

# Hope in Action

Your compassion to help neighbors in need

During  
a time of  
instability, you  
protected what  
mattered most  
to Natasha



1925 **YEARS** 2025

A Century of Helping Our Neighbors In Need

Helping Our Neighbors In Need  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison



# Our Shared History of Innovation Guides Current Service Adaptations

We certainly live in interesting times. Political, environmental, social, and economic changes at the national and local level deeply affect our neighbors in need and deeply affect the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison. It's easy to think that things are harder now than they were in the past. But the 100-year history of the Society in Dane County shows that we've faced tough times before and made it through. Things may be different today, but one thing stays the same... we will keep helping our neighbors with care and respect.

For 100 years, kind people like you have found smart ways to fight hunger, homelessness, and hopelessness. You've given your time, ideas, money, and support to help make life better for families in need. I'm grateful for everyone, past and present, who has been brave enough to try new ideas and look for better ways to serve others. Here are some of the ways Vincentians have changed how to help our community...

- **1943** – The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Madison won an important case in the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The court said that nonprofit groups running thrift stores to help others didn't have to pay certain taxes. This decision became a model for the country.
- **1989** – The St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Program

opened. It was the first program in Dane County to offer temporary housing for single women and moms with young children. In 2022, the program changed to better help families who had been homeless. Now, it offers more personal support to help families stay housed.

- **1994** – The St. Vincent de Paul Processing Center opened. The center made it easier to sort and prepare donations like clothes, furniture, and household items. It provided St. Vinny's Thrift Stores with goods that were organized, clean, and fairly priced.
- **2013** – The St. Vincent de Paul Charitable Pharmacy opened to give free medicine to adults without health insurance. It's still the only free pharmacy in Wisconsin that's not part of a hospital or big health system.

We certainly live in interesting times, just as we always have. You are essential in helping neighbors in need as circumstances continue to change. Thank you for your continued support.

**Save the date for the evening of Wednesday, September 17th to learn about how adapting to a changing world drives our current and future care for neighbors.** I look forward to seeing you there!



**Julie Bennett**  
CEO & Executive Director

*Right: Julie in the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry.*



## Continue A 100-Year Legacy of Compassion

Since 1925, dedicated people have been helping their neighbors in need through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison. When you give, you uplift the dignity and alleviate the suffering of our Dane County neighbors. Make a gift of any amount today to continue this legacy of compassion at <https://svdpmadison.org/donate/>.



**\$25/month**  
Give a two-week supply of meat to one family



**\$50/month**  
Give a two-week supply of produce to one family



**\$100/month**  
Fill a prescription for an uninsured patient



## Lacy Garden Season Underway to Grow Produce for Pantry

The 26th season of Lacy Garden is underway! The garden is part of 10 Madison-area gardens that grow produce for pantries like ours. Last year, volunteers planted, grew, and harvested 10,000 lbs. of produce from this 1.25-acre sustainable garden. Volunteers plant over 50 different produce varieties including squash, watermelon, tomatoes, and peppers each season and are intentional about choosing a wide variety of produce to satisfy varying preferences of pantry users. **The garden is an incredible resource for neighbors using the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry as the produce they receive is locally grown, high quality, and extremely fresh.** During the harvest season, volunteers pick produce on Monday or Thursday evenings, deliver it to the pantry, and the food goes out to pantry users the very next day - can't get much more fresh than that!

Many area businesses send employee groups to volunteer at Lacy Garden. If your business has an interest in volunteering, contact Garden Co-Leader Peg O'Donoghue at (217) 649-7210.

**Above:** Volunteers gathered on May 22nd for a garden blessing with Fr. Brian Wilk and Cheryl Horne from Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish. Volunteers then held an informal reception to kick-off the season, share in community, and appreciate the generosity of the Lacy family who provides the land.

## A Note from Yoshio...

Hello everyone,

On the first pantry day of January 2025, we launched a new client registration system. It was a slow-going process on day one and, as the line of waiting cars in the street became dangerously long, we almost postponed. But, we survived the launch, and now, after five months of the new system, neighbors are seeing the dividends!

