

VINNIES NEWSLETTER



Vinnies WA adapts and responds

Over the past few months, the constantly changing environment through COVID-19 has meant Vinnies WA's ability to adapt has been crucial so it can continue to support the Western Australian community.

In late March when the impact of the pandemic started to set in, Vinnies WA announced that all of the States' 53 shops would close. Revenue from Vinnies retail shops supports the operation of Vinnies WA services in Mental Health, housing, homelessness, emergency assistance and financial counselling, so the closure, along with the cancellation of fundraising events, made a swift and significant dent in Vinnies WA ability to support the community as well as affecting nearly 3,000 committed retail volunteers and staff.

In addition to retail volunteers, Vinnies WA has over 1,000 volunteers, known as Conference members, who perform part of the core work of home visits for our Emergency Assistance Program. Members respond to immediate requests from people in their local communities, meeting them face to face to hear their stories and give assistance with food, clothing, utilities, referrals and advocacy. As the government issued warnings to seniors, it was realised that many of our members who perform this vital role fell into the high risk age category of 70+. In an effort to continue supporting the community, members were able to adapt quickly to new modes of support delivery, shifting contact with clients to phone calls and emails which, in a short space of time, became an incredibly effective way for people to receive vital and immediate support.

Much of Vinnies WA services were able to continue operating throughout the lockdown period while adhering to stringent screening, social distancing and hygiene precautions for the protection of both staff and clients. The impact of social distancing in our homelessness services, Vinnies Tom Fisher House and Passages Youth Engagement Hubs in Perth and Mandurah, meant that specialised in-reach services that clients usually receive were reduced or stopped all together. For young people visiting Passages, this diminished connection added an increase in anxiety and further complexity to their situation.

A reduction in visitors to Vinnies WA 24 hour supported Mental Health Service was initially introduced as a result of government and health restrictions, with clients adapting well while being encouraged to maintain their connections with family and essential services. This was also the case in Vinnies Community Houses which offers support with more independent living for people with a mental health diagnosis. Once hygiene protocols were in place, residents were supported in managing restrictions such as decreased visitors to houses and not being able to venture out except for essential reasons.

Additional measures were also introduced for tenants in Vinnies Housing Plus program which takes on the role of being a supportive landlord, rehousing clients who need emergency accommodation. The program

has been operating at full capacity since March with staff supporting clients with regular checks for their health and well being, and the provision of food hampers when there were difficulties purchasing food due to supermarket shortages.

Vinnies WA operates the Commonwealth funded National Debt Helpline (NDH) which since the start of May, has seen around 30% of calls being the result of job losses due to COVID-19. Many people calling are also seeking information regarding Government stimulus packages and have been feeling overwhelmed due to the current situation. Most clients now have arrangements with financial institutions in place, with many accessing their superannuation to help with income losses.

The reality of people's situation and level of support is now being seen nearly four months on, with Vinnies WA having given out more than \$1 million dollars worth of assistance to Western Australians in this period, mainly in the form of food relief and support to help pay bills. Food continues to be the main reason for people seeking help with nearly 30% of requests coming from new clients that have never reached out for support before. Vinnies WA was able to rapidly adapt its resources in response to this change in demand with a new model of dispensing food relief that started in April, distributing food hampers to people experiencing hardship. Since its inception, well over 3,600 hampers have been given out with the project still running to at least September.

During what has been a challenging time for the community, Vinnies WA goal of assisting Western Australians when times are hard has not wavered. With an expected increase on demand for services over the coming months, we will continue to adapt services and programs to ensure support will be there for disadvantaged Western Australians.

KEY POINTS:

- More than \$1 million dollars worth of assistance has been given out
- 30% of calls to the National Debt Helpline are the result of job losses due to the pandemic.
- Requests for food are the main reason people contact Vinnies WA for support



Hamper Help

A new initiative during COVID-19 meant Vinnies WA was able meet community demand when food relief needs rapidly increased.

