

NATIONAL OVERVIEW 2017 HEALTH & DIGNITY



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works



St Vincent de Paul Society

good works

This logo represents the hand of Christ that blesses the cup, the hand of love that offers the cup, and the hand of suffering that receives the cup.

The Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia wishes to acknowledge that we are on Aboriginal land. We pay respects to all traditional custodians.

Warning: This publication may contain the names and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased.

National Council Office

PO BOX 243
Deakin West, ACT 2600
Phone: 02 6202 1200
Fax: 02 6285 0159
Email: admin@svdp.org.au

Editorial Committee

Dr John Falzon and Ramesh Weeraratne

Editor

Colleen O'Sullivan

Design

Damon Carr
Design and Print Office
Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Printing

Doran Printing, Melbourne

Environmental Profile

SVDP National Overview 2016 is proudly printed in Australia on 100% recycled paper and is certified carbon neutral by the DCC&EE under the National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS). The paper also supports Landcare Australia. Made in Australia by an ISO 14001 certified mill. FSC certified. No chlorine bleaching occurs in the recycling process.

Cover Image

St Vincent de Paul Society members carrying out a home visitation in 2017.

Contents

4	National President's report	20–21	National Congress 2017
5	Our Vision and Purpose		The St Vincent de Paul Society members from across Australia attended this historical event held in Adelaide in October 2017. It was the first congress to be held by the Society in many decades.
6	Chief Executive Officer's report: 'The freedom to lead flourishing lives'		
7	National Council Members		
8	National Statistics	22	Volunteering with kindness and respect
	An overview of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.		The army of volunteers who deliver Fred's Van services in South Australia help to deliver a hot meal, blankets, donated books and social connection.
9–13	Advocacy report: 2017 overview		
14	The St Vincent de Paul Society's approach to health issues	23	Nutrition to feed the soul
15	Hep C program changes lives		The chef at Vinnies Men's Crisis Centre in Adelaide is passionate about providing good, nutritious food to people who are disadvantaged.
	In 2017 a hepatitis C clinic was opened at the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Sydney in response to a clearly identified need.	24–25	Kathy's return to good health
16–17	Removing barriers to provide essential support		The story of a Melbourne mother struck by illness illustrates the unique support the Society can provide to help people navigate their own recovery and solutions.
	Tom Fisher House in Perth offers people experiencing homelessness a safe place to sleep where they are treated with respect and dignity.	26	Overseas development
18	Alleviating isolation through Vinnies Night Patrol van		Overseas projects that Vinnies supports help all people in need, including those who have found refuge in a new country.
	The Night Patrol is a crucial point of contact for many people doing it rough in Canberra.	27	National Financial Statements 2017
19	Special Works take many forms		
	In Tasmania the Society operates Special Works for people facing physical and mental health challenges, disabilities and loneliness, as well as those in need of permanent care.		

A dignified approach to health

Treating people with dignity has been a feature of the Society since it was established by a young university student, Frederic Ozanam, in Paris in 1833. Our guiding document, *The Rule* outlines how Vincentians are to approach their personal encounters with the people they assist and encourages us all to create relationships built on trust and friendship. Most importantly, the Society is committed to serve people in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions. That is where dignity comes into the equation; people tend to respond warmly when they have a sense they are being treated as an equal, and with respect.

Having a dignified approach to people's health is a vital component of the work of the Society. The Society is concerned with all areas of health, but

the primary focus is the health of the most disadvantaged.

Our services encompass homelessness support, mental health programs, disability support, addiction support and much more. We are vocal supporters of Mental Health Week, held during the first week in October, and strong advocates for asylum seekers and refugees, whose health is detrimentally affected by languishing in off-shore detention centres. The Society's national council office regularly writes submissions or reports on the topic of health, to government inquiries, independent commissioners, government agencies, and human rights bodies.

This publication also offers the opportunity to also highlight the Society's unique programs and services that are not necessarily under the 'health' banner per se but are closely

related because they improve people's overall wellbeing. For example, the home visits and mobile food van services the Society's 60,000 plus members and volunteers conduct every week in cities and country towns across Australia help combat loneliness, which sadly is a growing issue in our communities.

Vincentians know these realities and together we do what we can to respond to them, inspired by the gospel imperative of justice and love:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' (Mt 25:35-36) ■

Graham West
National President

The Society's work in health

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Most of the work the Society does with health is with people living with a mental illness. The Society actively works to achieve greater acceptance for all people by challenging community attitudes that stigmatise and ostracise people through ignorance and fear. Almost half of Australians between 16 and 85 have experienced mental health issues at some point in their life. Mental illness can severely limit an individual's ability to relate to and interact with their family, friends and the broader community. It can also make maintaining employment and undertaking day-to-day activities difficult. People with mental illness often experience significant distress and disability.

The Society works directly with those experiencing mental health difficulties, helping them to reconnect with the community. The Compeer program run by the Society in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and the ACT is an internationally recognised and

award winning volunteer program that helps people with mental illness through friendships and support. The program also helps to break down the stigma associated with mental illness. Compeer matches volunteers in one-to-one friendship with people who have become socially isolated due to mental illness. In Western Australia, the Society runs Vincentcare, which offers accommodation and support to people with a lived experience of severe and enduring mental illness or homelessness.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Addiction refers to a range of behaviours, from smoking, to substance misuse, to gambling. The Society offers a range of services designed to assist people vulnerable to various kinds of addictions. We primarily assist people with gambling and substance misuse addictions. Programs include counselling as well as access to professional service providers and long-term programs.

People suffering from substance misuse can access a range of services including those designed to assist with a dual-diagnosis (a mental illness co-occurring with substance addiction). The Society operates from the perspective that holistic treatment works best and often the first priority in recovering from addiction is to remove the substance from the person. From here clients can then start exploring, identifying and facing up to any underlying issues that have either caused or contributed to their addiction.

