



# VINNIE'S CEO SLEEPOUT

*Marion Mays of Thalia Stanley Group and Bernadette Eriksen of Flavour Creations share their reasons for braving a cold night of sleeping rough.*

**D**on't take your safe, warm bed for granted because tonight, over 116,000 homeless Australians may not be sharing the same luxury. Australia's rates of homelessness have risen by 4.6 per cent over the last five years and the number of homeless women has doubled since 2013.

This year, Vinnies CEO Sleepout aims to raise \$6.42 million nationwide for Vinnies' services for people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage.

Marion Mays of Thalia Stanley Group and Bernadette Eriksen of Flavour Creations share their reasons for braving a cold night of sleeping rough.

## MARION MAYS CEO THALIA STANLEY GROUP

Two years ago my then nine-year old son changed the way I thought about those without a home. On a bitterly cold, wet winter's night we saw a woman, propped up against a shop window and half asleep with her small bag of possessions beside her.

My son asked me three questions, which I couldn't answer. Why was she sleeping outside on the street, would she be safe and where would she go to the toilet?

As adults we are conditioned to rationalise, excuse or even dismiss human suffering for our own comfort or convenience. My son interrupted my numbness to the plight of those experiencing homelessness. After that night I couldn't put the issue down and so I committed to taking action and doing the Vinnie CEO winter sleep out.

The right to housing extends far further than simply the right to a roof over one's head. It is the right to safety, security, adequate facilities and so much more.

One of my highest personal values is generosity of spirit and kindness – sounds fluffy I know, but I've coined the phrase that "kindness is currency" in my world anyway.

Professionally, Thalia Stanley Group highest values include contribution to our clients, industry, business sector and our community, so Vinnies Sleep Out



is my small way of proactively contributing to the community in which I live.

As a single mother, wealth mentor and financial literacy coach, I want to raise awareness of the vulnerability of many women to being left on the streets when they are impacted by the economic triple D of Divorce, Disease or Death.

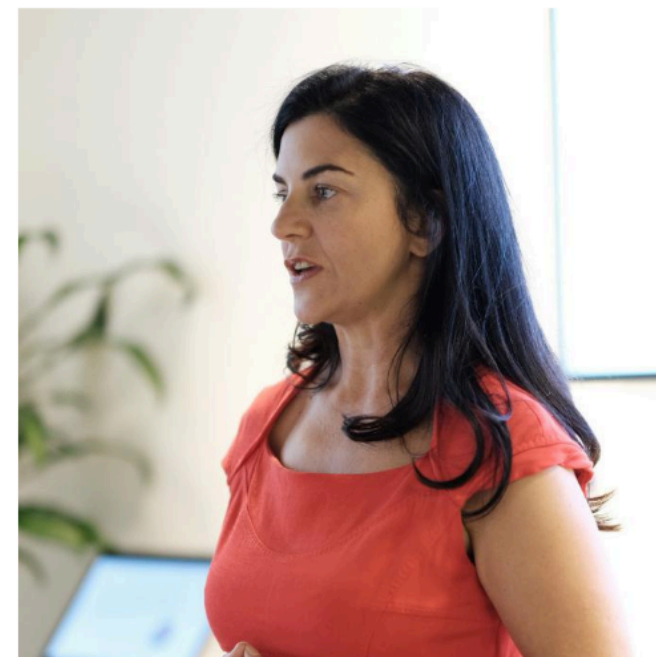
Women who flee abusive households also often have little or no money, no accommodation and young children to support. The situation is immensely challenging, and immensely sad.

Every single day in my business, I am contacted by women who are about to become or who are currently homeless. These are smart, educated women who have experienced the collision of an unplanned life event with their own lack of financial literacy.

Often the safety net and support services Vinnies provides are vital to their survival and re-integration to society. There are also those that are the misplaced of society, the long-term homelessness, and those without family or social connection. Vinnies is often the main resource keeping these people ALIVE!

Rightly or wrongly, I prefer to keep company with those who have similar values, and to be honest, there is kind of an unspoken expectation from me that my staff and suppliers will support and contribute to my efforts. All have so far!