Our goal in implementing the "Bob Software" (affectionately named after local software developer Bob Braier, who generously donated the program) was to **use better data to improve quality and speed of neighbor service.**

I'm happy to report that both of these goals are being met. First, more robust data helps us have better conversations with families during check-in to tailor service. We can now ask questions like, "You marked your family as pescatarian, can we bring you a fish bag?" or "Last time you mentioned you don't have a kitchen, can we bring out extra ready-to-eat foods today?" Second, the new system includes barcoded cards for all pantry neighbors. Approximately 80% of families using our pantry now have these cards. With a card in hand, check-in is as quick as a scan of a barcode. There is dignity in food choice, of course, and there is also dignity in expeditious service—we are glad to offer the latter for busy families with little time to spare.

The speed of check-in, and customization of service, will only continue to improve as more families register and receive new cards. **We are proud to have a culture of adaptation** and thankful for all of the volunteers who've worked alongside us building this system.

**Yoshio Leeper**  
Food Pantry Coordinator



**Above:** Yoshio at the pantry check-in station holding a registration card



# Long-term Goods Storage Program Helps People Facing Homelessness

When Natasha was homeless, she slept sitting upright in her car surrounded by her personal belongings. After a chance encounter with two St. Vincent de Paul conference members, she began storing her most precious possessions at Vinny's Lockers, a small storage facility near the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry & Service Center.

"I needed a place to store my most valuable things like my mother's ashes, a picture of my grandpa, and photo albums of my kids and my childhood stuff and some jewelry," Natasha said. "Nothing that's worth anything, but it's important to me. It's.. you know, money can't buy these things, these memories."

Your support of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison helps vulnerable neighbors in ways meaningful to them. For Natatsha and others struggling to regain stability, Vinny's Lockers has been a God-send. This unique program offers free storage for up to 45 people, allowing them to safely store their personal papers, family mementos, and out-of-season clothing. Volunteer hosts request people check in every 60 days to extend their storage. Since self-storage unit costs about \$40-\$70 per month (money neighbors struggling with homelessness don't often have), Vinny's Lockers fills this need and is the only resource of its kind in Dane County.

Vinny's Lockers is one of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison's smallest charitable programs in terms of the monetary value of goods and services provided. **But, its services actually have the biggest personal value as Vinny's Lockers protects the priceless belongings of homeless people.**

### A small miracle led to help for Natasha

Last spring, Natasha got evicted from her apartment. After a prosperous 40-year career with companies like Apple and Mattel, she had become addicted to alcohol and had lost her job. She had very little money and wasn't connected to any resources for help. She was stressed and worried about the safety of her personal items because she was living out of her car.



As she was returning to her car one morning, Natasha saw a note on her dashboard. It was from Mike and Kathy Meehan, two St. Vincent de Paul conference members who had noticed her car in the neighborhood and wanted to help her. They offered to meet with Natsha.

"It was just kind of surreal and I don't remember what I really thought," Natasha recalled. "It didn't look suspicious or anything to me. It seemed super genuine, so why not call them?"

Natasha met with the couple who brought her lunch and some gift cards. She told them her situation and they connected her with Vinny's Lockers where she could store her belongings. She said the visit was one of the many miracles for her during this season of life.

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*"Mike and Vinny's Lockers was just a super great little corner in my soul where I felt things were safe."*

*- Natasha, Vinny's Lockers user*  
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Natasha went to Vinny's Lockers after the visit. Most of her items went into two large plastic tubs; documents and photos went into a fireproof cabinet. **Natasha says she felt a weight lift off her shoulders when she left Vinny's Lockers.** Being homeless, she had been focused on taking care of her basic needs and worrying about the safety of her belongings was causing her stress. She couldn't think of anything else because she had her belongings with her, she recalls. Knowing her items were safe at Vinny's Lockers gave her peace of mind and helped her come out of the mental fog she had been suffering. In addition, being in contact with volunteers provided her consistency



**Left:** Natasha outside Vinny's Lockers  
**Right:** Storage bins, sorting through personal items, and an image of St. Vincent de Paul at the Vinny's Lockers check-in desk

and the ability to build a relationship with people that could help her.

