



Vinnies Shops



Celebrating
100 years

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF HOPE

Vinnies Shops have been raising money for our members and services since 1922.



Vinnies

1922 - 2022
100 VINNIES SHOPS
years strong

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge
Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples,
as the Traditional
Custodians of this land,
with deep respect.
May Elders, past and
present, be blessed and
honoured. May we join
together and build a future
based on compassion,
justice, hope, faith and
reconciliation.

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Vinnies



years strong

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Message from the CEO

It is a privilege to be CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW on such an auspicious occasion as the 100th anniversary that Vinnies Shops have been active in the state.

While I have been with the Society for several years, that number pales into comparison to the longevity of Vinnies Shops.

In that much shorter period of time, I have seen the value Vinnies Shops bring to the organisation, not just in their role as one of our most important fundraising sources, but also as a point of access to assistance from our members and services. They are also a practical way to support hundreds of communities throughout the state to recycle their clothes and other household items.

100 years ago, the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW was a group of like-minded people who wanted to help make a more just and compassionate world.

Today, we are one of the largest and one of the most recognisable charities in the country.

We operate accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, and other forms of disadvantage; we provide food, clothing, and other everyday essentials to people in need; and we provide social housing with wraparound support to help people achieve long-term independence.

We do all this and more and a big part of the reason why we can is the support people like you show us when you buy at a Vinnies Shop.

What follows is a celebration of how we got from where we were 100 years ago to today and everyone who has bought at a Vinnies Shop over that century has been a part of that story.

**Jack de Groot, Chief Executive Officer
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW**



Message from the President

Vinnies Shops are one of the most recognisable aspects of the good works of the Society in Australia.

Because many people in Australia are fortunate enough not to need help from the Society, much of the work of our members goes unseen.

Vinnies Shops both connect people to our members and enable our members to go out into hundreds of communities throughout the state and offer help to people who need it.

The money they raise ensures we can continually supply people with the food, clothing, and everyday essentials they need to live a dignified life.

In saying that, I think it can tend to obscure just how important that kind of assistance can be.

More than half of people coming to the Society for help experience housing stress.

One of the most important lessons we as a Society have learned about helping someone at risk of homelessness is how important it can be to ensure they can stay in their home.

If our act of supplying someone with food allows that person to spend their money on rent or a mortgage, we have helped keep homelessness at bay.

Once someone falls into homelessness, life becomes exponentially more difficult for them.

When you buy at a Vinnies Shop, you are directly funding help for people in your community, wherever you are in NSW.

Our members are active throughout the state, in large cities and regional and rural areas.

So, thank you for shopping with us and helping our members provide that vital assistance to people near you.

**Paul Burton, State President
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW**

Reflection



THE STORES ORGANISATION

Aims and Objectives

To further the work of visitation of the poor in their own homes by providing depots for the receipt of clothes and furniture required to alleviate their distress. Such depots or shops to also provide families on lower incomes with good quality clothes at low prices. To give further opportunity to the members of the Society to bear witness to Christ by taking an active part in the quarterly drives, a feature of most parishes today.

The Birth of a dream...

NEWTOWN, 1922
The first store was established in a disused stable at Newtown in 1922. From that humble beginning grew the Stores Organisation as we know it today. Many seemingly insurmountable difficulties were encountered and overcome by the first Stores Brothers, to whom the Society owes an immense debt of gratitude.



CROWS NEST, 1969

One of our more modern stores servicing the lower North Shore area to Lindfield. The upper North Shore extending through to Brooklyn is covered by Hornsby store. These two stores between them collect some 170,000 lbs. of clothing annually for distribution to the poor.



...and the Growth

1947: 6 stores only in Sydney area.
1955: First country store opened (Mudgee).
1955-69: Further 64 country and 28 city stores opened.
1969: A total of 99 stores now operating.

METHOD OF OPERATION

COLLECTION
Clothing is collected in most parishes on a quarterly basis by a group of volunteer workers calling on donors who, in their charity, give regularly. The clothing is left at a central pick-up point, from whence it is conveyed to the nearest store.

DISTRIBUTION
The best of all goods donated in each drive are sorted at the store and placed in a case room. They are distributed free of any cost to needy families who after visits by conference members have been given clothing orders in accordance with their needs.

A CENTURY OF HOPE AND LIFE

by Leo Tucker, Executive Director Mission and Spirituality, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

The Psalmist reminds us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain."

On the evening of 24 July 1881, over 140 years ago, in the crypt area of St Patrick's Church in Grosvenor Street, The Rocks in Sydney, the first Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW gathered in prayer and found its home. This meeting, with the support spiritually and physically of the Marist Fathers, was the final coming together of much work in raising awareness of the importance of the Society's charitable works, especially in the slums of the dock areas of The Rocks by Charles Gordon O'Neill.

I guess Charles knew well this verse from the Book of Psalms for without the foundation in faith, in vain would be their labours.

O'Neill tirelessly built the Society during the 1880s,



THANK YOU
to all our dedicated
members, volunteers
and staff

applying the experience he had gained in Glasgow and New Zealand. During the space of a couple of years, he established additional Society conferences in Sydney: those of St Francis's Haymarket, St Mary's Cathedral, St Benedict's Broadway, St Thomas' Lewisham, even to as far as Braidwood.

Such early growth of the Society outside of the initial establishment at St Patrick's and the continued communications between O'Neill and the International Council was possibly the reason the Society remained strong in NSW.

In addition to mainstream assistance such as food, clothing, travel and medicines, he gained approval from the International Council to provide money for rent for Sydney's struggling families. Providing rent assistance was unique and particular to Sydney.

'The humble Vinnies Shops offer a beacon of hope to many and are an important fabric in the story of our state and nation.'

In 1889, St Patrick's Conference in the Rocks instituted a risky new project. This was the St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank that was established primarily for encouraging habits of saving and economy in children, particularly in The Rocks and other inner Sydney suburbs. It was used by Catholic and non-Catholic depositors alike (the Society embraced inclusivity from its origins); parents also could be depositors. No limit was placed on the amount deposited. This crude banking system saved many struggling families through crushing economic depression years.

By the 1920s, some twenty years after the death of O'Neill (although faithful to his entrepreneurial flair) the established St Vincent de Paul Society needed to find ways of reaching those in need, to sustain the mission financially, and to be a visible presence of faith-based charity in the local communities. To this, our places of charity were instituted.

The first place of charity, later known in the Australian vernacular as Vinnies, opened doors in the inner Sydney suburb of Newtown in 1922, selling and providing assistance in all sorts of ventures, including horse manure, which makes good fuel for heating.

This important move towards retail was a decision not taken lightly, as it would have been a decision discerned "after reflection in the light of the Gospel and our Vincentian principles."

In the 1920s, Newtown's main road, King Street, was one of the first suburban shopping destinations outside the Sydney CBD. The suburb has since developed into a diverse and unique community and Vinnies is a large part of that vibrant story and culture.

There is more to our Vinnies story than pre-loved clothes. It is a journey of charity and visitation, our shops and conferences are places where our Vincentian spirit is lived out in the marketplace of local communities. Since their inception and now with more than 220 stores across NSW, which support a substantial portion of the finances needed to sustain our mission, the humble Vinnies Shops offer and share a beacon of hope to many and are an important fabric in the story of our state and nation.

A century of hope expressed in welcome, hospitality, trusted brand, and charity is a remarkable achievement.

As we celebrate this milestone in the Society's history, may we continue to pay respect to the many dedicated members, volunteers, and staff who are the actual lifeblood of innovation, openness, compassionate care, and respect. May the spirit of Charles O'Neill endure to fill our good works and encourage us for the coming century!

Foundations of the society - our journey of compassion



1881

First Vinnies
Conference
founded

He was born nearly 450 years ago, leaving Europe, just once, when a ship he was travelling in was captured and taken to North Africa where he was sold into slavery. Sustained by his Catholic faith, Vincent, as he was humbly known, escaped after two years, making it back to France to continue what was already an extraordinary life. This would include establishing hospitals for the poor, helping reform the clergy and co-founding the Daughters of Charity with St Louise de Marillac.

