate by filling out the form on the back of this magazine, visiting vinnies.org.au/springappeal, or calling 13 18 12.



Chris
at John
Purcell
House

The house of hope

SIXTY PER CENT OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN NSW ARE MEN, YET THEY CAN STRUGGLE TO FIND SERVICES.

John Purcell House is the only crisis accommodation service for single men in the Shoalhaven region. The Vinnies service opens its doors to all men over 21. The service prides itself on zero tolerance for violence, and respect is given and expected in return.

John Purcell House has been running since 1984, but a few years ago the building was levelled and rebuilt from scratch, using funds generously contributed by Vinnies donors.

The result is a modern and bright facility that looks just like any other apartment block in Nowra. There are 17 individual rooms. There's a kitchen, a dining room, a computer lab, a laundry and space to mingle outdoors.

In short: it's a space that allows people to live with dignity.

LEO'S STORY

Leo, 29, has been at John Purcell House for two-and-a-half weeks. As recently as seven months ago, he was living at home with his parents, in a relationship, and working as the assistant manager at a supermarket. Then the dominos fell, one by one.

His depression and anxiety were going untreated and starting to interfere with his everyday life. His relationship with his parents broke down and he moved out of home, but couldn't find a rental property due to a combination of low income and bad credit.

Leo and his two dogs moved into a trailer in the bush. He and his girlfriend

had broken up and gotten back together before, but this time they broke up for good. Next came the job: Leo wasn't enjoying it, and when long-standing tension with his manager boiled into an argument, he resigned on the spot. He didn't realise how hard it would be to find another job.

For the next few months, Leo had no income whatsoever. He rationed out his savings, but soon the money ran out.

The breaking point came when Leo's parents showed up at his trailer one day, and in the midst of an argument, he pulled out a gun.

Even though Leo's mum and dad were unharmed and he owned the gun legally, they were terrified that he would hurt himself. They called the police, and soon enough, Leo was in prison. He would stay there for two months before being released on bail.

That's how Leo found his way to John Purcell House. He's now regularly seeing a psychologist, taking his medication, in the process of getting his own house through Amélie Housing (a social housing company run by Vinnies), and has enrolled to study online.

There is still some way to go, but Leo feels the future is bright.

CHRIS' STORY

Chris is on his third stint at John Purcell House. He's only 26 but has the wry outlook of a much older man.

He was kicked out of his dad's place when he was 14 and diagnosed with stage-four cancer at 18 (somewhat miraculously, he's in remission). His mum was never really in the picture, and their relationship is rocky at best.

When Chris was in his early 20s he lived on the Gold Coast and worked in the construction boom. It was the highlight of his life so far. But as he says, all jobs must come to an end, especially in construction. When the contract ended, it wasn't long before he fell back into the habit that has defined his life on-and-off since he was 15: ice.

Chris says that Geminis have two personalities, and his are when he's taking ice versus when he's clean. He says he can't hold down a job while he's on ice, but he can make his way on the street.

And that's exactly where he's been for extended periods of time since his teenage years. Every now and then he manages to quit the drugs and hold down steady employment and housing, but it never seems to last. A few months ago, Chris was stabbed and robbed while living on the streets. That led to his latest attempt to clean up, and he hopes this time it'll stick.

He's living in John Purcell House while waiting to go into a 12-month residential rehab program. He's all too aware that the odds are stacked against him; even if he manages to stay the course of rehab, he's awaiting



sentencing for a slew of driving-related charges and might go to prison. He wants nothing more than to go back up to the Gold Coast and work in construction again, but his good behaviour bond is likely to keep him in NSW.

Yet Chris is cautiously optimistic that when he's broken free of his ice addiction, he can start to piece his life back together.

The staff at John Purcell House will keep in touch with Chris and Leo for at least a year after they move out, as they do with all the people they assist. There may only be 17 residents in the house itself, but the caseworkers provide support to around 60 men through outreach work in the community at any one time.

Over the past two years, only two have fallen short of the goal that Vinnies has for all residents; to find and sustain a safe home in the community.

VINNIES
RENEWS

Chris and John Purcell House will feature in the third season of *Filthy Rich & Homeless*, coming next year to SBS TV.



From Britain to Brookvale: a love story to last the ages

AMAZING THINGS HAPPEN EVERY DAY AT VINNIES. THAT'S SOMETHING EMMELINA PHILLIPS DISCOVERED WHEN SHE TOOK AN INTERNSHIP WITH US AND FOUND HERSELF TRACING A TROVE OF WARTIME LOVE LETTERS. HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED, IN HER OWN WORDS.

In the early 1990s, a vintage-looking box containing almost 1,500 letters arrived at the Vinnies Shop in Brookvale.

No one quite knew what to do with it and so it was placed in storage, where it spent the next 20 years. Only recently, when the box arrived at the Vinnies State Support Office, did staff realise these were no ordinary letters.

Covering the years 1936 to 1946 in England, the letters detailed the courtship of a couple named Peter and Philomena: from Peter joining the Royal Air Force in 1940, to their secret marriage, the outbreak of World War II and the birth of their first child, Angela.

The Vinnies team knew straight away that we had to find any existing family members and reunite them with this incredible history. I began to put the pieces together by taking note of names, dates and places, yet the results still placed me in England. Digging a little deeper, I discovered Peter and Philomena were both buried in the same lot and cemetery in Sydney.

Travelling to their resting place, I saw their names, birth dates, and a message their three children had left for them inscribed on the plaque. The children's names were listed, the eldest being Angela. I then knew this was the same Peter and Philomena from the letters.