It was identified very early on that food insecurity would be a major issue for people amid business shut downs, food shortages and the economic impact of the disruptions. In response to this, the Vinnies WA Emergency Relief Hamper program began in April with the aim to create and distribute hampers to people experiencing challenges meeting their basic food needs.

Determining what to include in the hampers was a critical first step which was guided by the WA Food Policy Index and some initial advice from the WA Health Department. Hampers were stocked with non-perishable items for a week's worth of food which required no refrigeration or special preparation, and included recipes for meal ideas to help families get the most use out of what they were receiving. When supermarket shortages peaked in that first month, having a stable supply of items such as rice and pasta for hampers became extremely difficult.

In an attempt to make up the shortfalls and continue to provide vital support to vulnerable people during the crisis, the Vinnies Drive and Drop project was

launched which lead to a callout to the general public for the donation of specific food items. Four closed Vinnies shops were chosen as locations for people to drop off food items, but this soon extended to food collections done by other community groups such as the Knights of the Southern Cross and Shree Kutchi Leva Patel Community as well as Newman College. Thanks to the generosity of the public a total of 8500 food items was collected for hampers in just a short few weeks.

Andrew York, Vinnies WA Executive Manager of Member and Volunteer Services explained that Vinnies agility, and the generous Western Australian public quickly guaranteed the project's success. "Vinnies has always had this amazing ability to adapt our resources and operation to meet people and community need. We really want to act quickly so by engaging the community, as well as funding from Department of Social Security and LotteryWest, we were able to all work together so people could receive basic food supplies."

For hampers to reach people directly affected by the pandemic, a collaboration between Vinnies WA and three local

councils was formed when Stirling, Bayswater and Wanneroo were determined to be experiencing high food insecurity. One of the biggest shires, the City of Stirling, offered council staff, stood down at the time, to sort donated food items and pack hampers. The closed Vinnies Stirling shop was turned into a makeshift hamper packing and distribution point that from there was delivered to the Council's collection point each week for people registered to receive one.

The bulk of the hamper preparation has now shifted to Vinnies Canning Vale Distribution Centre where half a dozen volunteers, three afternoons a week are managing to pack at least 300 hampers. The project is also being supplemented with donations from schools, Piconeri Fine Food and Wine supplying up to 50 hampers per week, and Curtin University providing volunteer students to pack hampers. Vinnies WA is currently distributing hampers weekly through two councils and a collection of agencies, while also slowly accruing a store of food, ready for an expected increase in requests for help in coming months. "This project has been a huge undertaking to be able to respond community need in a such a short space of time which was only possible through the team effort of Vinnies volunteers, staff and shop support. The partnerships we have formed and support we have received also allows us to work towards the expected change of circumstance for many people as government benefits cease, a possible second wave of the virus may loom, and how long this crisis will continue." Andrew said.

Much unpredictability in the coming months means the project is regularly being reviewed but Vinnies WA is well placed to continue its hamper distribution at least until September dependent on demand. This project has demonstrated Vinnies WA ability to adapt and provide an ongoing commitment to people when times are hard.



National Debt Helpline

Vinnies WA operates the National Debt Helpline here in Western Australia. This Commonwealth funded service is set up to address the needs of people experiencing financial hardship across the country. It is generally the first point of contact for clients in crisis situations such as the imminent risk of disconnection, eviction, repossession, mortgage stress and difficulty affording basic living needs.

Trained financial counsellors will assess your situation and provide you with free advice to help you move on. If your matter is more complex, they can refer you to your closest face-to-face financial counselling service.

If you are feeling overwhelmed with your financial situation you can call 1800 007 007 Monday to Friday 9.30am - 4.30pm

2020 CEO Sleepout

For the first time, business and community leaders across Australia united for a national online sleepout on 18 June supporting the mission to end homelessness.

In past years the Vinnies CEO Sleepout has comprised several events in major cities across Australia. In 2020, participants joined together for one online nationally streamed broadcast hosted by Dr Andrew Rochford from Sydney, raising more than \$5.7 million on the night to help people experiencing homelessness.