The Society provides a suite of support services for people seeking relief from gambling addiction. Certain services are free of charge for people with gambling problems and their families. Counselling can help them to either cut back or stop gambling altogether. The Society helps to address issues that helped contribute to gambling becoming an issue. ■

Our Vision and Purpose



OUR MISSION

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

OUR VISION

The Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering 'a hand up' to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

OUR ASPIRATION

An Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice.

The Society advocates on several pressing social justice issues such as homelessness, poverty and asylum seekers. To read more about the Society's work in these areas and others, please visit the Our Impact section of our website.

OUR KEY VALUES

We have identified seven key values to which we are aligned and they include commitment, compassion, respect, integrity, empathy, advocacy and courage. We are proud of the key values for which we stand and invite you to find out more through the Get Involved section of our website.

Commitment – Loyalty in service to our mission, vision and values.

Compassion – Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement.

Respect – Service to all regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions.

Integrity – Promoting, maintaining and adhering to our mission, vision and values.

Empathy – Establishing relationships based on respect, trust, friendship and perception.

Advocacy – Working to transform the causes of poverty and challenging the causes of human injustice.

Courage – Encouraging spiritual growth, welcoming innovation and giving hope for the future.

FAITH IN ACTION

Vincentians believe that Jesus Christ is not only God, but also truly human and at home in our world. When the voice of the poor calls, they willingly leave their prayers, or other religious practices, knowing that they are leaving God for God. They seek to honour, love and serve their truly human God by honouring, loving and serving the poor, the abandoned, the victims of exclusion and adversity.

Inspired by the compassion of Jesus Christ to all, Vincentians seek to be compassionate, kind and deeply reverent to all those they serve. With trust in God's help, they see their work as a continuation of Christ's own work. Vincentians express their love for God, and for all God's people, by the sweat of their brow and the strength of their arms. They seek to do this with gentleness and humility, striving to be selfless and genuine, yet passionate about the needs of the poor. ■

The freedom to lead flourishing lives

This is the truth of globalisation: the construction of new walls ... The fundamental divide is between those included in the sphere of (relative) economic prosperity and those excluded from it.

– Slavoj Žižek

Our companions, those with whom we break bread and share hope, the courageous people who accompany us on our journey, have a powerful story to tell. Each story they tell is deeply personal. But together they tell a common story of exclusion not only from economic prosperity but also from respect. They tell the story of being shut out behind walls of loneliness, humiliation and despair. They bear collective witness to our mission to build a more just and compassionate society. The stories told by our companions teach us the meanings of justice, liberation and love. This, I believe, is what Pope Francis means when he says, 'We need to let ourselves be evangelised by the poor!'

We have a sacred duty to be true to the vision that is yearned for by those who are most oppressed by the histories of oppression and injustice. We are obliged to tell the stories we have heard; stories imbued with incredible hope alongside unbearable pain. But, as the great writer Ursula K Le Guin reminds us, 'You can't tell a story unless you've listened to a lot of stories.'

We must always begin *by listening* to the people. The greatest progressive achievements in Australian social policy have been through movements for social change that sprang from the concrete experience of people who understood the problems and, more to the point, grasped that the solution to these problems could only come from within the guts of the problems themselves.

Good policy is a product of honest questioning. It is formulated from below, not from above. It is not inherently disempowering. It is not made for a people 'for their own good'. In fact, one of the strongest determinants of health is the degree of empowerment.

The World Health Organisation's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health released in 2008 its report titled *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. According to its findings, 'Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.'

Sir Michael Marmot, Commission Chair said: 'Central to the Commission's recommendations is creating the conditions for people to be empowered, to have freedom to lead flourishing lives. Nowhere is lack of empowerment more obvious than in the plight of women in many parts of the world. Health suffers as a result.'

Interestingly the Report also found the following:

'Wealth alone does not have to determine the health of a nation's population. Some low-income countries such as Cuba, Costa Rica, China and the state of Kerala in India... have achieved levels of good health despite relatively low national incomes. But wealth can be wisely used. Nordic countries, for example, have followed policies that encouraged equality of benefits and services, full employment, gender equity and low levels of social exclusion. This is an outstanding example of what needs to be done everywhere.'

Good policy is organically connected to empowerment and a redistribution of resources as an essential element of genuine empowerment. Good policy needs not only to arise from critical questions; it should itself provide a relentless critique of existing reality.

When, for example, we embarked on a road towards universal free health care

in Australia (which sadly has since been greatly denuded), we were collectively posing a question to the existing reality. The situation cried out, *'Who has been missing out? Why is health care not best left to the mechanisms of the marketplace? Why were people going to prison for failure to pay their medical debts?'*

Policy is usually presented as a fait accompli cooked up in the rarefied atmosphere inhabited by those whose lives and learnings are alien and alienating to the people whose lives will be affected.

There is often an incredible presumption that people are incapable of analysing their own situation. This presumption carries with it a rejection of the notion of actually providing resources to people to allow them to articulate their analyses and proposed solutions. And yet, under the guiding stars of struggle and hope, the greatest social reforms have been wrought by grassroots movements, both in Australia and across the globe.

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a global network of love, a movement in which spirituality and the struggle for social justice are as one. As such, we are deeply connected with this profoundly human, simply sacred urge for a better world.

And, strengthened by the courage and hope of our companions—the people we walk with and learn from, the people who are crushed and excluded and exploited—we carry our grains of sand to the building site of a new society.

