



St Vincent de Paul Society
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Impact

The difference
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AUTUMN 2018
ISSUE 04



FEATURES • OUT WITH THE NIGHT PATROL • FINDING SAFETY
• A DIFFERENT MAN • VINNIES ASYLUM SEEKER PROJECT
• A LEGACY OF LOVE

**“A SENSE OF
COMPANIONSHIP”**

**VINNIES
RENEWS
REBUILDS
RESTORES**



Dear friends

It's an old adage that life is a journey of discovery. It's rarely a path we walk alone, and it's the people we meet along the way who make life what it is.

Every friend is at first a stranger, and you never know who you'll find around the next corner.

Thanks to your gifts, every day and every night Vinnies is able to walk the path together with the people we assist.

The road we walk together is just as important for our volunteers as it is for the people we encounter. Volunteering builds empathy, compassion and friendship. In this edition, we meet the volunteer crew of the Sydney Night Patrol (page 4-5) and Brekky Van (back cover), who set out every week to share nourishment of many kinds. They and their fellow volunteers touch the lives of many, and in turn find

laughter and companionship in unexpected places.

And finally, it's a journey for you, the donors who make it possible for people like Noel and Sinead to do their good works. Doreen (page 10) is just one of the thousands of generous donors who mark out the path that we follow on our journeys together.

A journey of a thousand miles, as they say, begins with a single step. We thank you all for walking with us through these journeys, and for making those first steps possible.

Best wishes,

Denis Walsh
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

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 families receive the basic essentials. Without you, they would have gone without. Every dollar donated makes a difference.

DURING THE LAST YEAR, VINNIES VANS:



WENT OUT TO
PROVIDE MEALS

3,355
TIMES

PROVIDED

85,426
MEALS



WERE SUPPORTED BY

34,752
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

1,422 VOLUNTEERS
HELP RUN THE SERVICES



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Because we respect the privacy of the people we assist, names in this newsletter may have been changed, stories summarised and pictorial models used.
For more information about the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, contact: (02) 9568 0262 or vinnies.org.au.
Correspondence can be sent to publications@vinnies.org.au.

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us on:



Welcome



With a new year comes new hope. Hope for a bed, hope for a home, hope for money to pay the bills. Every day our volunteers and staff come to work because they know they can make a difference to the

lives of everyday people.

These feelings of hope carry us through the year, and you will find many stories echoing this within the pages of *Impact*.

From people like Jason who was helped out of homelessness by Caseworker, Theo (page 8-9), to the heartfelt thanks from Prosper (page 10), and even the re-opening of the men's homelessness service - John Purcell House in Nowra (page 6). On every page, there is a sense of hope.

My own sense of hope and purpose was renewed late last year as I was honoured and humbled to be named New South Wales Volunteer of the Year. It was a complete shock to hear my name called out at the Centre for Volunteering awards ceremony!

Ultimately, this award should go to the many hardworking people helping those experiencing disadvantage across the State. But it has shone an

important spotlight on the work we do here at Vinnies. For example, I was grateful for the opportunity to encourage others to give their time to causes like Vinnies, and also to thank all the amazing people who I work with every day.

I have long been a supporter of the St Vincent de Paul Society. However it wasn't until I retired from working at the Department of Community Services that I could really get stuck in. My seven children, husband, grandchildren and our pet dog have been behind me every step of the way.

Vinnies isn't just a charity; it's a community, a family. It's the strength and joy we experience together for giving people a hand up, not just a hand out. I hope this *Impact* edition will show you just how far the welcoming arms of Vinnies extend, and how we foster and grow that sense of hope.

Thank you

Beverley Kerr
President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services

Messages of Hope

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

Incredible people are usually the ordinary people - and the ones who should really be noticed!

Don't lose hope for a better future.

Hang in there. Bad times don't last forever.

Stay strong and know there are those who care.

Stay strong and with tenacity and the support of Vinnies, things will get better for you all.



just want to have someone listen to them," says Noel, "and you don't have to solve their problems. They are happy to have spoken to someone."

When appropriate the Night Patrol does step in to connect people, who have no-one else to turn to, with hostels and other crisis services. Noel gives the example of people escaping domestic violence, for whom the Night Patrol is sometimes a lifeline. "We have had lots of nights where we have been up until two or three in the morning trying to find somewhere to take a woman and a child."

More often than not, the process of building relationships with people experiencing homelessness takes weeks or even years. However, over the decades, Noel has got to know a lot of people experiencing homelessness in Sydney. Walking the journey with them has given him an understanding of the cycle that leads people into crisis.