Here in Perth, more than 80 CEO's took part, with some being joined by their families for the sleepout. An outstanding total of nearly \$500,000 was reached by the following morning, going towards supporting Vinnies WA unique specialist community services including Passages Youth Engagement Hubs and Vinnies Tom Fisher House.

With the onset of a global health crisis, this year's event was more vital than ever. There are 116,000 people experiencing homelessness across the country and one in 14 people 'sleeping rough'. It is that group that is particularly at risk, facing the impossible task of following a directive to "stay at home" when you simply don't have one.

Besides raising vital funds, a key aim of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout is to provide a greater sense of empathy and awareness of what it's like for people at risk of, or

experiencing homelessness and poverty. This year's event worked a little differently with business and community leaders being able to nominate their own sleeping location which was a mix of backyards, garages and balconies. A first time participant Sanjiv Manchanda, CEO of Atlas Iron in Perth, woke up the following morning feeling the effects from having chosen to sleep outside his home. He said one night was enough to have a profound impact on his idea of homelessness. "I woke up physically cold and sore and my mind went to thinking what it would feel like if one has to do this everyday. Not only do it everyday but do it with the feeling of not knowing when this will end, if it does at all. I realised at that moment what absence of any hope felt like. In my own time and effort I will continue to do whatever small contribution I can make towards this cause." he said.

The generous contributions and commitment shown by Western Australian leaders who participate in this event helps shine a light on the plight of people experiencing homelessness, and ensures Vinnies WA can continue to provide the support and resources needed to find a pathway out of homelessness.

Please visit ceosleepout.org.au



Meet Julie!

For the past three years, Julie has been one of our Youth Workers at Passages Youth Engagement Hub in Peel and is passionate about the work she does supporting young people.

Young people visiting Passages Youth Engagement Hubs often have high needs, complex trauma and behavioural issues, finding it difficult to meet obligations and requirements of less specialised services.

Julie says that as a team, everyone working together, talking and exploring each client's situation is what makes the difference to a young person who presents at Passages.

"It's the flexibility to look outside the box in our responses, that we can offer support to everyone that knocks on the door and these are some of the most disconnected and vulnerable young people in our community that don't have anywhere else to go and no one else to turn to." Julie said.

Passages staff work under a Low Threshold and Change model whereby they eliminate barriers for young people accessing the service. That means that youth workers such as Julie understand that basic needs may need to be met first such as food, a shower or emotional support so young people are more likely to engage with support services.

Julie mentions that one of the reasons she finds working at Passages so rewarding is the integrated support that young people can access in a safe and positive environment.

"We can be the support that has been missing for a young person to start to reconnect with services and also to reconnect with the community. When I put on my badge and keys in the morning and come to work and open the gate, I feel proud. I'm proud to be part of a service that is so unique, non-judgemental and giving."



SERVICE SPOTLIGHT

Passages Youth Engagement Hub



Passages Youth Engagement Hubs in Perth and Peel provide a safe and supportive environment to address needs of young people experiencing a range of complex issues. These issues can range from homelessness, mental illness, poverty and holistic non-judgmental approach supporting young people most at risk.

Passages Youth Engagement Hubs is a joint venture between Rotary Club of Perth and Vinnies WA.

Donation Support

As the impact of COVID-19 added further complexity and risk to young people who are already vulnerable, recent grants and donations have helped Passages Youth Engagement Hubs continue to deliver its vital service.

Passages Youth Engagement Hubs receive no ongoing funding from the state government so when retail revenue and fundraising was significantly affected due to event cancellations and shop closures from the COVID crisis, new donations and grants became essential.

For Passages Perth, being able to remain open during the height of the crisis was only possible due to a very generous grant from our supporter the City of Vincent of \$200,000 in May which ensured program costs were covered and staff could continue to work fulltime.

Measures to reduce numbers in the facility at one time, along with stringent hygiene practices to ensure the safety of staff and young people visiting the service were introduced at both hubs. During this time, young people visiting Passages were directly affected by the crisis when support networks reduced face to face services by shifting to phone support only, or even shutting completely. Through a donation from the community based organisation Neami, mobile phones and credit were purchased so young people could stay in touch with the

Passages Perth team, reducing further isolation experienced from service changes as well as maintaining their connections to support.