Not surprisingly, St Vincent de Paul would become a patron of prisoners as well as being a name carried by one of the best-known charities in the world.

In every city and in hundreds of towns across Australia, Vinnies Shops signage is carried prominently on the front of many hundreds of stores offering bargain clothing and household items. The St Vincent de Paul Society also sits behind charitable works large and

small, from services feeding and accommodating people seeking help through to conference members conducting home visits and face-to-face meetings with families and individuals in need. Many of these activities are run almost entirely by volunteers whose satisfaction is knowing how much the work of the Society benefits people in need.

In the same way that the faith and actions of St Vincent de Paul continue to inspire us today, his example found a place in the heart of a French university student named Frederic Ozanam (1813-53) who was deeply affected by the impact of the cholera epidemic on residents of Paris' poorer districts.



St Vincent de Paul

His group of students adopted the name The Society of St Vincent de Paul, seeking the advice of Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, who was visiting families in one of the poorer districts.



Within a year, the group's membership had expanded to 100 and the conference was divided into three, with more conferences starting in parishes around Paris. In its first decade, the Society spread to 48 other cities in France and Italy, later reaching Rome, England, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, the USA, and, on 5 March 1854, Australia.

London born Fr Gerald Ward had arrived here four years earlier, familiar with the workings of the Society. He initiated its establishment at St Francis' Church in Melbourne, after witnessing the plight of people following the discovery of gold in Victoria. Fr Ward became the first president of the St Francis Conference and began to address such problems as the increased number of people experiencing homelessness and deserted children.

The arrival of Charles Gordon O'Neill helped reinvigorate interest in the Society in Australia. An engineer who had led the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Western Districts of Scotland between 1859 and 1863. Moving to New Zealand, he became a leading engineer and parliamentarian, and helped found the Society's first conference there in 1876.

After several visits to Australia, O'Neill assisted in establishing the Society in NSW, encouraging Catholic support. The first conference was founded in 1881 and ten years later the state had 20 active conferences, with over 300 members undertaking almost 11,000 visits to people in need annually.

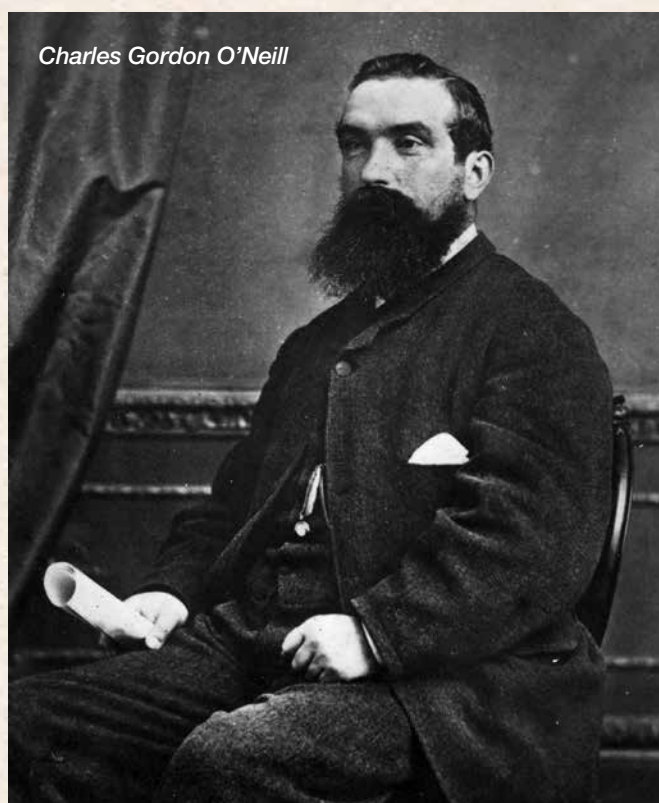
The end of his life was dogged by destitution and today he is seen as both a heroic and tragic figure, dying in 1900 at the age of 72. In accordance with his wishes, the remains of Charles O'Neill were moved in 1961 to the Society's burial plot for the destitute in company of those he served so well.

Ever since those early days, the Society's conference members and other volunteers have been dedicated to offering assistance to people experiencing hardship and struggling to meet the daily needs of themselves and their children.

Finding ways of providing this support marks the start of the second phase of this remarkable story. Even more remarkable was the discovery that collecting and selling what many people no longer want can help to fund what some people desperately need.



"His group of students adopted the name The Society of St Vincent de Paul, seeking the advice of Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, who was visiting families in one of the poorer districts."



A card and a cart – a century of retail begins

'On receipt of a postcard, or a phone call, the manager will at once arrange for the cart to call at any address given, so that the benefactors are not put to any trouble whatever.'

– St Vincent de Paul Society
message to donors of unwanted items,
Freeman's Journal, Sydney, 11 Sept 1924,

The working bee on the site of St Vincent de Paul Society's 'Waste Collection Depot' in Newtown, Sydney. Dated to 4 April 1922, it marked the start of a century of Vinnies retail activities in NSW. The names of only two of the Vincentians are known, W.J. Coogan and D. Mulquinney. The photograph was donated to the Society's archives by Jack Langrell.



1922
First Vinnies
commercial operation
established

In early April 1922, a group of ten shirt-sleeved men, two smoking pipes, all holding tools – a saw, spades, a hammer, trowel and a sieve for refining soil – posed for a photograph that is now treasured in the history of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW.

Unfortunately, only two of their names are known – W.J. Coogan and D. Mulquinney.

The purpose of their gathering, in an earthen-floored, former blacksmith's shed in a paddock in the Sydney suburb of Newtown, was a working bee to prepare the building for what the sign behind them announced as the "St Vincent de Paul Waste Collection Depot".

There are two captions to this photo. One, a typed note stuck to the back of the original print, reads:

"First movement in connection with what is now known as the Vincentian Welfare Stores was inaugurated." Already the name was changing.

"Established early in 1922 the first start was made in a paddock in Newtown on which mountains of manure had to be raked up and carted away and a dilapidated shed in the corner was made capable of being used, by a group of volunteer Brothers who went out for three or four Saturdays."

The manure, it might be noted, was sold to local gardeners and possibly as fuel for fires, and the funds put towards the upgrade of the premises.

The other caption, titled "Willing Workers at the Waste Collection Depot", appeared in a report in the Freeman's Journal, a popular Catholic newspaper launched in Sydney in 1850 (and today published as The Catholic Weekly).

"The... snap gives an idea of the enthusiasm with which the Sydney brothers [a term for Vincentians] have taken up the work of the Waste Collection Bureau."

The report continued, "A depot was recently secured in one of the best parts of Newtown [666 King Street, not far from today's Vinnies shop, located at number 187] but the shed itself, and the fencing and gates, were in a most dilapidated condition..."

"Last Saturday they put up a fine partition... and made a start with putting a good brick and cement floor in the enclosed portion of the shed."

The bricks were a donation.

The story then got to the purpose of the renovation:

"When these various jobs are completed the depot will be capable of holding any quantity of useless and refuse articles that may be donated... last week's deliveries included a cartload of furniture, another of timber and glass from a demolished building, a wire

dummy such as is used by dressmakers, a bath, and a couple of wash-tubs.

“It will be seen that nothing, from a needle to an anchor, goes to waste at the depot, and everything means money for the Society’s good works.”

To encourage donations, the story said, “Empty bags will be left at any address sent by letter or by phoning the Society’s office...”

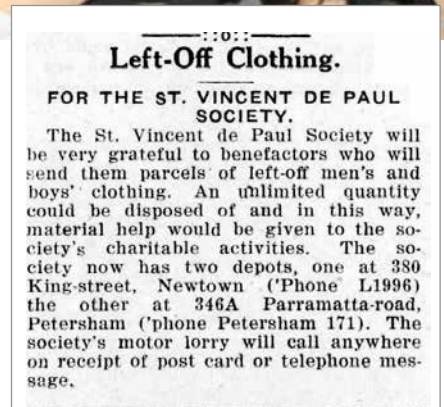
Next year, the public was being asked to “send a postcard” if they needed a pickup of unwanted goods, with a promise that “the cart will call at your residence immediately.” At the same time, it was being noted that the Depot was “gradually becoming a source of profit to the Society”.