My goal this year was \$7,777 and now that has shifted to \$11,000 for which I am still \$1,700 off. I have chosen a strategy of "active engagement" with my business community and even strangers via LinkedIn and social media. I have been tenacious, indeed



MARION MAYS, CEO OF THALIA STANLEY GROUP

shameless, in reaching out to other women, my business community and those I know have the resource to help my personal campaign. I have also shared the responsibility of fund raising with my team so that they are engaged and have ownership.

Whilst I love the challenge and hustle of business, I have found a much greater fulfillment in doing something like the Vinnies Sleep Out. It's nice to focus on something that is not about me, or my needs that is purely about being in service to others...simply because I can.

My message to other WNA members is to be supportive of other women trying to do good. There will come a time, be it for business or social causes that you will wish you had been more generous and supportive of your

fellow women in the business community.

Our character is only defined by our actions and leadership is a verb, so I openly invite all WNA members to donate to my personal Vinnie Sleep Out campaign.

*Sponsor Marion Mays:*  
[HERE](#)

**+** **OVER THE PAGE...**  
Hear from Bernadette Eriksen of Flavour Creations





“Someone who is homeless deserves to be treated with the same respect and dignity as someone who lives in a castle down the street.”

**BERNADETTE ERIKSEN  
FOUNDER & CEO FLAVOUR  
CREATIONS**

Winning Telstra Women's Business Awards puts the spotlight on you as a leader in the community, rather than just leading your own team at home, so I think it is really important to live what you say. I believe in helping and supporting people in times of need, to be compassionate and to never forget your humanity.

Our culture at Flavour Creations focuses on community and respect by restoring dignity and empowering people living with dysphagia – a difficulty in swallowing nutritious food or fluids. Vinnies CEO Sleep Out embodies our company culture and our behaviour and if the money and public awareness we raise by doing this helps the homeless that is a

fantastic outcome.

As a society we have to provide an environment where they feel safe and not judged just because they have found themselves in this terrible situation.

This is particularly important for homeless women, many of whom have fled an emotionally or physically abusive situation. They need our support, not our censure and we need to let them know that we are here as a community to look after them.

Homelessness could happen to any of us. It can come about from divorce, loss of a job or sudden changed circumstances. I have had first hand experience with this. Over the last 21 years, three women in my team have had to leave their relationships suddenly for various

reasons and I have assisted them by finding emergency shelter.

On a personal level, my husband left when I was pregnant with my second child. All my family was in Melbourne, I didn't have any support network and I had to work out quickly how I was going to keep a roof over our heads. We were all only a few steps away from homelessness and I never thought I would be in that position. I was fortunate that I was able to grow a great business and support my family but I certainly understand the fear of not knowing how to pay the rent next week.

Vinnies CEO Sleep Out also tells other women in the community, be they homeless or in a violent or abusive domestic situation they are thinking of leaving, that there are a lot of us out there willing to go the

extra mile to support them.

Flavour Creations initially set a fundraising target of \$5,000 and we have already reached that by doing a lot of initiatives in the company and community. Many of our suppliers have made a donation and written back to me personally giving me their encouragement.

Our team gave enthusiastic support to the cause when I raffled a fully paid day off for just \$2 a ticket. We raised around \$500 out of that initiative but in the end, it is also about putting my money where my mouth is and making that further investment because giving a day off disrupts the business.

Spending one night sleeping rough for Vinnies CEO Sleep Out is a great opportunity to draw attention to the plight of homelessness in this country and it is another form of leadership in action. For me it is

about taking what I have to the broader community and hopefully other members of AWN (or WNA?) will look at me and say, hey I can do that too.

Sometimes it is just simply about doing a small act of kindness that lets people in need know that you hear them and support them.

Sponsor Bernadette Eriksen: [HERE](#)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ann Buchner is an award winning journalist, documentary producer and corporate media trainer. After a 25 year career as a producer and writer at some of Australia's most iconic television programmes including Beyond 2000, Channel Nine's Small Business Show and Sunday, Ann now delights in assisting spokespeople from many of Australia's major corporations, State and Federal Government

departments and professional organizations to engage with the media with confidence, clarity and control.



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See Vinnies's CEO sleepout [HERE](#) for more details