A large supporter of local businesses and organisations in the Peel area is Halls Head Community Bank who through their Community Sponsorship Initiatives donated to Passages Peel. These funds were put towards purchasing essential items for young people such as wellness packs, food parcels, baby items, toiletries, sleeping bags, tents, underwear and warm clothing.

Many young people don't have the opportunity to access basic needs such as shower, laundry and kitchen facilities when they are experiencing homelessness, couch surfing or crisis accommodation which Passages can provide. A recent donation from Parmelia Hilton of frozen food, shampoos and conditioners were vital so this essential need could continue to be provided to young people during the lockdown period.

Social distancing had a significant impact on Passages having to reduce their cooking capacity in their kitchens and with supermarket shelves empty, access to food for young people that was normally provided in the service became a challenge. A priority was placed on access to food for young people which a donation from the Michele Canci Foundation helped achieve across both Hubs. In the early stages of COVID-19 shutdowns, the City of

Mandurah donated to Passages Peel frozen food and take away containers. Complementing this donation was a weekly delivery of frozen meals from Second Bite, as well as home cooked meals from local Mandurah resident Irene Kearns.

Providing meals and food can be one of the most immediate ways to respond to the needs of young people using Passages. Started during the height of the crisis, was a partnership between the local Toffee Café and Branch 28 of the Knights of the Southern Cross. A donation made it possible for freshly cooked meals to be delivered to Passages Perth each week providing a constant and reliable food supply. Although the project was initially to run for 15 weeks a further recent donation has meant that this can now be extended for another 5-6 weeks. Dr Anthony Rengel, a rural emergency hospital doctor and his wife donated what would have been their wedding reception deposit also to Toffee Café so this project can continue to provide meals to Passages Perth in the short term.

With many government restrictions now lifted, both Hubs are back to being fully operational. The incredible and continued support shown by the range of councils, organisations, community groups and individuals has meant that both Passages Youth Engagement Hubs can continue to be the first step for young people with complex needs out of homelessness.

Please visit passages.org.au

Homelessness Collaboration

Vinnies WA highly specialised services Passages Youth Engagement Hubs and Vinnies Tom Fisher House often work together to further support young people and adults build pathways out of homelessness.

Passages Youth Engagement Hubs in Perth and Mandurah, and Vinnies Tom Fisher House both provide services to address the underlying causes of disadvantage and homelessness. They do this through their unique Low Threshold and Change approach, which reduces barriers but can maximise someone's opportunities to find, access and engage with support services.

For street present young people, Passages Hubs are places to access essential needs such as showers, laundry facilities, a kitchen and computer and internet access. They are a safe supportive environment where young people can receive individualised support, life skill development, information and referrals and access to specialised visiting agencies.

Located only a few streets away from the Perth Passages Hub is Vinnies Tom Fisher House, which provides a 7 night stay for people experiencing homelessness aged 18 and over. Young people can be referred to Vinnies Tom Fisher House for a safe place to sleep and an expert evaluation of their situation. The referral process takes into consideration many factors that can be present at the time for both the young person and their entry into Vinnies Tom Fisher House, which ensures they have the best opportunity to receive intensive support.

Both services often work together to provide a pathway for young people who are homeless. Chrissie Smith, Manager of Vinnies Homelessness Services says that access to accommodation for young people with complex needs is extremely limited.

"It is very easy for a young person to become entrenched into an adult cycle of homelessness due to the limited availability of accommodation services. The ability to be able to refer Passages clients to Tom Fisher House, or put Tom Fisher House clients in touch with youth workers from Passages is incredibly valuable so a young person can feel totally supported and strengthen their opportunities for engagement with services."

"We recently had a young 20 year old woman with complex mental health issues referred to Vinnies Tom Fisher House. We organised for a youth coordinator from Passages to meet her during her stay so she could be linked with the appropriate age supports. The relationship and trust built up with her from both Passages and Tom Fisher House staff, meant that when she finished her 7 night stay, she was able to continue her engagement and access to services through the connections made with Passages." Chrissie said.