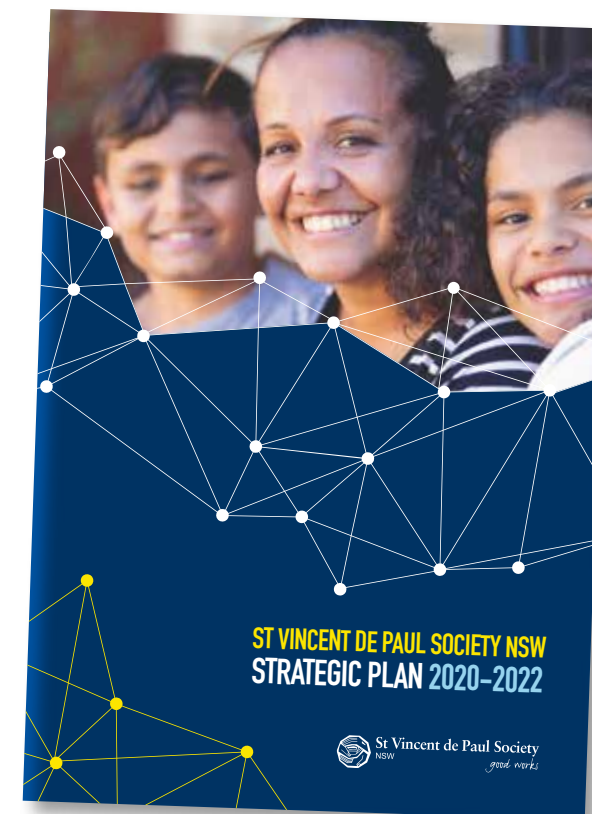
With the assistance of the cemetery manager and funeral provider, I received a call days later from Liz, the second child of Peter and Philomena.

Shortly after, Liz and a group of family members came to the Vinnies office, where they were overwhelmed to see that the letters still existed, having thought them to be lost or destroyed.

As I sat there with the family, I happened to mention something that Peter had written to Philomena. He was speaking of their love for one another, saying they would never get "tired in the least with one another, only falling deeper and deeper in love. Our children shall know that same love and so help to build a more loving and better generation".

It was a belief that became reality: Liz said her parents had been a happy couple and passed their love onto their children and grandchildren, who now have their love letters to keep and treasure.

**VINNIES
RESTORES**



Our vision for the future

VINNIES NSW IS IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2022, WHICH WILL ENABLE US TO CONTINUE PROVIDING EXCELLENT SERVICES TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE.

We have set an ambitious agenda to build 'One Society', a cohesive and unified organisation that does more for the people we serve. The new plan continues our core work in community service and advocacy, while embracing the importance of evidence, evaluation, technology and good governance in delivering these programs.

Over the life of our last Strategic Plan we were able to make a huge impact in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Our new plan aims to continue delivering this life-changing, grass-roots assistance via members and volunteers, along with providing services for homelessness and supported accommodation, community development, disability and health.

We couldn't do any of this without our donors, who are at the heart of the Vinnies mission. Thank you for your support over the last few years, and we look forward to continuing the journey together.

You can view the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 at www.vinnies.org.au/strategicplan

**VINNIES
REBUILDS**

A gift that goes on

"I alone can't change the world. But I can cast a stone across the waters, to create many ripples."

- Mother Teresa

This past financial year, more than 90 people left a gift in their will to Vinnies NSW. We give thanks for their extraordinary generosity and foresight, which has assisted so many individuals and families.

Our prayers and thoughts are with their families and friends, many who we have had the privilege to meet. Each person is fondly remembered in our Book of Gratitude and in prayers at our Annual Mass in December.

Thanks to these compassionate people and their legacies, we are able to support people who are experiencing homelessness; drug and alcohol addiction; financial hardship; women and children fleeing domestic and family violence; people experiencing mental health conditions; and refugees and people in the community rebuilding their lives.



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



No child should have to come to school hungry. Thanks to our donors, we were able to launch breakfast clubs, providing students with an opportunity to socialise before class and perform better in the classroom.

"It's a real investment in the students' future," said Sarah Mason, a social worker with Vinnies' Breaking the Barriers program.

"We're running breakfast programs in various North Coast primary and high schools, and teachers invariably say how a bowl of cereal or a few slices of toast can make all the difference to how students handle the first periods of the day."

Running five days a week in eight locations, breakfast clubs and food pantries supported 770 students with 154,000 meals in 2018.

Breaking the Barriers

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF SCHOOL CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR A LOT OF KIDS - ESPECIALLY WHEN THINGS ARE ROUGH AT HOME.

For those going on an empty stomach, the struggle of remaining focused in the classroom often leads to other problems.

In an effort to improve student concentration and learning outcomes, breakfast clubs sponsored by Vinnies have provided much more than a healthy start to the day.

With five of the 16 most disadvantaged areas in NSW falling in the Northern Rivers and surrounding region, our local Breaking the Barriers program was established in 2016 to provide a 'hand-up' for children by reducing disadvantage and improving social, emotional and educational outcomes.

Some of the additional services we provide as part of the Breaking the Barriers program include:

- Vacation care for primary school students in need of respite during school holidays
- Equine-assisted life coaching, partnering children who have experienced trauma with horses in order to develop emotional and impulse control, trust and self-worth
- Providing school uniforms to students as a means of developing a positive sense of belonging and self-esteem
- After-school programs for Aboriginal kids to strengthen cultural ties, engage with role models in the community and gain assistance with homework

The services offered through Breaking the Barriers are made possible because of generous support from donors like you.

VINNIES
RENEWS

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 \$ _____

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 ☐ 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. ☐

SVs19/MTs19



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



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works