For all of us are deeply flawed, dappled with vulnerabilities. But, as Paul of Tarsus reminds us, 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor 12:10). Our weakness is collectively transformed into an indomitable strength when we collectively join together to create a future in which the walls of exclusion are torn down and where all may enjoy the freedom to lead flourishing lives. ■

Dr John Falzon
Chief Executive Officer

National Council Members



Graham West
National President



Claire Victory
Deputy National President



Liz Callaghan
National Secretary



Frank Brassil
National Treasurer



Fr Troy Bobbin
Spiritual Advisor



Pat Garcia
Vice President, Bailly



Rick Stankiewicz
Vice President, Shops



Cathryn Moore
Vice President, Youth & Young Adults Representative



Celina Lai
Vice President, Twinning



Denis Walsh
State President, New South Wales



Fay Gurr
President, Northern Territory



Michael Liddy
State President, Victoria



John Forrest
State President, Queensland



Toni Muir
State President, Tasmania



Cathy Beaton
State President, South Australia



Bob Burns
State President, Western Australia



Warwick Fulton
President, Canberra and Goulburn Territory Council



Brian Spencer
State President, South Australia
(until April 2017 and current National Council member)

National Council Staff

Dr John Falzon
Chief Executive Officer

Donna Scheerlinck
Executive Assistant to the National Council

Corinne Dobson
Director Policy and Research

Vincent Nguyen
National Senior Manager, Web & Digital

Anneloes de Graeff
National Manager, Strategic Marketing

Catherine Braybon
Senior National Marketing Coordinator

Samara Gentle
National Digital Marketing Specialist

Len Baglow
Policy and Media Advisor

Gregory Caruso
Administrative Support Officer National Council

Colleen O'Sullivan
Communications Advisor

Dr Tikka Wilson
National Web Advisor (volunteer)

Michael Moran
National Council Archivist (volunteer)

National Statistics



New South Wales

Conferences	387
Members	4,282
Volunteers	14,499
Shops	250
Employees	1,783



South Australia

Conferences	64
Members	883
Volunteers	3,400
Shops	36
Employees	80



Victoria

Conferences	269
Members	4,603
Volunteers	11,727
Shops	108
Employees	337



Northern Territory

Conferences	5
Members	37
Volunteers	192
Shops	5
Employees	20



Tasmania

Conferences	30
Members	278
Volunteers	1,114
Shops	34
Employees	120



Western Australia

Conferences	75
Members	1,035
Volunteers	1,783
Shops	48
Employees	175



Queensland

Conferences	211
Members	2,962
Volunteers	6,336
Shops	145
Employees	400



Canberra-Goulburn

Conferences	52
Members	680
Volunteers	1,320
Shops	26
Employees	137

National Council Office

Volunteers	2
Employees	10

Advocacy report: 2017 overview



It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the only people affected by poverty and inequality in Australia are those receiving income support from Centrelink. Sadly, the livelihoods of these people are constantly being threatened but we are also seeing threats to the meagre incomes of people struggling to survive on the minimum wage.

The Society does not limit itself to a ‘welfarist’ view of the world. We want to see people in employment, but we hold that they have a right to dignity and fair pay in the workforce. We are also deeply concerned at signs of a growing cohort of ‘working poor’, similar to the United States. The claim that the cut to penalty rates will create jobs has been highly contested by some economic modellers and labour market economists. The bottom line

is that, even if it were true, it is deeply unjust and economically irrational to force the lowest paid to take a pay cut in order to create jobs for others. This is not the way a fair society or a robust economy is created.

The government knows that the St Vincent de Paul Society and other organisations will be there to give people a hand up when their income is inadequate, whether it comes from social support or paid employment. But charitable assistance should not be the default mode of delivering income security. We need a fair and progressive tax system in which large corporations pay their fair share so that social expenditure (including social security, health, education, employment support and housing) can be strengthened rather than slashed. Pushing incomes down, while cutting social expenditure, is no way to ensure dignity for all, and it will only exacerbate the crisis in housing stress and homelessness in prosperous Australia.

2017 saw some harsh Budget measures

designed to punish young unemployed people as well as the undermining of some basic rights and conditions at the low-paid, insecure end of the labour market (such as cuts to penalty rates and the rolling out of a rather misguided internship scheme).

We have the right and the duty to be passionate about the fate of the people who face a daily struggle against not just material poverty, but also a degrading sense of loneliness made even harder to bear due to heightened social, political and economic disrespect.

Our privileged vocation of being accompanied on our journey by these People of God, the oppressed and downtrodden, is something that is deeply spiritual, deeply human. As the Society prepares for and seeks to shape the future, we need more than tactics—we need vision. For, as the Book of Proverbs (29:18) puts it so pertinently for us:

‘Where there is no vision the people perish’.

continued on page 10 >

◀ continued from page 9



SPEECHES, PAPERS, PRESENTATIONS

The movement for social justice, AMWU Tasmania Delegates' Conference, Launceston, 9 March 2017

Solidarity is the tenderness of the people, St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania Social Justice Forum, Launceston, 10 March 2017

Homelessness and inequality, Footscray City College Years 10–12, Footscray, 15 March 2017

A place to call home, Footscray City College Years 8–9, Footscray, 15 March 2017

Inequality, struggle and hope, United Voice Leaders Forum on Inequality, Sydney, 6 April 2017

Decriminalising hope, speech to Palm Sunday Refugee Rally, Canberra, 9 April 2017

Building a just and compassionate society, May Day Rally, Sydney, 7 May 2017

The poetry of justice, Catholic Mission One Heart Many Voices Conference, Sydney, 16 May 2017

Social justice: speaking truth, CFMEU Delegates Conference, Canberra, 19 May 2017

Class analysis and the struggle for a new society, guest lecture, Sociology Program, Narrabundah College, Canberra, 24 May 2017

There is another world but it is in this one, Progress 2017, Melbourne Town Hall, 7 June 2017

I tell you true, CEO Sleepout keynote speech, University of Melbourne, 22 June 2017

Homelessness and inequality, keynote speech, launch of the 'Poverty and Homelessness' edition of Parity, Hobart, 4 August 2017

United against inequality, MUA Veterans Group Meeting, Sydney, 8 August 2017

Dust on our shoes, keynote speech, Xavier Social Justice Network Advocacy Forum, Xavier College, Melbourne, 22 August 2017