Before long, the converted shed – “dark and dingy... most unsuitable for its purpose...” – would be unable to handle the quantity and variety of donated items, and other premises were being sought. King Street was again the focus.

The second move brought the Depot to number 380 and, by 1929, the business, for such it had become, opened a second depot at Parramatta Road, Petersham. By now there was an added focus on not only raising money for good works but providing affordable necessities for people of limited means, for example what was called “left off” men’s and boys’ clothing. It was a sign that the times were getting tougher.



Volunteers at the recently opened Dubbo shop



A 1929 advertisement from the Freeman's Journal. Image courtesy of Sydney Archdiocesan Archives.

By the end of the decade, with a motor lorry rather than a horse-and-cart now collecting donations, the world, including Australia, had entered the Great Depression. Unemployment rocketed and the demand on charities increased accordingly.

In 1930, the Freeman's Journal noted the Society's support for those in need totalled more than £40,000, a massive sum at the time. In 2020-21, the Society would spend \$95.2M in the areas of people in need, homelessness and mental health, disability and capacity building and housing services.

An annual report from the 1930s spoke of general “hardship and suffering” and, at the time, the Society had more than 90 Conferences and around 1700 active members. Discussions around the waste collection and resale initiative were notably positive, with these seen as a valuable way of raising funds in the manner shown by the Society overseas, notably in the USA.

Despite the economic challenges, the Catholic Press reported, with some surprise, that the Depression had “increased people’s generosity”, likening the Vincentian Welfare Stores, as they came to be named, to a “Noah’s Ark” of goods, or in a more secular reference, an “Old Curiosity Shop”.

Over the years, the Society’s retail outlets have had various names, from the Waste Collection Depots of the 1920s to the Vincentian Welfare Stores (from



1940), St Vincent de Paul Society Stores (1959), St Vincent de Paul Centres (1972) and a range of colloquial names, from thrift, bargain, charity and op shops, through to the Vinnies Shops branding of today. The Society, and Australian society at large, managed to weather the twin shocks of the Great Depression and the Second World War, gradually returning to normality. By 1947 the Society was operating six stores, or centres, in the Sydney area, opening the first country shop, in Mudgee, in 1955, and a further 64 country and 28 city stores up to 1969. Not quite the ton, but close. By the 1970s this milestone would be reached and surpassed.

The rest, as they say, is history. Today's shops, totalling more than 220 and counting, stock a wide range of quality clothing, household goods and bric a brac – needles perhaps, although rarely anchors.

Other activities that generate vital funds from unwanted items are the processing of unsaleable clothing into industrial rags, the reprocessing and recycling of textiles, and the handling of deposit-paid drink containers.

Vinnies retail sales in the 2020-21 year totalled \$71.1M, an increase of 26 per cent on the previous year, which had been affected by COVID-19 closures.

As well as the coronavirus, there have been other major challenges, including bushfires, which hit the east coast in 2019-20, and the devastating flooding in northern NSW in 2022. These events caused temporary shop closures, damage to buildings and stock, and an impact on shop volunteers, who today number more than 5,000.

As in the past, however, resilience has prevailed and the proud tradition of receiving and reselling pre-loved goods continues on.

"The original Newtown enterprise marked the start of what has become the most expansive retail operation in NSW, with Vinnies shops in cities and towns across the state," said Yolanda Saiz, Executive Director Commercial Enterprise, Fundraising and Communications.

"Recent openings or extensive refurbishments, with the new shopper-friendly branding, include Dubbo and Maitland, with a major expansion and upgrading planned, appropriately, for the Newtown shop, scheduled for dedication in September 2022.

"While Newtown and wider Sydney are one focus of this year's Vinnies retail centenary, the celebrations are state-wide and feature a series of events and shop displays around NSW.

"This milestone will also include our members, as raising funds to support the work of conferences and our services lies at the heart of Vinnies retail activities, as it did from the very start," Ms Saiz said.



A 1929 advertisement from the Freeman's Journal. Image courtesy of Sydney Archdiocesan Archives.

FROM HORSE-CARTS TO HORSEPOWER

While promising a rapid collection of donated goods there were limitations, as an early newspaper article explained:

"At present, the brothers have only one horse and cart, which has to be relied on for the cartage of goods from places which are, in many cases, very distant from the depot... what is really wanted is a Ford lorry, which could do ten times the amount of cartage..."

Needless to say, the Society's capacity to collect and transport goods would expand considerably in the years ahead. Today, 60 Vinnies trucks and vans operate across NSW. For the month of June 2022, they transported approximately 14.3 tonnes of donated goods, mostly clothing, on a daily basis.



An Old Curiosity Shop

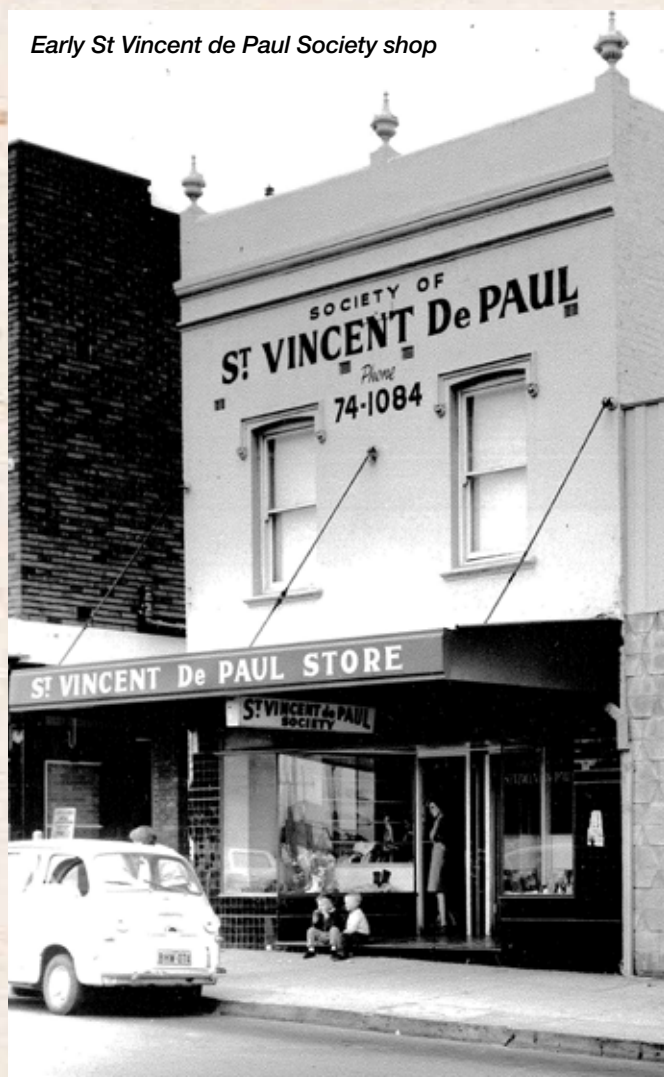
As quaint as it may seem now, there is no better description of the Society's earliest retail activities than that in the Freeman's Journal of 11 Sept 1924, and none better summarised the purpose of the fundraising.

In the sixth part of a series profiling the Society - "The Silent Brotherhood of Charity/Deeds Of Which The World Knows Not" - the newspaper reported:

"In one of the busiest thoroughfares of a busy suburb, there is displayed a massive signboard which is a constant puzzle for passers-by. It announces that this is 'The St. Vincent de Paul Society's Waste Collection Depot'."

It went on, "Practically everybody in Sydney knows something, at least, about the St Vincent de Paul Society and its wonderful works of charity; but what connection can there be between these and a Waste Collection Depot?"

Early St Vincent de Paul Society shop



"Picture to yourself a large, barn-like shop, which has, instead of windows, massive squares of strong wire-netting. Inside, the place is a veritable 'Old Curiosity Shop'."

