

Charitable gifts add depth to festivities

RESEARCH by the Australia Institute has found that more than 50 per cent of Australians receive a gift they don't want.

That translates into a lot of money being spent where it is not needed, and a lot of gifts being discarded the next day.

"The old saying that it's the thought that counts is so true," St Vincent de Paul Society state president Barbara Ryan said.

"Of course we want our family, friends, and colleagues to know we are thinking of them, and that we care about them, but there's a better way to do that than racing into a two-dollar shop and purchasing something that has no lasting value."

Gift-givers wanting to think differently this year can divert their generous intentions to a number of projects to help the needy.

VINNIES

"THE secret Santa or Kriss Kringle [giving games] are a prime example of where gift-giving begins to go wrong, when you consider the money wasted on reindeer ties and slogan mugs," Ms Ryan said.

"We're asking people to take a different approach this year, and give a Vinnies Secret Santa voucher.

"Academics explain the tradition as being about creating and maintaining social bonds, which is another way of saying it is about love, family and community.

"By making a donation to Vinnies in someone's name, you're spreading Christmas cheer further than you would imagine. Everyone

loves getting a present at Christmas. Vinnies wishes everyone could."

To support the Secret Santa Appeal, visit www.vinnies.org.au/secretsanta. To make a donation to the Christmas Appeal, visit www.vinnies.org.au or call 13 18 12.

WISHING TREE

YOU can place a gift under the Christmas Wishing Tree located at the front of any Kmart store.

To participate in the appeal, take a gift tag from the tree to identify the age and gender of a recipient and place it with your gift.

The Kmart Wishing Tree has collected more than 4.14 million gifts over the past 20 years and supports the Salvation Army and the Smith Family.

WORLD VISION SMILES

FINDING the perfect gift can be frustrating. What colour will they wear? What music do they like?

This year, World Vision makes choosing gifts easy with a range of Smiles gifts.

Smiles are gift vouchers that represent a contribution to World Vision's humanitarian work, such as a mosquito net or a chicken.

This year, Australians ordered almost \$4 million of life-changing gifts.

These included 4138 contributions to provide beehives and training to help families generate income; 1183 donkeys to carry heavy burdens; and 5800 contributions to provide clean water to help reduce waterborne diseases. Go to worldvision.com.au.

SIMPLY GIVING

WITH Christmas approaching, shopping centres are starting to resemble mosh pits, and finding a park is the first hurdle to overcome before the frenzy really sets in.

Simply Giving takes the pain out of shopping with its online service.

All they need to do is visit www.simply-giving.com.au, choose a charity, and pick a gift for a child who would otherwise receive nothing this Christmas.

You can give gifts to charities including The Smith Family, Mission Australia, Variety, Barnardos, The Salvation Army, Anglicare, The Starlight Children's Foundation, OzChild and the Benevolent Society.

NBCF

THIS Christmas, the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) has made it easier than ever to support breast cancer research, while still finding the perfect gifts for family and friends.

This festive season, skip the crowds and log on to the NBCF's online shop www.pinkribbonshop.org.au.

There are plenty of goodies online, including the Pink Ribbon Christmas gift pack that consists of an apron featuring the pink butterfly design, a pink silicon oven glove, a set of two Pink Ribbon tea towels, a pack of Pink Ribbon balloons, two Osram LED light-up dots and an inspirational book, *A Pocketful of Sequins*.