The crushed and the cursed, speech to Concerned Catholics Public Forum, Centre for Christianity and Culture, Canberra, 31 August 2017

The movement for social justice, ASU Social Justice Forum, Sydney, 4 September 2017

Listening to the people, panel presentation, AEU Retreat, Birrigai, 8 September 2017

Solidarity and social justice, keynote speech, Local Community Services Association Annual Conference, Redfern, 19 September 2017

Standing with our companions, St Vincent de Paul Society National Congress, Adelaide, 6 October 2017

How we can reduce inequality, CFMEU Construction Division National Conference, Perth, 12 October 2017

Collective hope, keynote speech, United Voice NSW Delegates Conference, 17 October 2017

The dismantling of the safety net, keynote speech, 2017 Anti-Poverty Week Conference, Adelaide, 20 October 2017

Taking Back Control, Launch of the People's Inquiry on Privatisation Report, State Library, Melbourne, 23 October, 2017

Inequality, work and the community, Beyond Neoliberalism, Privatisation and Inequality Conference, Wollongong, 26 October 2017

We live in the shelter of each other, launch of the St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania Christmas Appeal, Launceston, 17 November 2017

Love will win, speech at Rally in Support of Refugees on Manus Island, Canberra, 23 November 2017

Insecure work and social security, Jobs Embassy Rally, Canberra, 5 December 2017

Inequality is a political choice, CFMEU Delegates Conference, Sydney, 15 December 2017

PUBLICATIONS

The National Energy Market—A hazy retail maze: observations from the Vinnies' Tariff-Tracking Project https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/256854_National_Energy_Market_-_A_hazy_retail_maze.pdf

The Relative Price index, the CPI and the implications of changing cost pressures on various household groups

'Humanity over humiliation', *Adelaide Voices*, Dec 2016–Feb 2017

'An ode to those "rich in brokenness and brimming with dreams"', *Pro Bono Australia News*, 15 December 2016 <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2016/12/ode-rich-brokenness-brimming-dreams/>

'The housing crisis in Australia is not

an economic inevitability', *Pearls and Irritations*, 29 January 2017 <http://johnmenadue.com/blog/?p=9239>

'Hope versus humiliation in the Federal Budget', *Eureka Street*, 10 May 2017 <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aid=52335#.WRQCRoiGOUk>

'Investing in people', *Workplace Review*, vol 8(1), Autumn 2017

'Fighting injustice and inequality: a revolution of love and mercy', in *The Francis effect III*, edited by D Achikian, P Gates and L Turvey-Collins, Sydney: Catholic Mission and Catholic Religious Australia, 2017

'The centrality of class analysis', *Parity*, July 2017, pp. 43-44

'Politics is concentrated economics', *Pearls and Irritations*, 25 August 2017 <http://johnmenadue.com/john-falzon-politics-is-concentrated-economics/>

'Inequality is a political choice. No matter how long it takes, we will defeat it', *The Guardian*, 1 August 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/01/inequality-is-a-political-choice-no-matter-how-long-it-takes-we-will-defeat-it>

'Inequality grinds us down', *Adelaide Voices*, September–November 2017

'The proposed welfare bill will push people further into poverty. We have to stand together against it', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/18/the-proposed-welfare-bill-will-push-people-further-into-poverty-we-have-to-stand-together-against-it>

'Inequality is not a personal choice—it's a choice governments make', *The Guardian*, 13 December 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/commentisfree/2017/dec/13/inequality-is-not-a-personal-choice-its-a-choice-governments-make>

SUBMISSIONS & INQUIRIES

2017–2018 Pre-Budget Submission

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017*

Submission to Department of Social Services, *Financial Wellbeing and Capability Activity Discussion Paper*

Submission to Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2017–18 Discussion Paper*

Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs, *Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Housing Affordability) Bill 2017*

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Cashless Debit Card) Bill 2017*

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Ending Carbon Tax Compensation) Bill 2017*

Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, *Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017*

Evidence to the Productivity Commission Public Hearing on Reforms to Human Services

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Better Targeting Student Payments) Bill 2017*

Joint Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission Consultation, *OPCAT and Civil Society*

Submission on *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Payment Integrity) Bill 2017*

continued on page 12 >

Submission to the Commonwealth Treasury, *Response to Tax Deductible Gift Recipient Reform Opportunities Discussion Paper, August 2017*

NATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Comprises members from each state and territory, and is supported by the National Council Office.

The social justice policy objectives of the committee are to:

- increase the understanding of members of the Society of broad social policy issues and the impact they have on the lives of the people in our communities
- encourage the members of the Society to actively critique social justice issues experienced in their work for the Society and their daily activities and to express the consequences of these to the broader community
- carry out the work of the Society in the spirit of Christian values set out in the Gospels, as mentioned in Luke 4:18–19, ‘to preach the good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives ... and to set at liberty those who are oppressed.’

JOINT CAMPAIGNS

Campaign to ratify UN Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT)

Social Determinants of Health Alliance

Energy Consumers Australia – Disconnection Project Joint Letter

COAG Energy Reform Joint Letter

‘Not My Debt’ Campaign

Refugee Council Joint Statement on refugees on Manus and Nauru

Joint Letter on Energy Policy

Joint Letter to the UN on proposed measures to (further) reduce social security benefits for single parents in Australia

Joint Statement calling on the Prime Minister to reconsider his government’s position and adopt the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’ as a matter of urgency

Open Letter to New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern on the Manus Island crisis

Open Statement to the Prime Minister, premiers and chief ministers on the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Joint Statement on the further development of the National Energy Guarantee

Community Legal Centres Funding Campaign

Joint letter to United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

Providing update on measures to (further) reduce social security benefits for single parents in Australia

Civil Society Statement to government calling for Royal Commission into violence and abuse against people with disability