"You will see piles of left-off clothing, both ladies and gent's, side by side with secondhand gas stoves, and in close proximity there are to be found Paris hats and perambulators, secondhand boots and invalid chairs, furniture and gas pipes, bathtubs and crockery, broken brass and carpenters' tools, umbrellas, ladies' bags, old paper, bottles, and tailors' cuttings - in fact, there is hardly any conceivable article that ever was made which is not represented..."

"Where does the connection come in between the St Vincent de Paul Society and this extraordinary jumble of goods?"

"The explanation is a simple and a very practical one. These goods, to their respective owners, were of no value and perfectly useless; but when sent to a Depot such as this, and cleaned up and classified, they have a certain value and there is always a ready sale for them, and as they are all gifts the sale means a nett profit, which goes into the Society's funds.

"Thus the good people who have sent unwanted goods to the Depot have a twofold gratification in the matter. They are getting rid of a lot of what is, to them, useless rubbish; and they know that this rubbish, when sold, will realise a certain sum of money, which will go to help the St Vincent de Paul Society in its good works.

"It is quite reasonable to suppose that the nett profit will, ere long, mount up to £1000 a year, and every penny of this could go to the relief of the poor and the helping of the various works of charity carried on by the Society."

1931
The Depot moved
along King Street,
Newtown again

An Australian first

According to Freeman's Journal, the idea of selling castoff goods to raise money for charitable works was "not an original idea", having been proved a successful initiative by the Society in London and several American cities.

However, so far as was known, it had not been taken up by the Society in any other Australian cities, although, as the paper thought "just as much scope existed".

No one could have dreamed what the idea might lead to.

By 1925, the lists of acceptable donations continued to be published... old furniture, left-off clothing, empty bottles, bedsteads, mattresses, invalids' chairs, umbrellas, suitcases, tools, old iron, brass, lead, pictures... Offers for their collection by cart were still being offered.



“St Vincent de Paul Society’s Waste Depot... in other words, the ‘Old Curiosity Shop’... is a receptacle for every conceivable kind of unwanted and useless articles. To the owners these articles are a nuisance and encumbrance, but if sent to the Society’s depot, they have a certain value, and the amount realised by their sale goes to the support of the St Vincent de Paul Society and its various good works...”

It was advised that the Depot, having been located for the last couple of years in most unsuitable premises at 666 King Street, Newtown, had now been removed to a much better shop at No. 642 King Street, Newtown, ‘where there is excellent light and ample storage and show space.’ Freeman’s Journal, 11 June 1925

The Society’s retail operation was on the move in every sense.

On 11 June 1931, The Catholic Press, also published today as The Catholic Weekly, reported on the 1930 Annual Report of what it called “the great Catholic lay society for charitable work”.

The Depot had again moved, but remained on King Street, Newtown. The modern Vinnies Shop is still on King Street today.

A WONDERFUL DEPOT

“It would be utterly impossible to attempt a description of the goods contained in this Depot. Men’s and women’s clothing, boots and shoes, Paris hats and tennis rackets... pictures, books, lawnmowers... empty bottles and waste paper... these are but a few of the things contained in this wonderful Depot... these articles are sold to the best advantage, and the proceeds given to the St Vincent de Paul Special Works.”

(Freeman’s Journal, 19 January 1933)

WELFARE STORE IS BLESSED & OPENED BY BISHOP FOX

A welfare store which will be conducted by the Broken Hill branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Argent street near Kaolin was blessed and officially opened by the Bishop of Wilcannia—Dr. T. M. Fox, yesterday.

1940

Vinnies expands welfare shops to twelve

From depots to shops

Australia entered the Second World War in September 1939, following the Government's acceptance of the United Kingdom's declaration of war on Nazi Germany. The war would last until 1945 and, by its end, almost a million Australians would have served in the armed forces, and nearly 40,000 lives would be lost.

At home, the cost of living went up and unemployment rose for a time, but industry expanded and laid the foundations for rapid economic growth. Post-war economic reconstruction was also aided by the Government's policy of national development, widely supported within the broader labour movement.

After the war, Australia enjoyed favourable terms of international trade and an increase in the amount of foreign investment into the economy.

As ever, the less fortunate struggled to make ends meet.

"Huge scheme of expansion" in Sydney

On 22 February 1940, near the start of the war, Freeman's Journal reported that, for years, the Society had given "great quantities" of goods to families in

need. Now, a "huge scheme of expansion" was being planned by the Sydney Brothers who were forming 12 Conference Groups, each comprising seven or eight conferences, with Vincentian Welfare Stores to be located in each group's area.

The first was in Sydney's eastern suburbs, with a meeting in Paddington attended by 40 Brothers adopting the new scheme with "the utmost enthusiasm".

Noting that Brothers in Melbourne had opened six suburban shops, with "no fewer than six motor vehicles for transport", the story said, "In Sydney we shall be in the same position in a very short time."

Articles sought for donation included clothing, bedsteads and bedding, motor tyres, paste tubes, tinfoil, bottles, worn-out batteries and sundries of every description. The article regretted that with only one store and one motor lorry, the Sydney operation was severely limited, but said, "The system now being organised is so perfect and so businesslike, that it is most unlikely there will be any further grounds for complaint."

The Sydney stores were on their way to unimaginable growth and success.

IN NEWCASTLE, "OLD NEWSPAPERS ARE STILL THE BEST LINE"

With the 1940 Christmas and New Year holidays over, thoughts turned to fundraising in the Newcastle district, where the St Vincent de Paul Society's new "Economy Shop" was actively in business, having made a profit of £100 to date.

The Catholic Press (30/1/1941) noted that "old newspapers are still the best line."

In August the same year the Society's "Welfare Shops" in different parts of Sydney's suburbs made an "urgent appeal" for "all kinds of waste and unwanted goods", saying that already that year some £850 had been given to selected charitable works, including the Matthew Talbot Hostel, then in Kent Street in the city, with a similar amount likely to be distributed before the end of the year.

£2000 profit in 1942

On the last Sunday of 1943, more than 180 delegates representing 80 St Vincent de Paul Society conferences assembled at Ashfeld, where it was revealed that a total of £2000 had been raised by Vincentian Welfare Stores in the past year.

The stores had handled –

- 17,401 articles of clothing
- 2401 articles of furniture
- 3546 pairs of boots and shoes
- 8356 sundry articles
- 28 tons of pressed paper
- 20 tons of rags
- 6 tons of magazines
- 1848 bales of pulp



Praise was directed to Brother Chamberlain from Eastern Suburbs No. 1 group, Watson's Bay, who had managed to secure a depot free of charge, and "solicited the aid of the local grocer, the baker and the butcher in collecting parcels".

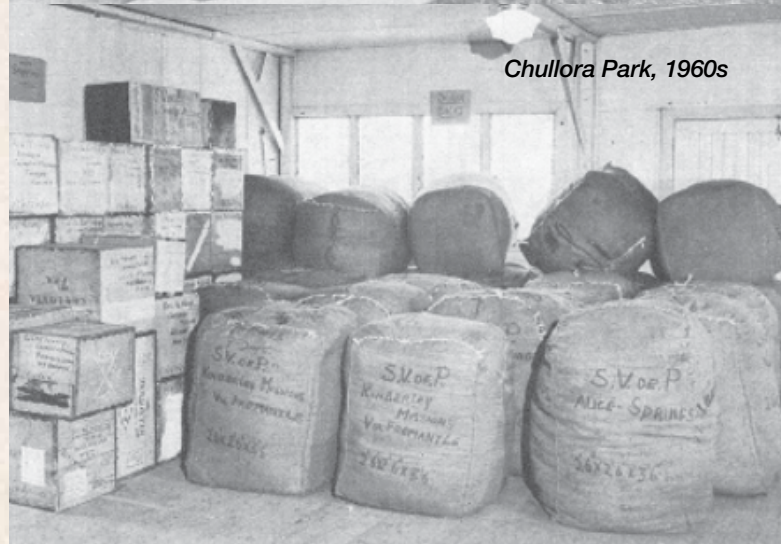
Later, Brother Chamberlain sought assistance from a Mr Cooper, who leased ponies and offered one cost-free. Brother Chamberlain and another brother canvassed the district, and soon their salvaging grew to the point where both were offered full-time employment. Brother Chamberlain accepted – but without payment. The last load of the 1942-43 year from Watson's Bay was three tons of goods, representing only four weeks' collection.



