



FACING BELOW ZERO TEMPERATURES TO RAISE FUNDS FOR HOMELESS

Nearly \$8,000 has been raised for the Dubbo Region's homeless community, after dozens of community leaders slept rough in below-freezing temperatures as part of the Vinnies Sleepout. The event was originally meant to be held at Old Dubbo Gaol; however, COVID-19 restrictions meant the event had to be moved online, with prominent sports journalist Geoff Mann emceeing the event. Ten registered sleepers including Dubbo Regional Council (DRC) CEO Murray Wood, Manager Old Dubbo Gaol Julie Webster, and Dubbo Region Mayor Stephen Lawrence participated in the sleepout from their own backyards.

"It was wonderful to participate in the 2021 Vinnies sleep out along with council CEO Murray Wood. The event raised thousands of dollars and just as importantly raised awareness on this growing issue of homelessness. In the Dubbo region we have many hundreds of homeless people and the situation is worsening. Organisations like Orana Support Services, Barnados, Mission, St Vincent De Paul and Uniting Care – among several other support groups - are doing important

work in this area. Hopefully next year's event will be post pandemic and in person," said Councillor Lawrence.

It's estimated that there are currently 632 homeless people in the Dubbo Region, with more than half of them being women. The rate of homelessness in the Dubbo Region is sadly much higher than nearby councils that are similar in size to DRC. While there are a number of support services available including Vinnies, many are overwhelmed and struggling to keep up with demand. The aim of the Vinnies Sleepout is to raise funds to assist those people who are still waiting for help.

The ten participants in this year's sleepout showcased the various ways homeless people sleep rough, which doesn't always look how most people think. This included some participants sleeping in their backyard, car, patio and armchair. President of Vinnie Bathurst Central Council, Neil Rabbett, says while St Vincent de Paul provides assistance to homeless people, it also helps thousands of people who are experiencing hardship.

"Vinnies provides more than 30 services. Every day, St Vincent de Paul in NSW helps thousands of people through home, hospital, and prison visitations. It also provides assistance for homeless men, women and families, migrant and refugee assistance, and support for people living with a mental illness," said Mr Rabbett.

Reasons for homelessness vary, but the main reasons people end up sleeping rough include mental health, people escaping family and domestic violence, and drug and alcohol addictions. Across Australia, there are more than 116,000 homeless people sleeping rough. The annual Vinnies Sleepout raises vital funds to assist those people, and

provide support to other not-for-profit organisations. Recently, Vinnies completed 502 new housing units across NSW, 21 of them are in Dubbo.

Donations are still being accepted for the sleepout. Visit the Old Dubbo Gaol's Facebook page for information about how to donate to this year's sleepout.

Image caption: Participants met via Teams to start the night, after the event was moved from Old Dubbo Gaol to a virtual event.



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