Joint letter to Labor MPs regarding the social security budget cuts

Open Letter to the federal government on the health impacts of meagre welfare payments and other policies

Statement on the four-year anniversary of Australia’s offshore processing regime

Joint Statement on strengthening the social safety net

Joint Statement in support of NT Elders

Family Reunion Open Letter (with Refugee Council of Australia and Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum)

Campaign to withdraw Citizenship Bill

Opposition to company tax cuts

Opposition to social security cuts to fund NDIS

RESEARCH PROJECTS

‘Poverty and inequality’, (with UNSW and ACOSS)

‘Impact of benefit cuts on sole parents’ (in partnership with ANU, National Council for Single Mothers and their Children)

BRIEFING PAPERS

#LetThemStay campaign

‘FAQs on penalty rate decisions’

‘Drug-testing income support recipients’

‘Deadline for asylum seeker applications: updated briefing’

‘What’s wrong with the cashless welfare card?’

‘Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform Bill’

‘Government targets asylum seekers with threatening letters and sanctions’

MEDIA RELEASES

‘Governments should not view Centrelink as a weapon of deficit reduction’, 10 January 2017

‘Vinnies calls on government to rethink budget strategy’, 8 February 2017

‘Community sector welcomes Parliament’s opposition to social security cuts to fund the NDIS’, joint release with ACOSS, 14 February 2017

‘Vinnies deeply saddened by penalty rates decision’, 23 February 2017

‘Vinnies calls on government to stop cutting women’s incomes and services’, 7 March 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society urges Federal Parliament to reject Omnibus savings bill’, 21 March 2017

‘Groups respond to big business push for company tax cuts’, 30 March 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society slams threatening letters that are pushing vulnerable asylum seekers over the edge’, 7 April 2017

‘Violence and forced deportations threaten asylum seekers’, 19 April 2017

‘Budget 2017 boosts already high inequality’, 9 May 2017

‘Manus Island: St Vincent de Paul Society says asylum seekers must be brought to Australia now’, 16 May 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls for 1 October deadline for asylum seeker applications to be revoked’, 22 May 2017

‘\$70 million no compensation for asylum seekers’, 14 June 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society urges senate to block attack on people with a disability’, 20 June 2017

‘Robo-debt must end: government should support people, not intimidate them’, 21 June 2017

‘Weekend workers facing pay cut from Saturday’, 30 June 2017

‘Social housing desperately needed to halt the rising rate of homelessness’, 8 August 2017

‘Australia’s focus must be on health, not punitive drug-testing policy’, 22 August 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society applauds parliamentary motion to resettle refugees from Manus and Nauru’, 24 August 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls for compassion for asylum seekers’, 28 August 2017

‘Rohingya crisis: St Vincent de Paul Society urges Australia to increase intake of refugees’, 22 September 2017

‘Mission Australia, Vinnies and Anglicare Australia say inadequate income support payments are leading to poverty’, 26 September 2017

‘Welfare Reform Bill will push more people into poverty during Anti-Poverty Week’, 18 October 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls for urgent action to avert further injury and loss of life on Manus Island’, 30 October 2017

‘St Vincent de Paul Society today ramps up call to action on Manus’, 8 November 2017

‘Harassing Newstart recipients not a solution to drug addiction’, 13 November 2017

‘Respect integral to hope for unemployed’, 22 November 2017

‘Cashless debit card: a nod to populism, but bad policy’, 7 December 2017

‘Civil society groups welcome Australia’s ratification of torture prevention treaty’, 15 December 2017

This work has involved nearly 200 media interviews on issues such as:

- Inequality
- Poverty, including youth poverty
- Budget 2017
- Homelessness, including homelessness funding and youth homelessness
- Social and affordable housing
- Employment participation
- Unemployment, including regional unemployment and youth unemployment
- Compulsory income management
- Cashless debit card
- Privatisation of public services
- Random drug testing of Newstart recipients
- Manus Island and Nauru
- Refugees
- Robo-debt
- Disability
- Women’s incomes and services
- Minimum wage
- Low-paid, insecure work
- Penalty rates
- Demand for services
- Financial stress

- Cost of living
- TAFE as a pathway out of poverty
- Human rights
- Asylum seekers
- Energy costs and disconnections
- Social expenditure
- Economic priorities
- Tax reform

We also participated in a wide array of panels, committees, forums and working groups:

- ACOSS Board
- Housing and Homelessness Policy Network, ACOSS
- National Shelter Policy Network
- Community Sector Policy Network, ACOSS
- Tax Policy Network, ACOSS
- Health Policy Network, ACOSS
- Income Support and Employment Policy Network, ACOSS
- Australian Energy Regulators – Customer Consultative group
- Australian Energy Market Commission – reliability panel
- Vincentian Refugee Network
- Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum – Advisory Group
- Asylum Process Network, Refugee Council of Australia
- Detention and Offshore Processing Network, Refugee Council of Australia
- Asylum Seeker Advocacy Sector Network
- Asylum Seeker Advocacy Group
- Australia OPCAT Network
- The Australian Human Rights Commission’s Consultation on the OPCAT in Australia
- Organising Committee for Preventing Abuse in Detention Expert Symposium ■

The St Vincent de Paul Society's approach to health issues



People experiencing poverty and those at risk of homelessness may suffer multiple types of health-related disadvantage, such as poor physical health, mental illness and addiction. This intersection between health and a range of related issues is known as the 'social determinants of health' approach to health. The St Vincent de Paul Society strongly supports this approach to health and, while we are concerned with all areas of health, the primary focus is the health of the most disadvantaged people in our community.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The social determinants of health are the social inequalities that

are highly correlated with and causative of health problems. Social determinants are the types of social problems the Society is already working to address, such as housing, income insecurity, poor access to education and disadvantage. Public health research has shown that these social issues are the primary cause of health problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. Health is now understood to follow a social gradient. If we think of this 'gradient' as a ladder, people in disadvantaged groups are on the lower rungs and struggle to move up the ladder.