Wagga Wagga, 1963



St Vincent de Paul Society members on a salvage drive in the 1960s



Chullora Park, 1960s



Volunteers sorting clothes in the 1960s



**AN EASY WAY TO
HELP A NOBLE CHARITY**
The Society St. Vincent de Paul
carries on a
Waste Products Depot at Newtown

Which is intended for the reception of all kinds of useless or unwanted articles. Some of these articles are sold, and the proceeds given to the Society and its Special Works, but the greater part of them are given direct to poor families who are surely in need of such items as clothing, boots, blankets, etc.

Nothing will be refused at the Depot, but these are a few of the items most desired:-

Clothing of every description	Boots, Shoes and Hats.
Furniture of any kind.	Umbrellas.
Bedsteads.	Pianos.
Wireless Sets.	Timber.
Galvanised Iron.	Tools of Trade.
Bottles.	Zinc, Iron and Lead.
Sheets and Pillow Cases.	Thousands of Newspapers.

WHEN YOU HAVE SUFFICIENT OF THESE IN HAND, PLEASE
'PHONE L1996.
AND THE SOCIETY'S LORRY WILL IMMEDIATELY CALL AND REMOVE THEM WITHOUT ANY COST WHATEVER TO YOU.

An ad from the Freeman's Journal on 23 September 1938.

Image courtesy of Sydney Archdiocesan Archives.

OLD MASTER SOLD FOR 4 SHILLINGS 6 PENCE WAS WORTH £1500+

It's a classic tale of how an item bought for very little in a charity shop was later found to be worth a small fortune.

Back in the late 1930s, a painting was donated to a Vincentian Welfare Store where it lay amongst pieces of old furniture. Along came an antiques dealer, who obviously had a keen eye for a quality item and a good bargain.

He bought the painting for 4 shillings 6 pence and soon was receiving offers in excess of £1500, many thousands in today's dollars. Fascinated by this story, a correspondent for The Catholic Weekly visited the Newtown store in late 1942 and found "one of the most remarkable businesses in Sydney."

Under the heading "Good with the bad", it was noted that along with "a constant stream" of cast-off items – broken beds, cracked mirrors, ragged books – not everything was "junk". For example, brand-new clothes, a baby grand piano in good condition, and 2112 cans of tinned meat, soup & vegetables donated by Holbrooks: "The orphanages were more than happy to get them."

While wonderful bargains are regularly found at Vinnies shops these days, donated goods are carefully assessed by well-trained staff who can identify branded clothing and other valuable items.

A correspondent for The Catholic Weekly visited the Newtown store in late 1942 and found "one of the most remarkable businesses in Sydney."

Late war clothing appeal

The end of World War II was approaching and the reporting of Allied successes filled the newspapers.

"Super Fortresses blast Japanese cities", readers of the The Riverine Grazier (17 July 1945) were informed. The Australian 6th Division was maintaining steady pressure on Japanese forces along the Wewak coast in New Guinea, and the 7th Division was readying to attack oil fields in Borneo. The big news from Europe... there was still no sign of Soviet leader Stalin at the "Big Three" conference in Potsdam – "Stalin not arrived" – leaving Winston Churchill's mood "noticeably dour".

Sharing the page with these war despatches was a story about an urgent clothing appeal in the south-western NSW town of Hay to gather items that could be sent to refugees in Europe in advance of the approaching winter. The St Vincent de Paul Society had the contacts and volunteer personnel, and was a key member of the organising committee and the collection effort.

Just as today, not all clothing donations to the St Vincent de Paul Society are sent to our shops. Some are sent direct to our services where they are gratefully worn by people we assist.





Burwood

It's not always easy...

In a frank account of the challenges being faced by the 1960s the Society discussed what it termed "Our collection problems", noting this was the Welfare Stores committee's "greatest worry". However, it is being "tackled intelligently".

For instance, "During the early part of 1941 our collectors were collecting on the house-to-house system and averaged between 10 ten per cent and 30 per cent effective calls. Today, by revising our calls system, we are averaging over 90 per cent effective calls.

"At the present time we are collecting from about 20,000 donors per year. Quite a few of them require immediate attention. These urgent calls naturally interrupt the routine, and it frequently happens whilst on the regular rounds the collector has to pick up an unexpected load of furniture, necessitating an immediate return to the depot. In the interim the phone runs hot with complaints from one end and explanations from the worried staff at the other.

"This is no easy task [and] oftentimes even our own offer us articles fit only for the rubbish heap... fortunately these cases are in the great minority...



Wellington

"As all goods are given gratis to the Society from donors who have in mind first and foremost our duty to the poor, it is imperative for us to provide a service to those patrons."



Vinnies Dubbo

1961

Vinnies clothing sales increased by 31%

The new era of op shopping

The 1969 Annual Report for the Sydney Metropolitan Area (including Gosford and Katoomba) recorded that 112,000 persons had been assisted by 3,200 members. It recapped on the activities since 1961 which it called a “historic year in the progress of our stores”.

New shops had opened in Sutherland, Rockdale, Burwood and Liverpool. Meanwhile, stores at Newtown and Paddington were taken over by the Particular Councils of Sydney and Eastern Suburbs, with the Conference involved in these changes “cooperating enthusiastically with the Stores Committees” and the voluntary drives producing “characteristically excellent results”.

Clothing sales increased (up by 31%) and the ratio of profit to expenses was 52%, a rise of 5%.

By now the shops had a well-recognised threefold purpose – offering affordable clothing and household items to people in reduced circumstances; saving goods that would otherwise have gone to waste; and generating funds that could be put towards what were already known as “good works”.

The report noted that, “A most pleasing feature of country activity... is seen in the establishment of stores during the year at Grafton, Coffs Harbour and Casino, while arrangements have been made to open a store at Katoomba...”

“We must all be edified by what our country brothers have done in these districts, and it is our hope and prayer that as many towns as possible will see the value of establishing a store... the money obtained from stores’ activities can assist materially these days towards the relief of acute distress in such mission areas as India and Pakistan, as well as in the support of our own special works.”

“At this stage in the history of the stores it might be appropriate to mention that since 1940 the stores at Newtown, Paddington, North Sydney, Enfield [etc]... working largely with paid staff and a minimum of voluntary assistance by the brothers of the Conferences, contributed £116,000... We thank [amongst many others] our thousands of donors whose generosity enables our stores to function.”

A lifelong Vinnies obsession

Now the holder of a PhD and an academic position at The University of Sydney, Dr Vanessa Berry embarked on a quest in 1999 to visit every Vinnies Shop across Sydney, 69 of them at the time.

It took her a month and she described the undertaking in a zine* titled "Vinnies". Since then, op-shopping has been a continual inspiration: the title of her book *Mirror Sydney* was inspired by a 1960s photo album found in an op shop, and in her most recent book *Gentle and Fierce* (Giramondo 2021), she reflects on some of the animal-related objects she's collected over the years.

Vanessa's Sydney-wide mission was reported in *Tharunka*, the UNSW student newspaper (21/8/2001), which said it had made Dr Berry "a solid reputation out of her obsessions".

Now a well-published writer, Vanessa says, "I took the list from the phone book and worked through them one by one, catching trains and buses around the suburbs."

Her professional zeal enhanced a love for op shopping that continues to this day.

"I bought all sorts of things during my investigations – a few I still have and have written about since, for example, I bought a framed collection of butterflies from Hornsby Vinnies which I wrote about in *Gentle and Fierce*."

Vanessa adds, "I'm a lifelong op-shopper and love them – they're unique shopping spaces in that have a strong sense of community and inclusion, as well as being a treasure trove of second-hand goods."

"I love the chance element of what you might find in them and the stories the objects can tell or suggest – and I'm not alone. I know plenty of artists and writers who find their inspiration through op shopping."

