

Stories of Hope

The Mini Vinnies in one school were invited one December to visit the local care home and sing some carols for the residents. They practised hard and spent the day pulling crackers, wearing party hats and eating mince pies. The following Monday, at the whole school assembly, the head teacher congratulated them for how well they represented the school and said they should be proud to be Mini Vinnies.

The head teacher went on to say that one of the residents had even made the effort to ring her and tell her that "this was the best day of our year". As the head teacher was talking a hand shot up. She was surprised and, not usually open to interruptions, asked whether there was a question. "Yes" answered one student, "when are we going back?" The head teacher replied, "We have been invited back to do the same thing next year". Suddenly three more hands shot up to join the first. Aware that interruptions have a way of multiplying, she said, "One last question and then we must move on".

Another student now asked what the other three were also thinking, "If this was the best day they've had for a whole year, shouldn't we go in more often?"

So, plans were put in place to go back for an Easter party. Sadly, a global pandemic had other ideas. However, one of the Mini Vinnies lived around the corner from that care home and during their daily exercise outside they would often walk past and wave at the residents if they could. The days turned into weeks, and they began to live for these walks. They cycled over, brought posters, waved and they wouldn't leave until they'd made someone smile through the window.

Then one day an opportunity presented itself. Commenting to their parent that the birdfeeders had run empty, they persuaded their parent to do an extra walk to the shops for seed. The parent wanted to encourage their child in this good work and so over the coming days they bought coconuts and made feeders to put the seeds in, so that every day the feeders were topped up. The Mini Vinnie continued to wave, and they noticed their audience of admirers growing.

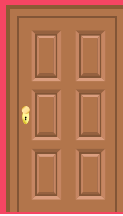
One day, while doing their self-elected role, some of the staff from the home ran out and waved to them to stop. The parent was worried that they were about to be in trouble for trespassing, but the Mini Vinnie waved as usual. The staff seemed excited to have stopped them and because they wanted to ask them a question. "Please can you settle an argument for us? Every resident says you are their child or grandchild. Who are you related to?" The Mini Vinnie explained they had no relatives at the care home but that they were visiting every day because they "have permission to do good works in the world". A deep friendship was sparked that day, the residents universally adopting the Mini Vinnie, the parent, and an SVP member who was now bringing the staff a care package of good coffee.

When school returned after the pandemic, the head teacher had dozens of letters from the care home to read out. In assembly, she asked the mystery Mini Vinnie to raise their hand. Remarkably though, they never did.





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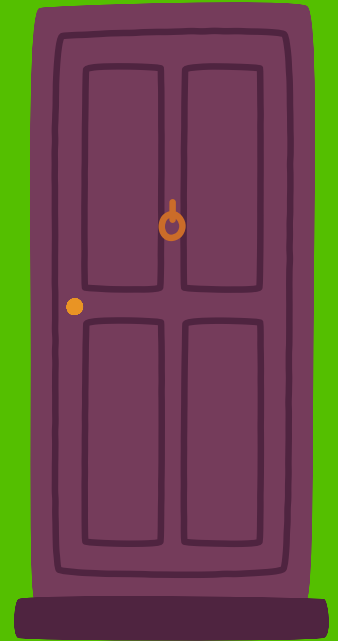
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"I am writing to advise you that one someone is taking more than they need from one of your parish groups. I know the work that the SVP do in supporting families in need, but I am sorry to tell you that our neighbour is just using you. On Monday, two of your members visited this family, bringing a food hamper. I saw them as they came in, but later that evening the family ordered kebabs, so they can't really be in need."

We do occasionally get letters of concern from the public, but this one was a little unusual. We contacted the adult SVP group and let them know the neighbour's concern. The adult SVP group already had an idea of who had contacted us.