For over a decade the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been challenging governments to address the social determinants of health. According to WHO, poverty, social exclusion, poor housing and poor health systems are among the main social causes of ill health. Interestingly, there is a correlation between obesity and social

inequality and it is important that public health campaigns tackling the obesity epidemic take this into consideration. In Australia, interest in the social determinants of health has grown considerably with the Senate Inquiry into the Social Determinants of Health, and the establishment of the Social Determinants of Health Alliance (SDOHA) in 2013. The Society is one of 70-member organisations that form the Alliance. Linking health to welfare and disadvantage opens new doors for policy change. The Society believes that the community services sector and public health researchers and practitioners can achieve exponentially more than each can on their own. But greater investment in health—particularly health services such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), which are delivered by and for the First Peoples' of this land—is required to ensure people are treated promptly and with respect and dignity. ■

Hep C program changes lives

A Hepatitis C Clinic at the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo, Sydney began this year in response to a clearly identified need. We observed worrying rates of Hepatitis C among many of the men we were working with, including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, men with problematic drug and alcohol use, mental health concerns and cognitive impairment. Staff at the Preventative Health Program recognised them as a high risk group and, with new medication to combat Hepatitis C being placed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the timing was right. As well, our Hepatitis C Clinic is well regarded as a leader in quality practice in this area.

We worked with 45 clients who tested positive for Hepatitis C. Of this group, 18 have already tested as 'cured' (their blood test three months post-treatment shows no Hepatitis C). It is likely this number will rise significantly as more men reach the three-month threshold. Twenty-one people received a full course of Hepatitis B vaccination, and 19 are mid-way through the course.

There is great potential for growth of this model, which we can replicate within the Society's services and elsewhere. We will be looking at introducing it at our aged care facility, where many of the men have the condition, and at our drug and alcohol services around the state. ■



CASE STUDY: FRED AND JIM

Fred and Jim have both been associated with Matthew Talbot Clinic for many years. They are men in their early 60s who have schizophrenia, chronic lung disease and Hepatitis C.

They represent many in the homeless population who carry the heaviest burden of disease and are the hardest to treat.

Jim was housed for a few years but a lack of living skills and his vulnerability meant he lost his housing and returned to the streets. Fred has been housed locally for the past five years but continues to rely on the services of the Matthew Talbot Hostel for health care, food and social support.

When the big psychiatric institutions closed their doors, men like Fred and Jim lost many things, including housing and a purpose in life. Because their severe mental illnesses prevented them from living stable lives, they have lived on the streets or in homeless shelters for most of their adult lives.

Both became Hepatitis C positive along the way. With no treatment options readily available at the

time, they never hoped they would be cured.

They don't receive health care from mainstream health services and would be regarded as having chaotic lifestyles that might prevent successful treatment. Treatment includes having many blood tests and other investigations that they might refuse or fail to present for.

Fortunately, they have built good relationships with the staff of the Matthew Talbot Hostel Clinic. The nurses explained what the treatment involved and how, if they participated, they would receive lots of support and encouragement. A support worker would accompany them to regular doctors' appointments and hospital visits and assist with their daily medication service.

All of their care is managed and coordinated by the dedicated staff at the Hepatitis C Clinic, part of the Preventive Health Program. Both men are half way through their treatments and on target to be cured of their Hepatitis C virus.

Without the Matthew Talbot Hostel Hepatitis C Clinic there would be no hope for a cure for these two men. ■

Removing barriers to provide essential support



Sue Bumbak from the Member & Volunteer Services team sorting Christmas donations.

Long-term homelessness is very closely linked to chronic health conditions, mental illness, poor nutrition and dental conditions. As a consequence, people experiencing homelessness are often excluded from opportunities such as education, employment, health care and recreation.

In Western Australia, an estimated 9595 people are experiencing homelessness.¹ Approximately 10 per cent of people identified as homeless are sleeping rough (living on the streets), with the remaining homeless population staying in overcrowded dwellings, with other households and in short-term supported accommodation. Homelessness is an ongoing issue in Western Australia.

The St Vincent de Paul Society provides a 'low threshold' approach to its homelessness service delivery, which

means it removes as many barriers as possible to people accessing support.

Vinnies' Tom Fisher House was developed to support Perth's chronic long-term homeless who find it difficult to access other services due to their complex issues and unmet needs. In 2016 Tom Fisher House celebrated the opening of its new purpose-built facility. This created the opportunity to increase the number of beds available to 12 and provided the ability to accommodate couples. It also has facilities for pets to accompany their owners. Tom Fisher House is always in demand and unfortunately due to capacity is not able to accept all referrals.

Tom Fisher House offers seven nights of emergency accommodation. A crucial component of the service is that it provides an opportunity to develop a relationship with the people who access it and to support them to use Tom Fisher House as a point of engagement with other services, including alcohol and other drug, accommodation, health and mental health services.

In the last financial year, Tom Fisher House assisted 346 people with a place of respite. 75.7 per cent of people assisted were male and 24.3 per cent were female. 29.8 per cent of people receiving support were of Aboriginal origin.

Referrals made by Tom Fisher house to other services in 2016–17:

- 9.1%: medium and transitional housing
- 2.8%: long-term housing
- 3.9%: assertive outreach for rough sleepers
- 13.4%: mental health services
- 24%: health and medical services
- 4.7%: drug and alcohol counselling
- 0.4%: incest and sexual assault assistance
- 0.8%: trauma assistance ■

1. http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/WA_-_updated_Jan_2014.pdf

Edith's story reflective of complex health needs



Terri Johnson, from the retail team, outside a Vinnies shop.