"For me, it's a way of life, and most things I own have been found in op shops over the years!"

"Op shopping has become a much more popular activity than it was when I started in the 90s as a teenager, and there's much more of a market for and interest in retro and vintage things now, but they're still essentially the same welcoming and promising places I've always found them to be."

Dr Vanessa Berry's books include *Gentle and Fierce* and *Mirror Sydney*: an atlas of reflections; her visual artworks have been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, National Gallery of Australia, and the Museum of Sydney.

* Zines are small-circulation, self-published printed works, often reproduced via a copy machine.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The now familiar term "op shop" was invented in Australia back in the 1920s by a former Melbourne showgirl, Lady Amelia (Millie) Tallis, married to a showbiz entrepreneur and often photographed in a group that included actor Charlie Chaplin.

Wanting to give so-called thrift shops a more dignified name, she coined the term "opportunity shop", which then became "op shop".

The term was derived from the naming of stores in France. The streets of Paris – where Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, had walked – hosted bargain shops known as *magasins d'occasion*. The latter word also translates as opportunity, which was the name Millie Tallis preferred.

OP
SHOP

Dr Vanessa
Berry





THEN



NOW

AND IT ALL GOES BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Julia, daughter of a Vincentian in Warialda, describes the Society's activities in the late 1940s

Every Sunday morning after 7.00am Mass two members would purchase Sunday papers from the newsagent and two pieces of fruit per person from either Jim Bowman's or Durkins and take them to patients in the Warialda hospital and to the men living in humpies up in the scrub (behind the old cemetery). This process was very much appreciated.

St Vincent's shop before the new building in Geddes Street was at the back of the butcher shop in Stephens Street. Margaret Quinlan always made goods available to the needy and these were also much appreciated by those in need. Father Lynam often appealed from the altar if any goods were needed, be it furniture, baby wear, bedding, linen etc.

From memory, the men held their meeting at the Highway Garage which was owned by Frank Dempsey.

At Christmas time, hampers and presents were put together and delivered to the very needy in the town and district on Christmas morning. There were some very excited little and big people.

Over the years, a number of families called to the presbytery for food and petrol. The priest of the time would ring Jim Quinlan who would contact Jim Bowman and ask him to do up a parcel of food and give the family petrol so they could move on to their homes wherever. No doubt Vinnies would have got good value from Jim's parcel.



The times they are a-changin' and nowhere more rapidly than in the world of pre-loved (and even new) retail fashion.

The Drop by Vinnies was an innovative campaign in April/May 2022 involving some of Australia's most followed fashionistas, along with local and international fashion brands, aimed at helping drive fashion conscious customers to our shops.

The Drop was focused on four selected shops with the participation of trendsetters Kate Waterhouse, Nadia Fairfax and Paula Joye, who donated some of their own pre-loved designer items for sale. The Drop created suspense and fun for our customers, driving them in-store over the promotion period.

Each week we dropped off designer items and promoted the thrill of the chase by directing people to our Instagram to see who and what would be dropping next.

Think a mix of pre-loved and never-worn items by Stella McCartney and Ellery, Camilla and Marc, and Bianca Spender. Plus, participating designer brands like Lee Mathews, Matteau, One Teaspoon, Scanlan Theodore, Shona Joy, active-streetwear P.E Nation... and many other donations of brand spanking new goods.

The Drop showed Vinnies is not just keeping up with the times but getting ahead of them. And there's much more to come.



Standing by for The Drop were Erika Rybar, Kris Galustian, Bronya Shapievsky from the Paddington Vinnies shop.

Susan Monson with the donated set of National Geographics



Donation covers the world

Casino-born Louise Doust travelled the globe for years before putting down roots and experiencing the world through the pages of the National Geographic.

Louise cherished each month's issue when it arrived by post, 12-a-year for the next two decades, keeping them in mint condition after reading. She donated her collection to Vinnies, suggesting the Society sell them to raise funds.

The unbroken set dates from 1982 to 2002 and includes special issues such as the Moon - with a hologram front cover - the former Soviet Union, and the long conflict in Afghanistan.

Louise Doust's decision to help Vinnies resulted from her friendship with the Society's Lismore Central Council spiritual adviser, Margaret Loker, a classmate at St Mary's College, Lismore.



SHOPPING IN THE CLOUDS

WWW.EBAY.COM.AU/STR/VINIENSHOP

Vinnies now has an online store (with 99.7% positive feedback) offering designer clothing, accessories & collectibles at the click of a button. Items for sale have been generously donated by supporters and, as usual, the funds we raise support vulnerable people & local communities.



2022

10 tonnes of
clothing donated
every day

A week in the life of a donation

If you've ever made a donation at a Vinnies Shop or clothing bin you might have wondered about the processes it goes through before ending up for sale to raise money for our services.

Some clothes go straight on the rack, others are collected by our logistics team. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has a small army of people who can transport whatever is needed. Every day, they collect and deliver donated goods to one of our distribution centres, like the one at Auburn in Sydney.

At the distribution centre, donated goods are sorted into different categories like men's shirts, women's skirts, and so on, and packaged into boxes of similar items.

Vinnies Shops place orders for different sorts of clothing and other goods they require and our distribution team is called on once again to supply them.

Alternatively, some clothing is taken directly to services like the Matthew Talbot Hostel homelessness service for men or the Marian Centre domestic violence shelter.

These clothes are made available to people who come to stay there to take as their own.

Many people who arrive at Vinnies Services often have only the clothes on their backs, so having extra clothes on hand is an absolute necessity.

At the shops, the clothes go through another round of sorting, this time by staff and volunteers, before the items are placed on the shop floor, ready for sale.

Every item sold in a Vinnies Shop raises money for local services.

That can mean money to supply food and other assistance at our conferences, where our members carry out the mission they have had since the beginnings of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1830s Paris: providing support to people in need.

With the resources of the Society in modern times, it can also mean going to one of our homelessness shelters, domestic violence refuges, health services, or one of the other professional services we provide.

The St Vincent de Paul Logistics team during times of crisis

During times of natural disaster and crisis, all hands are on deck at the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and people on the logistics team are often one of the first called upon to help.

For example, they were some of the first people onsite in the direct aftermath of the recent flooding in NSW, bringing donated goods with them.

As one of the first batch of Vinnies staff members to lend a hand to flood-ravaged communities on the NSW North Coast, Richard Burgos uses few words to sum up the contrasting emotions felt on the ground.

“Devastation, but community helping each other.”

He said this after making the long trek from Sydney to Lismore in the still of the night with a load of donations in tow, Richard and fellow Logistics leader Martin Pottage leapt straight into action working alongside members of the local fire brigade, Rural Fire Services and Australian Defence Force to clear out the damaged Vinnies Shop in Mullumbimby.

Having already put in a full day’s work prior to making the journey north, the scope of the damage made apparent for Richard that the job ahead over the coming weeks and months would be anything but a run-of-the-mill 9-5 shift!



IT'S NOT JUST CLOTHES BEING TRANSPORTED

Hernan Vergara has been with Vinnies since 2005 and for about half of that time, he's been a driver delivering people and all manner of goods to wherever they need to go.



He's part chauffeur, part tour operator, part courier, and he even helps on reception at the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Sydney.

Despite the Hostel being his main place of employment, he provides logistical support to a broad range of Vinnies services.

He's taken the men who stay at the Hostel on outings to the beach, ten-pin bowling, dog-walking, and more.

He also drives them to important medical appointments or the emergency department if they are in need of treatment.

When he's not transporting people, one of the most common things Hernan says he couriers around the city is food.

Hernan also brings clothes from Vinnies Distribution Centre at Auburn back to the Matthew Talbot Hostel so they can be provided to the men there.

Over the time he's been with Vinnies, he's driven a minibus and a truck and he's now got a small fleet in the form of a small car, a people mover, and a refrigerated van at his disposal.

If the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW needs someone or something transported in Sydney, there's a good chance it will be Hernan doing the driving.

Every item sold in a Vinnies Shop raises money for local services. That can mean money to supply food and other assistance at our conferences.