"It happens for all types of reasons," he says. "There is mental illness, they may have started as broken up from their family... all of a sudden there's no

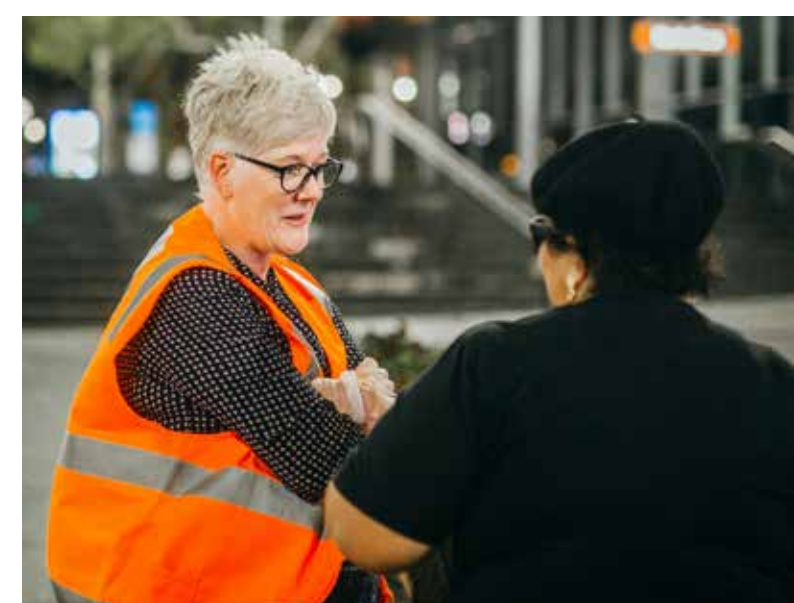
friends to stay with, or their friends have had enough, and they might start staying in hostels and then one night the hostel is full and so it's sort of a slow spiralling situation and they end up on the street."

And once people fall into the cycle, it becomes hard to leave. "My view," says Noel, "is that if you can catch them at that point when they hit the streets, and help get them into services, if you can help them at that point that is the best chance you have of eliminating homelessness to some degree."

"Once they are in that cycle... it becomes a way of life: they lose sight of what's normal - I hate saying that - but they lose sight of that reality and this becomes their reality."

A data analyst by day, Noel's is clear about what motivates him to go out on the patrols. "I guess for me it's about giving something back," says Noel. "Giving something back to people who don't have opportunities like I've had."

It's thanks to the dedication and compassion of volunteers like Noel that the Night Patrol goes out every night and brings a little hope to people's lives. But without the generosity of our donors, it wouldn't exist at all.



With Noel on the Night Patrol

AFTER A THIRTY-YEAR CAREER VOLUNTEERING WITH THE VINNIES NIGHT PATROL, NOEL HAS MORE THAN A FEW STORIES TO TELL.

On the streets of Sydney, he's encountered people from all walks of life but has found common ground with many of them.

"What we bring," explains Noel, "is a sense of companionship and a sense of constancy. The Night Patrol goes out pretty much every night of the year... so the people we know well, might specifically come out and say hello."

Funded by donations to Vinnies, the Sydney Night Patrol delivers hot food and a listening ear at Martin Place, Surry Hills and Haymarket. It's one of five in New South Wales, with other vans operating in Parramatta, Liverpool, Wollongong and Orange.

As well as a meal, the camaraderie the Night Patrol brings to isolated people experiencing homelessness

sometimes has surprising results. Noel remembers 'Steve' who recently passed away. "At his funeral there were hundreds of people that either met him through Night Patrol or met him on the street. We were all exchanging stories about his life, and how he touched people."

On a happier note, there are times when the Night Patrol can bring the fun back to someone's life. Another person who uses the Night Patrol is 'Nina'. "We know when her birthday is, and she is a Bon Jovi fan," Noel explains, "so her last birthday we had Bon Jovi blaring as we drove in!"

The Night Patrol has also set up a regular event at Martin Place where people are seated and served their meals by the volunteers. Though just for an evening, this simple act gives people back the sense of dignity that their circumstances may have taken away.

Noel is convinced that people come to the Night Patrol more for the friendship than the food. "I find that people



John Purcell House re-opens in Nowra

THE JOHN PURCELL HOUSE ISN'T JUST ABOUT PROVIDING A BED TO SLEEP IN. IT BREAKS THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS AND DISADVANTAGE.