They knew the family that they were supporting had recently been going through a terrible time. When they brought this food parcel to them, they knew that there were several unfamiliar ingredients to them, but they never felt that the family weren't thankful for these, or taking what they didn't need. They also knew that the family were in desperate need of the friendship the SVP could give. As a result of the letter, a long conversation took place about perhaps changing what the SVP group did for new visits, resulting in the following reply to the original message:

"Thank you for bringing your concern to our attention. I have spoken to the Parish SVP members, and we have discussed a number of ways to support those who are in need. They recognise that they do not always know what the most useful and helpful food is to put into a hamper to help a family going through a hard time. Inspired by your feedback, they have now changed their process for first visits and will now be asking those they visit to name a few food preferences. They will also now be using an online food app to make an order for the evening after the first visit. Thank you for your very useful feedback."





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At a recent National Meeting of members, a Bishop shared stories about how his own family had been helped by the SVP. He also shared a story which had long inspired him in faith and charity.

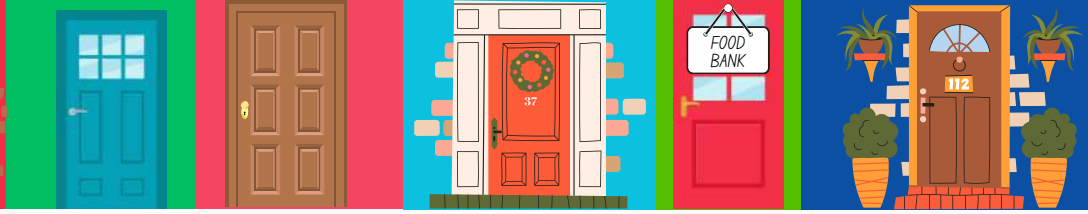
Many years ago, a mother of two, whose husband had died suddenly, was finding it hard to pay for the things she needed. She worked hard to ensure that the children's worn-out shoes were polished, and their patched uniforms were clean. The local SVP were very keen to offer support, but the lady did not consider herself to be in need. She didn't want to take charity from the SVP or the local parish.

One day, the parish decided to hold a raffle, which was supported by the local butchers. The prize was for a year's supply of meat. This lady bought one ticket, and you'll never guess who went on to win! She did!

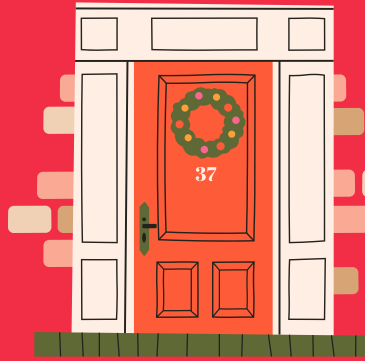
The Bishop doesn't know whether there was any bending of rules, but everybody noticed that the winner was always the person who needed the prize the most.



If you or someone you know needs help from the SVP, go to Info@svp.org.uk



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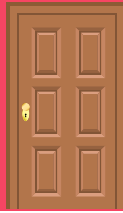
A retired man who had found himself a widow, and with little family around him, came to one of the SVP Community Support Projects to take part in the regular activities, meet friends and feel welcomed. When asked to describe what the experience had meant to him, he simply said this. "What I have found here at St Vincent's I can only describe as heaven on earth".

Many SVP members use their jobs, hobbies and interests to help serve other people. During a meeting with some new adult SVP members, one member shared that when she struggled to sleep, she found herself watching YouTube videos where homeless people were offered haircuts and beauty treatments. As a trained hairdresser she wished she had the confidence to do something similar. Another person spoke up and shared that they were an events planner and were good at organising other people's ideas. This led to a third person sharing that they had a van! Together, with some careful planning, this then became the group's first call to action as they provided an on the move hairdressers for the homeless.