Brad Ryan, the 'king of the cutting bench', slicing buttons and zips off material for clean rags at Vinnies Bag O Rags



2020

Vinnies re/CYCLE
range is
launched

Helping the environment and people we serve

"Landfill" may be a softer term than "the dump" or "the tip" but this remains the destination for many unwanted goods, from clothing to household goods, a significant amount of which could be collected, cleaned up and resold to raise funds for charitable works.

This lesson was put into practice back in 1922, when a group of Vincentian brothers came together in Newtown and established the St Vincent de Paul Society Waste Depot that was the genesis of the state-wide retail network that continues to flourish a century later. Then, as now, the money raised was used to provide much-needed support for people in difficult circumstances.

One major problem with landfills is that they are polluting environments and the space for hosting them close to our urban areas is running out.

A huge amount of resources goes into producing the goods that society consumes (and all too often throws away) – there's human labour, energy, material and machinery costs; the wastage is massive and all inputs come with a cost.

Every hour some 36,000 kilograms of clothing and textile waste go to Australian landfills.

Globally, it's 11.7 million tonnes of waste every year, despite most clothing and textiles being recyclable in one form or another. The Society is playing a huge role in reducing the amount of 'waste' being wasted.

By donating unwanted clothing and textile items to Vinnies, the community is making a major contribution to waste reduction as well as bringing pleasure to the next owners and helping raise valuable funds to support our good works.

We've made a heartfelt commitment to the concept of the circular economy that aims to eliminate waste through the continual use of resources. By reusing, sharing, repairing and recycling, a circular economy closes the loop to create resources from "rubbish" and ensure nothing goes to waste.

We saw there was more to be done with clothing received in condition that's not fit for re-sale.

re/CYCLE is a new eco-friendly range of blankets, throws, rugs, and cushion, made from recycled clothing and textiles which would otherwise end up in landfill.

For two years now, the Society has been sending some of our non-saleable donations to partners who are turning these textiles and others, into something of value. It is often commented on how beautifully colourful and what great value this very popular range is.



Recycling pleases customers, helps people in need

Every day, around 10 tonnes of discarded clothing and piles of sundry household items are placed in Vinnies collections bins throughout NSW.

First dibs on this mountain of material goes to the volunteers who sort through the donations and set aside clean, undamaged items for sale in Vinnies Shops. After some sprucing up these quality items go on sale in local Vinnies Shops and go quickly out the door. Others are transported to our recycling centres.

The Goonellabah centre, one of two in NSW, occupies 1600 square metres and is named after Matthew Talbot, the 19th century Dublin ascetic who is an inspiration for ex-alcoholics worldwide. It handles one-fifth of the state's total clothing donations.

Angelo Grande, the Society's Recycling & Waste

Management Facilitator, has a team of twenty workers who start the process by sorting wearable clothes from clean but tattered items which, shorn of buttons and zippers, will be blade-shredded and sold in 5kg or 10kg packs as part of the Vinnies Bag O Rags business.

Vinnies Bag O Rags was established in 2014 to find a purpose for waste textile. Some of the clothing items donated to Vinnies are not commercially viable to resell. Rather than see these items heading to landfill we repurpose them into various types of cleaning rags.

Locally, the Bag O Rags products are used by fine arts students at Southern Cross University, who value the rags for cleaning printing plates, brushes and spills. Other regular customers are car repairers and detailers, painters, mechanics and DIY home improvers.

This extraordinary operation is unimaginable to people dropping their unwanted clothes in a Vinnies collection bin. If they could look behind the scenes they would realise how resourceful the Society has become over the past 100 years.



Recycling centre manager Angelo Grande and the team with compacted bales of clothing.



GOODBYE PLASTIC BAGS

From 2018, well ahead of the state's supermarkets, Vinnies shops in NSW ceased putting shoppers' purchases in single-use plastic bags.

Hundreds of thousands of bags were removed from circulation, and volunteers reported that the policy was well supported by customers.

Many plastic bags are let loose in the environment and find their way into our waterways and eventually the ocean where they pose terrible risks to marine life. Vinnies regards ending plastic bag use as a key environmental action.

The ban was well received by shop volunteers Shona Townend and Noelene Geraghty, and customer Misha Harding.



Vinnies



100 years strong



2022

Members gave \$3.278 million in cash grants to flood victims

Clare Van Doorn assesses the damage at the Lismore Shop

Meeting nature's challenges

Drought, fires, and floods

Years of prolonged drought had brought great hardship to regional communities, especially in western districts, and then eastern New South Wales burst into flames, with the 2019–20 bushfire season being the worst the state has recorded.

The toll of the July 2019 - March 2020 Black Summer bushfires included 26 fatalities, 2448 homes destroyed, 5.5 million hectares of land burnt – 6.2 per cent of the state – with estimated insurance costs of \$1.88 billion. The impact on NSW communities, farmers, local businesses, wildlife and bushland was unprecedented.

Thankfully, Vinnies Shops were not directly damaged by the fires – unlike the damage that would result from the floods in early 2022.

Following the devastating bushfire season of the

previous year, NSW was hit with 1-in-100 year floods in March 2021. Almost exactly a year later, with the ground in much of the Northern Rivers region saturated by consistent rains, the greatest flood emergency in living history descended on the area.

Ground zero was the city of Lismore, one of Australia's most flood-prone regional centres. Floodwaters rose to record levels and more homes were left uninhabitable than in the wake of the Black Summer fires.

Temporary closures and damage were also reported in Vinnies Shops at Ballina and Casino.

The rain came down and the waters rose

Tracey Doherty is a member of the Vinnies bushfire recovery and community development team but, living near Lismore, she was caught up in the Northern Rivers floods.

Prior to the floods, Tracey and her friends and family tried to prepare for the worst.

"We had a couple of friends who have got businesses in the main part of town and we went in and helped on Sunday before the flooding came in," Tracey said.

"We helped pull all of the stuff out of the Vinnies conference and put it in the office above the Vinnies Shop across the road but that got flooded as well.

"In 2017, it was probably about a foot from going the next level up but this time it well and truly went the next level up," she said.



The clean-up efforts at the Lismore Shop after the 2021 floods

The floods peaked at 14.4 metres in Lismore, completely submerging the Vinnies Shop there and flooding the office on the floor above, damaging the items Tracey had helped place there.

The Vinnies Shop in Mullumbimby was also inundated and, along with its counterpart in Lismore, remains closed at the time of writing due to the overwhelming damage and contamination inflicted by the floodwaters.

The clean-up

It wasn't just St Vincent de Paul members, volunteers, and employees pitching in to clean up Vinnies Shops and other homes and businesses damaged in the floods.

Firefighters and Australian Defence Force personnel were on the ground in the aftermath helping to clean out the Mullumbimby Vinnies Shop.

"For the local Vinnies people, it was tough because some of their homes or those of their friends and family had been damaged in the floods, too," Clare Van Doorn, North East Regional Director for the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, said.

"In the immediate aftermath of the floods, one of the biggest barriers to providing help was the floodwaters themselves blocking off access to places in around Lismore.

"The clean-up is ongoing and, in the meantime, members, volunteers, and employees at Lismore are working out of our Goonellabah warehouse to provide ongoing assistance," Ms Van Doorn said.

The Lismore shop is no stranger to floods

2017



Lismore shop gets ready after 2017 flood reopening

2022



Lismore shop clean up after the 2022 floods



Vinnies Shop Dubbo

COVID-19 caused every shop to close

The first cases of the highly infectious COVID-19 coronavirus were detected in NSW in January 2020, putting public health authorities – and soon all retail businesses – on notice. The impacts across the whole community would be sweeping and trigger a range of government supports.

In March, we decided to close our entire retail network, due to the increased risk for a large proportion of our volunteers and the increasing Government restrictions affecting retailers and customers.

One innovative work around was the opening of eight Donation Stations at sites throughout the Sydney metropolitan area. These were equipped to accept quality donations of clothes, bric-a-brac, books and household items. With all Vinnies Shops temporarily closed across NSW, the Donation Stations enabled Vinnies to continue accepting donations during that difficult time.