"Mike and Vinny's Lockers was just a super great little corner in my soul where I felt things were safe," Natasha remembered. "He kept in touch and I reported my progress to him as I was going. And it was all good stuff as I finally got serious about getting out of that hell I had been living in."

### One positive "rung on the ladder" to move forward

During this time, Natasha stayed at The Salvation Army and The Beacon. At one point she noticed a flyer for Just Bakery, an educational and vocational training program. She applied, completed rigorous coursework, and recently graduated from the program earning her ServeSafe certificate and credits towards a Madison College culinary degree. Natasha now has a job at Festival Foods and is living in a sober living community. When she was finally able to gather her things from Vinny's Lockers and place them on the shelves of her own apartment, it was a very special moment.

"I've been able to get my things on the shelves and it's just been quite a journey, Natasha said. "Mike and his wife and Vinny's Lockers has always been that one little safe place in my heart or soul or whatever you want to call it where I knew I had my important stuff and so then I got it back. I don't know what I would have done if they didn't have the lockers. It was just one, first, little glimmer of hope that helped me get out. **It's just one rung on the ladder. It was an important rung.**"

Reflecting back about the difficulties of being homeless, Natasha said many people don't realize

it's a full-time job. It's almost impossible to put into words how difficult being homeless is with all of the physical and emotional dangers, especially for women. It's a full-time job getting through every day. And for people suffering from addiction and being homeless, it's not as easy as it would seem to "just stop drinking, just stop doing drugs, just get a job" Natasha said. Alcoholism was part of her story, and addiction can happen to anybody. Now, she hopes to get into a position where she can make a difference and give back.

"There's a million other Natasha's out there and Jims and Johns and Daves and Marks and Sarahs that are all stuck in it and can't get out of it," Natasha said. "And that's the people I want to help. What I want to do with the rest of my life is figure out a way to get a position somewhere myself just to help people who are going through it. What I've gone through."

### You protect what matters most in times of instability

Your support of Vinny's Lockers makes a big difference in the lives of Dane County neighbors. Not only do you provide a safe place for people to store their personal belongings, you give peace of mind to neighbors like Natasha who know their items are safe. The personal service volunteers provide at Vinny's Lockers is especially meaningful as well.

When people are homeless, hungry, lacking medication, or in need of basic essentials, they turn to you and St. Vincent de Paul — Madison for help. Thank you for alleviating suffering and preventing family homelessness. **Every dollar you give provides essential help to neighbors this summer.**



## Centennial



Above: Employees at the Centennial Mass & Launch Luncheon

## Centennial Kick-Off Celebrates 100 Years of Vincentian Service

With joy, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison launched its 100th year of service on April 23rd with a special Centennial Mass & Launch Luncheon. The event gathered more than 550 supporters under one roof to reflect on a century of Catholic-inspired charity and service to Dane County neighbors in need.

The centennial celebrations are just beginning! Save the date for the evening of Wednesday, September 17th to learn about how adapting to a changing world drives our current and future care for neighbors. You'll have the chance to test your own innovation skills and hear a remarkable story of resilience from keynote speaker, John Foppe.

There are dozens of ways to enjoy the centennial this year! To join the fun, visit <https://svdpmadison.org/100-ways-to-get-involved-with-svdpmadison-centennial/>.



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### Mission

We are a Catholic lay organization in which members join together in friendship to grow spiritually by providing person-to-person services to our neighbors in need.

### Vincentian Values

Simplicity  
Humility  
Gentleness  
Selflessness  
Zeal

### Your Crucial Support

Your generosity changes the lives of Dane County neighbors in need. Donate online by scanning the QR code below.

Contact Eric Fleming at (608) 442-7200 x34 or [efleming@svdpmadison.org](mailto:efleming@svdpmadison.org) to leave a bequest in your will.



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