The St Vincent de Paul Society was recently contacted by a concerned community member regarding the wellbeing and safety of an elderly lady who was sleeping rough outside a popular Perth organisation. In collaboration with other service providers, Edith was transported to Tom Fisher House.

On meeting Edith, support workers learned that she was 64 years old, with a range of conditions including diabetes, cellulitis, hypertension, thyroid disease and incontinence. Edith was also displaying signs of memory loss, depression and confusion.

Tom Fisher House provided Edith with a safe place to sleep and access to bathroom, laundry and kitchen facilities. Workers at Tom Fisher House treated Edith with respect and dignity. They attended to her personal needs and arranged for medical care to treat

the wounds to her legs and monitor her blood and sugar levels.

During her stay, Edith disclosed that an undiagnosed mental health issue of hoarding led to her becoming homeless and she had been discharged from hospital with no fixed address. Due to the complexity of Edith's health issues, Tom Fisher House advocated on her behalf for an appropriate level of care which led to Edith being re-hospitalised. Sadly Edith passed away a few days later while in hospital. ■

Alleviating isolation through the Vinnies Night Patrol van



The homelessness problem has been exacerbated in Canberra since ACT Housing units in the Civic area were demolished in recent months. While tenants were relocated to the outer suburbs of Canberra, many couch surfers and subletters now have nowhere to live.

The Vinnies Night Patrol is a flagship service of St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn and is the front line commitment to addressing the basic

human right to dignity and issues surrounding affordable housing.

The Night Patrol is a crucial point of contact for many people doing it rough. The service doesn't just provide a hot cup of coffee on a cold winter's night but a sense of security through friendship and community. This human contact and sense of community help to minimise feelings of isolation, which is an integral element to a positive mental outlook. The Night Patrol offers a safe space without judgement for people who are experiencing hardship. It connects them to services that can help them

to survive difficult situations that are often beyond their control.

The St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn takes a 'housing first' approach and believes that if the basic human right to proper housing were addressed in an effective manner, the mental health issues associated with homelessness would disappear, reducing the costs of running other services.

In 2016, Night Patrol provided 11,475 instance of support in the Canberra region and will continue to expand its services through the introduction of a second van. ■

CASE STUDY

Olivia* arrived in Canberra from interstate. With no knowledge of the community and with nowhere to live, she feared for her safety.

When Olivia found the Vinnies Night Patrol van, she knew she would be safe. The volunteers provided her with food, warm clothing and bedding to help her survive the freezing temperatures. The volunteers offered a non-judgemental ear and helped Olivia connect with OneLink.

Unfortunately but not unusually, all the women's shelters were full and Olivia had nowhere to go. The Night Patrol Coordinator, having heard from the volunteers about their concerns for Olivia, asked them to invite her to meet a member from the Street to Home service at a local free-food provider. The Street to Home team managed Olivia's case and provided outreach support. Soon after, St Vincent de Paul Society's supported accommodation services found Olivia somewhere to stay.

On her third night in the

accommodation, Olivia locked herself out of her unit. Having no warm clothing or a phone, Olivia went to the Vinnies Night Patrol. The volunteers assisted her by arranging for a locksmith to come to the unit where she was staying.

Olivia continues to visit the van, which is one of the only social connections she has in the community. Olivia knows the volunteers are there each night to talk and to help if she needs anything. ■

**Name changed to protect privacy*

Special Works take many forms in Tasmania

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania operates several Special Works and programs that offer social inclusion to members of our community who are faced with daily challenges such as physical and mental health issues, disabilities and loneliness, as well as people who are in need of permanent care.

We are proud to offer services that they can attend where they can enjoy themselves in a safe and non-judgemental environment and are treated with respect and dignity. Our Special Works vary in each of our four regions: Southern, Northern, Devonport and Burnie. We would like to highlight a few of these services.

OUR SOUP VAN SERVICES

Both the Southern and Northern Regions operate soup van services. Southern Region has been operating Loui's Van since 1992, which started as a small operation but has grown to a three-van service operating six nights a week in various municipalities of Hobart.

Vinnies Van began operation in the Northern Region in October 2015. The service began with one location and has now grown to two, with plans to further expand the service in the coming months.

Both soup van services provide much needed food and drinks, blankets and clothing to some of the most vulnerable people in our community. They also offer support and provide information on services available to help with their immediate needs,

including visiting a St Vincent de Paul Society office to talk to our conference members who can provide continued support to them.

THE CENTRAL MEN'S SHED: SOUTHERN REGION

The Central Men's Shed has been in operation for more than ten years and is run by a team of volunteers. The men's shed offers a safe environment for attendees and is a great place for men in the community to go and make new friends and be creative. It also offers respite for men who are tending to sick family members. Activities are based around woodwork and metalwork.

YORK PLACE SOCIAL CLUB: NORTHERN REGION

York Place is a social club for people living with physical and/or intellectual disabilities and has been in operation since 1995. Run every Saturday by a team of dedicated staff and volunteers, York Place offers attendees an environment where they can socialise and participate in activities in a non-structured format or enjoy some quiet time watching a movie or doing a puzzle. A nutritious meal is served at lunchtime, birthdays are celebrated and Santa arrives with gifts at the annual Christmas Party.

MT ST VINCENT NURSING HOME AND THERAPY CENTRE: DEVONPORT REGION

Mt St Vincent Nursing Home and Therapy Centre was established in 1969. Residents are provided with the care required to live a happy and dignified life in a safe and homely environment. Mt St Vincent Nursing Home and Therapy Centre has partnered with the University of Tasmania (UTAS) to host medical,

nursing and paramedic students so they can learn through a hands-on approach the daily tasks that are required to care for and interact with patients suffering from dementia.

VINCENT INDUSTRIES: BURNIE REGION

Vincent Industries, a special work of the Society in the Burnie Region, offers employment and training opportunities for around 40 adults living with a disability. This work includes cutting and bagging cleaning rags, catalogue deliveries and sorting of clothing, shoes and handbags that are recycled and exported to third world countries.