Due to a lack of affordable housing and a shrinking job market, Nowra has surprisingly high homelessness levels. In the Shoalhaven area, young people are particularly at risk.

Thankfully, the much-anticipated renovation of the Vinnies John Purcell House in Nowra came just in time for the festive season. The new residents spent a special Christmas together, sharing a meal and receiving a hamper with food, toiletries and other helpful gifts.

A service for men over the age of 21 experiencing homelessness, the new facility offers 17 rooms and wrap-around services for local men who have nowhere else to turn. The official opening of the service took place on 29 January 2018, and was attended by a range of representatives from Vinnies and the local community.

Team Leader at the John Purcell House, David Simister, said: "It has all been smooth sailing and we have a new team who are pumped and excited. The reaction from the men is great and they are happy to be here."

Residents can stay for three months, with case managers working hard to find them government housing or affordable private rentals. However no-one is asked to leave when they have no accommodation to turn to.

The men going through the John Purcell House also receive housing support, case management, living

skills development, meals, referrals, outreach to other services, and ongoing support once they leave and move into independent housing.

One of the most distressing situations many people face when experiencing homelessness is becoming disconnected from the people they care about, or the community they were once a part of.

To combat this isolation, John Purcell House also has a new learning centre with computers they can use to keep in touch with their loved ones as well as to look for accommodation and jobs. It will also provide training classes on budgeting, cooking, and many other practical life skills.

VINNIES RESTORES



Kathryn – finding safety with Vinnies

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN. WHEN HER HOME BECAME VIOLENT AND UNSAFE, KATHRYN AND HER TWO SONS LEFT WITH VIRTUALLY NOTHING.

"We had just fled a domestic violence relationship with my two sons. David who's now 15, and Tristan, 9. This was in 2016.

"When we first arrived [at Vincentian House] we were frightened. We were upset, there was a lot of anxiety happening. We were unsettled, unaware of how long we were going to be able to stay, unaware of what the other residents would be like and the challenges we would face. But we were made to feel quite comfortable. Fully supported. It was wonderful.

"Vincentian House was amazing. We were given a room, you know, we were given so much, a caseworker, they sorted our financial needs. If I was upset I could come down and talk to the [caseworkers] on the front desk. We've been able to make friends in here. We were very well supported."

When speaking about her sons, Kathryn says: "They weren't comfortable at first. I don't think they really wanted to go into a refuge. But over time they became more comfortable. It was shelter, very nice and clean. They said they made friends here."

Vincentian House also runs the KEEP program to help children staying at the refuge and other children experiencing disadvantage engage with their education. It takes a holistic approach, helping children feel safe and develop friendships, as well as work on their homework.

Kathryn's sons greatly benefitted from after-school activities at Vincentian House. "They take them to laser tag, and they take them bowling, and they take them all over. I can't necessarily afford to do these things... it gives me a little break and it's also something for them to do during the school holidays. Something that they look forward to. They go back to school and tell their friends all about it."

Like many Vinnies services, Vincentian House is more than just a refuge. It offers round-the-clock support for families left stranded after fleeing violent homes. It is also one of the few refuges to accept older sons and single dads affected by homelessness or family violence, ensuring no family has to be split up.

"You couldn't ask for a better support service," says Kathryn. "I mean, they really are there for you. All you have to do is ask and they're there. There isn't a need that they can't help you with, or that you won't feel fully supported in. I think they're unreal."

VINNIES RENEWS



A portrait of a young man with dark, spiky hair, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a dark t-shirt. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

Jason's Story

HAVING ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA AT AN EARLY AGE, JASON HAD HIGH HOPES FOR THE FUTURE. HE ATTENDED A GOOD SCHOOL, AND BEGAN TO STUDY ENGINEERING AT UNIVERSITY. BUT THEN HE HIT A SNAG.

What had begun as a casual pokie habit soon became an addiction. Before he knew it, Jason was gambling every night and his money ran out fast. Alone and cut off from his family with 50 cents in his pocket and his rent in arrears, one day he had no choice but to face life on the street.

Soon Jason's life revolved around searching for work and finding somewhere, anywhere, warm. He entered a cycle of sleeping out in a park or a churchyard, then riding the trains until malls and food-courts opened, and then onto the pubs where he could get free coffee, sometimes all he could get for sustenance. But when the pubs closed, it was back to the park and the cycle began again. Pounding the streets for days at a time, his feet became infected; and without access to clean clothes and a washroom his personal hygiene began to suffer.

