

## Media Release

### Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## Research highlights importance of St Vinnie's retail outlets

New research into the importance of St Vincent de Paul's retail outlets play in a community has been released.

The University of Tasmania's Centre for Rural Health was invited to assess Tasmania's retail outlets to see whether customer needs and expectations were being met.

The research project provided a snapshot of current customers' needs and what was required for future planning.

"Vinnies is 100% committed to providing a quality service to our customers," St Vincent de Paul Society (Tasmania) Chief Executive Officer Merleen Cronin said.

The Society's State Centre Chairman Peter Lyall said all 34 of the organisation's retail stores across the State were involved in the project.

"We felt to be able to extend or improve on the service provided we needed a better understanding of our customer's shopping habits, trends and practices," he said.

Research project lead Stuart Auckland said there was limited research on whether the outlets offer what the community wants.

"Despite the importance of these outlets in communities, there has been limited research into whether they are offering the types, quality and range of goods and services needed by the community, or whether their presence has any broader benefit or impact on the host community," Mr Auckland said.

The research project involved surveying customers and visitors, across all of the State's outlets. Focus groups were also held in different regions to help inform the research.

Mr Auckland said a total of 664 surveys were completed which represented an overall response rate of 50.3%.

He said the results helped to reinforce and highlight a long-held belief.

"These outlets are vital hubs for social inclusion," Mr Auckland said.

“In small rural communities it’s not so much about selling products as the outlets playing a key role in social inclusion and providing a sense of comradery.

“For some it’s the only opportunity they have for interaction with others. The social interaction between staff and customers, and between customers themselves, was highly valued by many in the survey.”

**Key findings from the survey included:**

- Providing more opportunities for greater social interactions for customers. This could include creating open space in outlets (with tea and coffee facilities) where customers could sit and chat, and/or host community meetings.
- To further promote the environmentally-friendly practice of buying pre-loved items. There is also an avenue to target the younger generation and its beliefs in supporting sustainability and the upcycling of goods.
- To continue to increase greater awareness of the role Vinnies plays in society (ie helping the disadvantaged) and how the retail outlets help to achieve these goals.

**Information released by:**

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