The community's response to our invitation was positive – just as it had been one hundred years ago in Newtown when the donations we accepted were so different!

The re-opening of shops followed the development of Target Action Plans across April and May 2020.

A range of control measures was developed to ensure the safety of our workers, our customers, and the public. This included the provision of Personal Protective Equipment and hand sanitiser as well as specific parameters around social distancing within the shop, customer restrictions, contactless payments, closed dressing rooms and later the establishment of QR codes for contact tracing.

Our first shop reopened in Byron Bay in early May as a pilot to test and review all our control measures and the response of customers. This was well received, and more shop openings were scheduled from late May. By the end of June, 70% of our retail network in NSW was reopened.

In 2020–2021 Vinnies Shop sales bounced back, increasing by \$14.8 million, or 26% on the previous year, to \$71.1 million.

Sales went down and then came back up

In 2019–2020 Vinnies Shop sales decreased by \$11.9 million, or 17% on the previous year, to total \$57.1 million. This was mainly due to all of our retail centres closing around mid-April 2020 with centres gradually opening as restrictions were eased. By the end of August 2020, 93% of Vinnies Shops were open.

In 2020–2021 Vinnies Shop sales bounced back, increasing by \$14.8 million, or 26% on the previous year, to \$71.1 million.

All Vinnies Shops gradually reopened from 1 September following COVID-19 lockdowns in the last quarter of financial year 2020.

A better year than expected...

Vinnies Shops are much more than places to buy quality clothing at great prices. They are often co-located with or a conduit to the Society's conferences or services, expanding the assistance we can deliver.

The sale of clothes through Vinnies Shops provides funds that support our wider efforts to alleviate poverty and disadvantage.

Vinnies Shops keep donated goods out of landfill and we are increasing our ability to divert textile inappropriate for sale from ending up as waste through our recycling efforts.

In the 2020/21 financial year, Retail & Logistics was acting as a single business across the state for the first time. Some of the benefits

2020

Every Vinnies shop closed due to the pandemic

included increased sales growth of 20% in regional NSW and significant cost reductions in production and logistics.

Our response to the pandemic continued with development of COVID-safe plans; control measures; communication with staff, volunteers, and members; and distribution of personal protective equipment.

E-Commerce became increasingly important as more Vinnies Shops had to close their doors due to the pandemic. While in its infancy, our Online Shop helped maintain a level of sales while our bricks and mortar stores were closed.

In the fourth quarter of the 2020/21 financial year, Vinnies Shops made up for lost time due to the lockdown, particularly in regional NSW, with sales beginning to normalise. We are forever grateful to our supporters through the donation of goods to Donation Stations, to customers of our Online Shop and to those who engaged on social media while waiting for the reopening of Vinnies shops.

Our volunteers, whose dedication we always appreciate, stuck with us through thick and thin despite the disruption caused by the pandemic. With many in a more vulnerable group due to age, they showed a strong willingness to get vaccinated and return to run the Vinnies shops with their much-valued colleagues.

'We all have a passion for working here'

– Sylvana Gibson, Byron Bay shop.

"I had always been interested in Vinnies," says Society volunteer Sylvana Gibson. "So when I found out more about what they do and the people they help, I wanted to try and give back. I can't give money, but I can give time."

Starting out at her local Vinnies shop in Byron Bay late in 2020, Sylvana found great fulfillment as a volunteer and the impact it makes for people experiencing hardship.

"We're not just volunteers – we don't go in because we have to – we do it because we want to."

With the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 forcing all Vinnies shops to close across NSW, Sylvana maintained contact with her fellow volunteers while gaining a permit to get the shop up and running following the easing of lockdown restrictions.

"I was a bit worried as some of our girls are a bit older, I've been messaging them to make sure that they're OK... They were all keen to come back and work – we've got a 94-year-old who was just itching to come back!"



Kempsey welcomed shop re-opening

Trish Doust (left) from the Vinnies retail team and Kempsey shop manager Ruth Usher celebrated the shop's re-opening after a four-month closure because of COVID-19 restrictions.



2022

Vinnies operates
227 shops across
the state

Vinnies shops help fund our good works

We would never describe the donations we receive as “refuse” today but little else about our operations has changed in the past century.

We may no longer collect goods using horse-and-cart but, in the spirit of the brothers who pioneered the St Vincent de Paul Society’s retail activities back in 1922, the funds raised through Vinnies Shops still help support our good works throughout the community.

In 2020/21, the Society spent \$95.2 million directly in the areas of people in need, homelessness and mental health, disability and capacity building services and housing services.

Helping people experiencing disadvantage

At just 22, Leah has been failed by many people in her life who have been closest to her. From an early age, her story is one of people around her deliberately trying to remove her ability to choose for herself.

Control of another person is the driving force behind domestic violence, and it is something so common that one in six Australian women have experienced it at the hands of a current or former partner.

At 16, Leah found herself couch-surfing and then living in a youth hostel. Shortly after, she met her boyfriend. Leah became pregnant and her boyfriend didn’t want the child.

Pregnancy is a time of heightened risk for women who experience domestic violence.

After fleeing the violence, at 17, Leah delivered a baby daughter six weeks premature.

Alone, at 18, Leah then met her second boyfriend, and the couple would be together for the next two years.

During that time, he was physically abusive, and financially controlling.

“It started with threats. He would hit me.”

Leah was scared and wondered where she would go

ONE STORY AMONG MILLIONS OVER THE YEARS



As a child, I was the beneficiary of Vinnies' support and that set me on a path to lead my life as I do today.

Vinnies was able to help out with financial counselling, clothes and everyday essentials. I think most of my casual wardrobe was provided by Vinnies for a couple of years, as was almost every piece of our furniture, crockery and homewares.

Vinnies gave us a hand at a time we really needed it and that enabled a bunch of choices that wouldn't have been available otherwise. It enabled Mum to give me an education, which created so many options. I often think of that when I see a Vinnies Shop today.

I feel a moral obligation to pay back Vinnies' support. I started volunteering for Vinnies in about 2000. I began at the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo, serving lunches on Saturdays, and I've been contributing ever since, including in various governance roles.

- This recollection by Richard Stewart is part of a column in The Sydney Morning Herald, 24/6/22. He is a partner at PwC and the chair of the board at the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

and how she could protect herself and her daughter. Leah ended the relationship after a particularly traumatic experience.

This led to Leah being put in touch with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The Society has provided Leah with support to find housing, food, clothes, furniture, white goods, and emotional support.

The assistance has opened an array of choices for her that had been closed due to the neglect and abuse she had experienced from those closest to her.

Leah's main goal is to provide the kind of life for her daughter that she didn't have as a child.

"I want to give her what she wants which, at the moment, is gymnastics and swimming. She is a sporty kid and I love it."

Funds raised by the Society helped enable the following works in 2020-2021

92,650

visits by our members to people's homes, hospitals, aged care facilities and prisons to offer support

1,259

people assisted to manage drug and alcohol addiction

3,595

people supported by our disability and community inclusion programs

13,852

people supported by our health, housing, and homelessness services and day centres

232

people were assisted with employment opportunities, recreation and leisure programs, and outreach facilities

35,289

people assisted by our members

\$7,700,000

worth of assistance provided by our state-wide network of members

1,335

people found social inclusion and skills support at the Ozanam Learning Centre

9,073

meals served up by the Nagle Centre in Campbelltown

2,415

women experiencing domestic and family violence supported with crisis accommodation and outreach case management

3,000

doses of COVID-19 vaccine given in the space of 12 weeks at our Woolloomooloo clinic

1,228

people helped to secure permanent accommodation

1,259

people were provided with healthcare through the Matthew Talbot Clinic

753

tenants who found a home at our 502 social and affordable housing units



WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!

Volunteering with Vinnies Shops is a chance to give back to the community, share your skills, develop new ones and make new friends. We have roles to suit everyone.

HELP US CREATE A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY AND PLANET.



EMAIL: retailvolunteering@vinnies.org.au

VISIT: vinnies.org.au/shopvolunteersnsw

SCAN the QR code or **ASK** instore



Vinnies