Jason describes the vicious circle he found himself in: "How are you going to pass an interview, how are you going to find a job? I didn't have a mobile phone, I didn't even have money to buy a paper for the job advertisements. You feel like there's no way out. You don't have money, you can't have a shower, you can't tidy yourself up, you can't look for a job... No job, no money, no home, and there you go again."

Though other hostels did take him for a limited period, Jason had to go back on the street when his time was up. Despite having an Australian passport, he couldn't get help at Centrelink either: besides, he had left behind all of his identification documents and couldn't get through the convoluted system by himself.

By the time he was referred to Vinnies' Matthew Talbot Hostel, Jason was having suicidal thoughts. At his lowest ebb, Jason remembers, he took what was his birthday dinner from a bin outside Woollies.

"He was very skinny, depressed, he didn't want to talk," says Theo, Jason's Caseworker at Vinnies.

"He was ashamed, he was upset because he couldn't be an engineer and he couldn't talk to his family." Losing his grandmother who had remained abroad also hit Jason badly.

But Theo had a plan. Once Jason had been at the Matthew Talbot for some weeks, the next step was organising more permanent accommodation and furniture. "The first thing I did in the new apartment was cook myself a noodle soup," explains Jason. "Yeah, it was a long time since I'd had noodle soup. I cooked enough for two people, but I ate it all myself!" Theo also contacted the mental health team to help Jason talk through his experience of sleeping rough.

Jason was also deep in debt. He had been spending large amounts on the pokies two or three times a week, and had dipped into a business loan his father had taken out. His father had helped him out at first, but eventually his patience wore thin and they became estranged. Jason had taken out another loan of his own and the bank was chasing him.

Theo arranged a financial manager to figure out how to pay off the five-figure sum Jason had borrowed, and also helped him negotiate Centrelink and find work. Now Jason is earning money again and able to begin paying off the bank, as well as look after himself.

"I couldn't even imagine that I would come back from the street," concludes Jason, "I have a full-time job... and from packing shelves I am now Duty Manager."

Jason has come this far, not just with Vinnies support with finances and accommodation but through the inner spirit Theo has helped nurture. A normal life is no longer a dream but a reality and Jason is beginning to enjoy the little things again, such as fishing and walking with Theo in Centennial Park.

"Now I am feeling quite happy..." he says. "I am pretty much back to normal. I'm still trying to do my best, to finish my dream, you know?"

"Believe me, he is a different man," says Theo. "If you don't do anything for yourself, you can't do anything for anyone else. The most important person in your life is you."

**VINNIES
RESTORES**

"Before... when I was okay... I used to give a few coins to homeless people. I never realised that one day, I would be that guy. I really didn't realise that."



Prosper's story

PROSPER FLED HIS HOME IN THE AFRICAN NATION OF BURUNDI. "IN MY COUNTRY THERE WAS UNREST AND MY LIFE WAS IN DANGER," HE EXPLAINS.

The Vinnies Asylum Seeker Program helped Prosper to understand and apply for his refugee visa, and once it was approved, was able to help reunite the whole family.

His wife was pregnant when Prosper was forced to leave Burundi, and it would be four years before he finally met his son at Sydney International Airport. Tears still come to Prosper's eyes when he recounts the moment. Despite his worries that his son would not know who he was, he instead ran to him and threw his arms around him yelling out "Dad!".

Prosper had struggled to keep in touch with his family while he was in Sydney, and constantly worried about their safety. But Vinnies was there to offer emotional support as well as necessities for living.

"Life had no sense for me," said Prosper. "Vinnies provided me with clothing. Then they provided me with accommodation. Vinnies have been helping me and my family from the starting point. Even now they are still helping me. I can say that without them our family would not be the same.

"We are lucky to call Australia home. Even if we are struggling with everyday life, we have peace and there is hope. And I can say, with Vinnies support, we will get there."

**VINNIES
REBUILDS**

ABOUT THE ASYLUM SEEKER PROGRAM

Vinnies has a long history of helping refugees and people seeking asylum.

During and after the Vietnam War, many people fleeing their homeland were welcomed by the open arms of members and volunteers across Australia, who provided blankets, clothing, food, accommodation, English lessons and friendship. To this day, Vinnies maintains a wonderful relationship with the Australian Vietnamese community.

Fast forward to 2018, and record numbers of people are displaced worldwide by conflict and persecution. In Australia, people seeking asylum often face an agonising wait to be recognised as legitimate refugees. During this process, the majority are not allowed to work or receive government assistance such as housing and medical costs. If they do receive any payments, they are approximately 89% of the already low Newstart Allowance. As a result, many of these people are homeless and cannot afford medicines they need.