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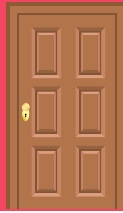
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Claire, one of our London SVP Conference (group) members, heard that Lillian, a woman she had worked with a long time ago, was unable to leave her home because she was elderly and found walking difficult. Lillian did not need help with money or things, but she was no longer able to cook for herself and was relying on ready meals or those provided by a carer. Her one wish, she said to Claire, was to eat some of the Jewish food her mother had made her as a child. Claire decided to research the recipes she might have enjoyed and reproduce them. Claire's own family are now fans of the meatloaf and chicken noodle soup that she delivers regularly to Lillian, whose eyes light up as she catches sight of the little foil dishes and the smells of her youth.



The staff at the St Vincent's centre in Leeds were made aware of a woman with three children, aged six, five and two, living in an unfurnished property. She and her family had had to move cities for their own safety. The staff at the centre soon discovered that not only were the family living in an unfurnished property, but also had no food. When she eventually went to the St Vincent's centre, the staff worked together to entirely furnish the house, give them food parcels, and provide the children with toys and a TV and DVD player.





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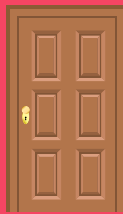
The cold winter weather prompted the Mini Vinnies at St Alban's Catholic Primary School to discuss what they could do to help their community and those in need. The Mini Vinnies decided to organise a clothing collection for the St Vincent's Community Shop. Thanks to the community's generosity, the Mini Vinnies received hundreds of items, including warm coats and shoes. The Mini Vinnies sorted and packed the clothes which were then sent to the shop to be sold or given to families who really needed them.

Marcus and his sister, Beth, had fallen out many years ago and there had been no contact between them for all that time. Marcus wanted to be reconciled, but fear of rejection had held him back for several years. Early one December, as Marcus talked about his long-lost sister; one of our members suggested that he might simply send Beth a Christmas card. Marcus took the plunge and was surprised to receive a response almost by return. Receiving the card had been just the push Beth needed to get back in touch with her brother; whom she also missed deeply. The pair arranged to meet and a few short weeks later were completely reconciled and keen to catch up on lost time, A little advice from someone who is not personally involved can sometimes help people to forgive themselves and others.





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When asked about one of the SVP Community Support Projects. "I came here on a bus – I'm not from Birkenhead but someone said to come and try it. I had to ask at the station, and I eventually got here. It was friendly and I had two coffees and seven bags of shopping on day one. I travel two hours a day to get here and back to the hostel but it's worth it. I've met nice people. By the time I leave here I am happier than when I came. I can also help other people that are new here and that feels good." – James (name changed), The Wirral

When UK storms forced many people from their homes, local SVP groups did everything possible to help those affected. Along with another community organisation, the SVP Conference (group) in Camberley, Surrey, put out a call for donations. They poured in from all directions, according to the Conference president, John. 'We were given at least 10 trolleys from local supermarkets as well as hundreds of bags from local shops and cafes.' The Youth SVP members joined the older members to deliver carloads of supplies to people in need. Donors helped pay for petrol for the vans. Working as a team with other charities often helps to get things done quickly and efficiently in times of crisis.



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On 15th March 2022, Year 6 children at St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Northampton held a coffee afternoon to raise funds for the people from Ukraine.

They were all talking about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and they were watching Newsround daily for updates.

They were concerned about the families fleeing their homes and, as Mini Vinnies, wanted to put their concern into action. Their teacher asked them what we would like to do, and everyone agreed they should hold a coffee afternoon, just as they had done for the bush fires in Australia, just before Covid 19.

They started by writing letters to the local shops and supermarkets asking for any donations they could give the school for a coffee afternoon. They were inundated with tea, coffee, sugar, biscuits, cakes, and milk. Everyone was very excited, and they created posters to send home to the parents and put up around the school.

The day came and the teachers helped the Mini Vinnies to set up the hall ready to welcome the parents. The afternoon was a great success and they raised £311 for a charity the SVP are supporting: Depaul International Emergency Appeal. The charity has a team of people in Romania and in Ukraine helping and supporting anyone who needs it.

The Mini Vinnies at St Mary's had so much tea and coffee left that they planned to hold more afternoons during the following term and continue to raise money for Ukraine.

