

WHY I HELP **one person's story**

(The author is a long serving member of the St Vincent de Paul Society.)

I have assisted many people in all walks of life but some stay visually implanted in my memory . Every person I visit has a different and personal story ranging from suffering to joy, but mostly suffering. Many of the stories I have heard seem beyond belief, but seeing the tears in their eyes and hearing the shock in their voice, shows how real they are. From extreme circumstances, involving childhood experiences carried on to adulthood, as well as, children in situations beyond their control, experiencing disappointment, fear and despair.

I go to situations with the intention to assist those in need in every way possible. The reality is that what they share is important to them and it will be just as important to me. They are reaching out to St Vinnies because they feel they have tried everyone everywhere, from family to doctors to legal to all and are now left admitting they have reached the point of desperation. For some, this is too hard. For others, who have had no-one else to turn to, will explain their situation in full detail, to a total stranger, who listens and cares.

I vividly remember sitting at the dinner table of a young man who had come home one day from school, to find that his Mum had been shockingly killed. He was only 17, an only child and trying to complete his HSC. He had a girl friend there when I met him. She was initially sceptical, because she had been with him at other consultations, and was amazed to see how comfortable enough he became, to open up and tell this awful experience. He'd tried school counsellors and friends and had told only part of the story but still felt he couldn't tell it all. Slowly he started to share the horror of the event, in sickening and painful detail. I could still smell the bleach used by the Forensics and see in my mind the horrific picture as he spoke. He seemed quite surprisingly relaxed. The funeral had been months ago, time had passed and now he was left alone with all his emotions and the unknown. He had no idea what to do next.

My heart was in my throat, I could feel his pain intensely, but I knew I had to do something for this desperate young man. He had a roof over his head, but no money was coming in, bills were accumulating and a lot of the furniture and belongings was being taken by others. My son was a similar age at the time, so I asked myself, ***'What would I want for my son if I was looking down over him in this situation?'*** And if I was this young man, ***'What would I really need right now, but am feeling too confused to ask?'***

He continued to tell his story about what had all happened, how he felt when he walked in and found his Mum in the bedroom, the shock of it all and how he had coped so far. His disappointment's in other family members, and his gratitude to those who had tried. Every excruciating detail. The anguish of losing the only one he loved and anger at the person who had taken her from him. The numbness he felt of not knowing what to do, or where to go, and feeling terrified. Who would really understand what he was going through?? His mind was full of questions, living in constant panic and anxiety.

The cruel realities were still very fresh and uncomfortably impressed on his heart and mind. I knew he needed a lot of help. He was still respecting his Mother.... knowing she was never coming back. Still loving her.... wishing she would. Missing her,.... especially because he had no-one to talk to or relate to, feeling very lost and alone.

He needed emotional, financial and spiritual support and I wanted to offer as much as possible and as deeply as possible. I quietly engaged with the Holy Spirit to comfort him, and everyone around him. I prayed for a good outcome and a road to recovery, paved with hope. I was there for a long three hours. He was exhausted, but relieved to know somebody was there, and prepared to stand by him. I returned the next day to change the locks for his safety and security, preventing others from taking any more of his belongings and his Mum's personal possessions. His fridge and washing machine had been taken previously while he was at school, so they were replaced immediately. Now he could start to breathe more easily, knowing he was finally getting the assistance he needed. He hadn't even opened his Mum's mail because he didn't feel right 'it was addressed to her'. So I again went through the pile of bills for him. The utility companies were sending threatening outstanding bills, so they were called and arrangements made. Legal assistance was contacted to guide him to his best advantage.

The hurt and confusion started to ease as his load was getting lighter and trust started to re-emerge. He knew he had to stand alone and do what his Mum would have wanted. He completed his HSC and eventually moved to another place to feel free from the bad memories. I heard later that he was studying Counselling. I knew he would make a good one, with deep understanding, feeling the empathy and compassion to others. I had full faith in this young man. This is a real story, one of many hundreds and by no means the most harrowing. So you can see how important and Christian it is to lend a helping hand, to see and feel their pain and emptiness. I know most people would feel uncomfortable doing what I do. All I'm asking is to try to understand THEM.....to show compassion and help Vinnies help them.

It is my passion to serve all those who are reaching out in so many different ways. That's why I became a member of St Vincent de Paul and have continued this work for so long.