

MEDIA RELEASE



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Vinnies CEO Sleepout ambassador on a mission to help Gold Coast's hidden homeless

For Gold Coast businesswoman Lorraine Lovatt, homelessness on the Gold Coast is personal.

The Maylake Pty Ltd CEO has become one of the biggest supporters of the annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout and said knowing how it felt to be homeless was a driving factor behind her decision to become an event ambassador.

"I found myself in my late teens in a position of being without a home, effectively homeless, even though I had a good job," she said.

"I spent quite some time staying with different friends, effectively couch surfing, until I was able to, with the assistance of my then supervisor at work find a suitable and affordable share apartment.

"Just remembering how fortunate I was when I was young to have someone help me, I want to pay it forward and hopefully encourage others to also get involved in making a difference.

As part of her duties as an ambassador for this year's event on 20 June at Cbus Stadium, Lovatt said her aim is to breakdown people's misconceptions about the homelessness issue.

"I have found most people think of the old stereotypes, so many people I speak to do not realise the number of women, men, families as well as young adults experiencing the difficulties of having nowhere to call home," she said.

"They either living out of their cars or couch surfing with friends.

"I also wanted to be able to assist with the workload of my fellow ambassadors in raising awareness of the hidden homeless of all ages here on the Gold Coast."

Lovatt said the Sleepout has had a huge impact on the Gold Coast, with Vinnies establishing its Cornerstone Homelessness Prevention Service at Southport as a direct result of the Sleepout's success.

Cornerstone has assisted more than 160 Gold Coast residents to avoid homelessness since opening in April 2017, of those assisted 29 were over the age of 55, with the oldest being 89-years-old.

"The funds we raise are invaluable and all money raised stays on the Gold Coast, that's important, but we also have the right event to raise awareness - taking homelessness out of the shadows," Lovatt said.

"I think community and business leaders have a great opportunity to raise awareness at a more personal level, right throughout their personal and business networks, highlighting a very real and growing problem on the Gold Coast."

Vinnies aims to raise \$500,000 from the event this year, with funds raised going towards an affordable housing project on the Gold Coast for one of the fastest rising groups of homeless people in women over 50.

*According to a 2017 report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and there has been a 52 per cent increase in older women (over 55) contacting homeless agencies for help since 2011. ABS Census data indicates that 20.5 per cent of people considered homeless in Queensland are over the age of 55.

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