The safe environments of both services allow young people to build capacity and empower them to make decisions due to the success of the Low Threshold and Change model. Chrissie says that presenting young people with a non-judgemental environment when they are disconnected and vulnerable is essential to helping them on their journey for change. "In the case of the young woman, she was able to achieve strong outcomes because she felt accepted and supported in a positive and safe environment."

These highly specialised services support people to build a path way out of homelessness. Passages Hubs in Perth and Peel can be accessed by any young person aged 12-25 however Vinnies Tom Fisher House is a referral only service.

No place to go: Tim's Story



Tim had been living on the streets and visiting Passages Youth Engagement Hub Perth regularly. He frequently used one of the Hub's in-reach services Homeless Healthcare, which identified some health issues and referred him to hospital. After spending some weeks in hospital, Tim was able to be discharged but due to his ill health he could not return to the streets.

Passages worked alongside youth accommodation services to ensure he could find a stable and safe residence. A housing support worker contacted all youth accommodation services to try and locate a place for Tim. Due to COVID-19, many services had either reduced their operations or were not taking in new referrals so finding a place for Tim was very challenging.

Tim was accepted into transitional accommodation which was a safe place for his recovery. The accommodation however was unfurnished and Tim had little belongings and no money to buy

furniture, household items or even food. He was thrilled to learn that Vinnies Emergency Assistance could help with furniture which would give him a good start in his new place.

One of Passages long-time supporters is Sacred Heart Sorrento College, and they too heard about Tim's situation. Within one day, staff at the school were able to source electrical and white goods such as a fridge, microwave, television, kettle and toaster. They were also able to provide some groceries and a basket full of laundry and cleaning products. When the Vinnies truck arrived to deliver all the furniture and appliances to Tim, he was shocked and expressed his gratitude at the kindness everyone had shown to him.

Tim still visits Passages as he recovers from his health issues. Our thanks to Sacred Heart Sorrento College for their donations for Tim and continued support.



Have you ever considered volunteering?

At the core of what we do, is a group of approximately 3,500 volunteers using their passions, skills, talents and willingness to do whatever it takes to improve people's lives.

From helping people who most need our support through our home-visitations, customer service in our retail shops; driving trucks and delivering goods at our Distribution Centre and depots; call-

taking in our call centres; administration; knitting clothes and blankets in our knitters' group to archiving our historic documents and treasures, every contribution is highly valued and makes a difference to the lives of more than 55,000 West Australians each year.

Corporate teams, school groups and other organisations can be regularly seen assembling beds, sorting shipments of clothing and recently making up food hampers in our Distribution Centre as part of our emergency assistance program as people are increasingly affected by the impact of the pandemic.

During COVID-19 we were faced with one of our most challenging times when our services had to reduce or be suspended and our shops had to close, affecting nearly 3,000 of our valued and essential volunteers as we navigated our way through the impact of the crisis. And although many of us were affected in different ways during this time, the one thing that never changed was the commitment and resolve of our volunteers who were so incredibly willing to return to us and continue to help support their communities as soon as they could.

It is a privilege to work with volunteers and to see how their lives have benefited from volunteering. At Vinnies we celebrate our volunteers, how they share their stories over morning teas around the state, about how this activity has improved lives – creating caring communities; improving confidence through learning new skills; finding pathways to employment; feeling useful and valued.

Our volunteering program continues to evolve, becoming more contemporary, improving our technologies and expanding our communications which support our current volunteers and appeals to our new recruits. Volunteering is a choice that you make, not only to give back to your community but also to feel very much a part of one. As we have all experienced an enormous amount of change in recent times both socially and economically, so why don't you consider becoming a volunteer because when you care, lives are changed.

May Bowden
Vinnies WA Volunteer Manager

For more information about volunteering
vinnieswa.org.au/volunteer/

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To respect the privacy of the people we assist, some of the names and images may have been changed.