Vinnies has always advocated for the rights and welfare of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities. To help those left in limbo while they wait to hear about their visa status, Vinnies NSW began the Asylum Seeker Program.

For more information on the Asylum Seeker Program, visit: vinnies.org.au/ASP

Doreen - leaving a legacy of love

THE EXPRESSION 'AGE IS JUST A NUMBER' HAS NEVER BEEN TRUER THAN FOR VINNIES SUPPORTER DOREEN. WITH A LONG HISTORY OF HELPING OTHERS, AT 86 SHE CONTINUES TO GIVE TO THOSE LESS FORTUNATE.

"As I say to people sometimes, I'm very blessed because I've got a roof over my head, food in my stomach, and in the mountains a warm bed to get into at night."

Doreen and her husband were both involved with Vinnies for several decades. Doreen worked in Vinnies Shops for more than 30 years, and through Vinnies the two of them would also do home visits.

Home visits are still carried out today by our volunteers and members, and offer comfort and support to people struggling to make ends meet. They were also a way for Doreen and her husband to meet people and see what else could be done to improve their situation.

"They'd come into the shop and say 'oh I need some food or I need this, that and the other', and then they would be referred to a Conference member who would visit them in their house. And that was very good because some of them would say that they needed a bit of food, and you'd get to the house and you'd find they had no furniture in it, they were sleeping on a mattress on the floor and that sort of thing, and you'd open the fridge and there'd be nothing there. You'd get an insight into what was really going on."

Doreen has not only spent her life helping others, she is now looking to make a difference after she has gone.

She explains why she is including Vinnies in her Will. "I get the magazine from Vinnies as a donor, and I see what they do at the Matthew Talbot Hostel and the people there, and the women who've been sleeping in cars and all that sort of thing, and I think oh, gosh, you know, if I can help in some way."



Leaving a gift in your Will to Vinnies is a meaningful way to impact the work that we do, from providing food and accommodation, to employing caring caseworkers supporting people along their journey out of homelessness or disadvantage. Doreen's legacy of love will be a gift that helps continue her work well into the future.

**VINNIES
RENEWS**

LEAVE A GIFT TO VINNIES PLEASE CONTACT

Cherie McKenna, Bequests 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

A person seeking asylum is someone who is seeking protection, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.



A refugee is someone who has been recognised as such under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

Brekky Van

SINEAD MOVED TO AUSTRALIA EIGHT YEARS AGO AND BEGAN WORKING AS A FAMILY EDUCATOR, HELPING THE FAMILIES OF AN ASHFIELD CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL TO CONNECT WITH THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL AND THE PARISH.

Just like Sinead's work as a 'connector' with the school, the Vinnies Food Vans also help to link families with services and activities and to improve their wellbeing. They provide those living rough, in supported accommodation, or in social or financial hardship with a sense of community and companionship, compassion, genuine care, and support.

A counterpart to the Night Patrol, the Vinnies Brekky Van offers a cooked breakfast, cereal and hot drinks each Sunday morning. Through her engagement with the Brekky Van, Sinead thought: "This is a fantastic outreach opportunity - I can connect everybody across the community, parents, students, Parishioners, both mobile and housebound, we can all get on board as a community."

Sinead put her hand up to volunteer and received her training and induction. Before long she was helping give companionship as well as food to those experiencing disadvantage. Straight away she saw the direct impact that she was having.

"You're out there and you're having a chat, it's normalising, and that's what is so brilliant about the Brekky Van service. I was blown away when I did the first one, it was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so Australian'.



Barbecues are so Australian, and here we are in the park having a barbie and having a laugh together chatting and sharing stories."

As Sinead got more involved with the Brekky Van, she was able to encourage others within her community to also get involved.

"Everybody in the whole community over the years has become involved. Parents and children make sandwiches, the parishioners collect and donate food items, students organise snack collections and create toiletries packs." These supplies are often loaded up in the truck, if Sinead can bring it to the school.

Over all it's not just the people Vinnies assist who benefit from our services, but also the volunteers themselves - volunteers like Sinead.

"For me serving on the Vinnies Van Services gives me an enormous feeling of gratitude. I am grateful for my own life, everything that I have, everything I've received and the people in my life, including those I serve regularly on the streets of Sydney."

**VINNIES
RESTORES**

WITH YOUR HELP WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Suburb/Town _____ State _____ Postcode _____

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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 \$ _____ 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

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

SVA18/MTA18



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

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PO Box 19
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(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
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