MARILLAC HOUSE

Marillac House, a Special Work of the Society in Tasmania, provides affordable home-away-from-home accommodation for patients travelling to Launceston for medical reasons and for relatives of patients in hospital. Staff and volunteers at Marillac House tend to guests in a caring and kind manner and offer their support when needed. Marillac House will celebrate its ten year anniversary in January 2018.

ASSISTANCE

Our dedicated conference members deliver assistance through home visitations and through assistance offices in the four regions. For the financial year ending 30 June 2017, the Society in Tasmania assisted 12,657 adults and 8800 children through 9130 visitations. Of these, 1031 people were assisted for the first time by the Society. Requests for assistance increased by 9.5 per cent in terms of the number of visitations and 10.2 per cent for the amount of assistance given. ■

Together we make all the difference



Almost 200 participants from across Australia took part in the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Congress 2017. The event, held in Adelaide from 6 to 8 October, was the first of its kind to be held by the Society in more than 60 years. It brought together members, volunteers and employees over three days to work towards formulating new ideas and ensuring the Vincentian charism continues in services.

Inspirational, emotional, prayerful and joyous are only a few of the words used to describe the congress experience. National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia, Graham West, described the congress as 'a step in a never-ending journey of renewal and action that our founder, Frederic Ozanam, called us to'.

At the congress Vincentians began the process of devising strategies to pilot for action and they have set deadlines for action and reporting. As the Society

moves forward from the congress it will keep members updated on the implementation of these plans for advancement via this website: <https://community.vinnies.org.au/>.

'We must also find even more new ways to put our calling into practice for the benefit of all,' Mr West said. 'As our members and companions call upon us to respond to new forms of poverty with new forms of action, we must create pathways for new ideas of service to be implemented at every level of the Society.'

'The Society has been at the heart, not only of the Church but of service in Australia. Our mission remains just as essential now as when we were founded. Thank you to all those who attended with such faith and openness; to those who volunteered, especially conference members and volunteers from South Australia; to the South Australian State Council, St Aloysius College and to those who worked quietly and diligently to bring the congress to fruition.'

In four years' time, Vincentians will come together again at the next national congress, the location of which is yet to be announced, to share their progress and continue the renewal of the Society. ■

1. There were almost 200 participants at the St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia's National Congress 2017.
2. Members of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia attended the National Congress 2017. Back row from left: Michael Liddy, Victoria State President; Cathy Beaton, South Australia State President; Denis Walsh, New South Wales State President; Graham West, National President; Frank Brassil, National Treasurer; Brian Spencer, Vice President on National Council; Dr John Falzon, National CEO; Warwick Fulton, President Territory Council of Canberra and Goulburn; Cathryn Moore, Vice President Youth & Young Adults Representative; and John Forrest, Queensland State President. Front row from left: Liz Callaghan, National Secretary; Pat Garcia, Vice President Housing Homelessness, Bailly; Toni Muir, Tasmania State President; Bob Burns, Western Australia State President; Claire Victory, Deputy National President; Celina Lai, Vice President Twinning; and Fay Gurr, Northern Territory President.
3. The St Vincent de Paul Society's chief executive officers at the National Congress 2017, from left: Canberra-Goulburn CEO Barnie van Wyk, National CEO Dr John Falzon, South Australian CEO David Wark, Victorian CEO Sue Cattermole, Queensland CEO Peter Maher and NSW CEO Jack de Groot.
4. Young Vincentians and employees of the St Vincent de Paul Society added their voice to discussions at the congress.
5. During the congress Simon Kneebone, a freelance cartoonist and illustrator for over 25 years, created tailored graphics to reflect the ideas and information being communicated.
6. National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Graham West.



Volunteering with kindness and respect



St Vincent de Paul South Australia's 10 Fred's Van services provide comfort and warm, nutritious meals for people experiencing disadvantage or homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness. Operating from eight sites across Adelaide and two regionally in Port Lincoln and Port Pirie, this emergency service is delivered by more than 600 committed volunteers.

Vinnies Fred's Van supports some of the most vulnerable people in the community who are experiencing a range of issues such as homelessness, social isolation and unemployment. Those forced to live rough are able

to access Fred's Van for a hot meal, blankets, donated books and social connection—so important for their physical and mental health.

This important service provided 40,000 meals over the 2016/17 year, an increase of 30 per cent from the year before. The army of volunteers who deliver Fred's Van services make an enormous difference to people experiencing disadvantage—not only through the meals provided but also the manner in which they assist, with kindness and respect. The increase in meals has been a driver to expand our services in the Northern suburbs to meet increasing demand in this area. Ultimately, Fred's Van provides a tangible benefit to the whole community by ameliorating the impact of major disadvantage on people and reducing health impacts.

Delivering a service that provides our companions with dignity and

respect is a high priority. With this in mind, in June 2017 the Salisbury Fred's Van service relocated from its outside location to a heated inside venue, enabling seated meals to be enjoyed in a social setting. This has also facilitated a broader menu, with positive impacts on nutrition and health.

Many people served by this key service are not homeless but struggling to make ends meet. Over the financial year we saw large increases in the attendance of families with children, reflecting increasing challenges experienced in the South Australian community.

The Society is grateful to the many partners who work with our Fred's Van service including OzHarvest and Orange Sky Laundry. We are also grateful to our generous Fred's Van supporters. ■

Nutrition to feed the soul

Ben Lewis is passionate about food. He dislikes wastage and believes that food is medicine. He considers true cooking to be about using what you have on hand in the cupboard and essentially adding ingredients that might otherwise be wasted and turning them into a beautiful meal.

It is this attitude and flexibility along with his professional chef experience and tertiary qualifications that found Ben employment as chef at our Vinnies Men's Crisis Centre in Adelaide.

Along with his passion for food, Ben is equally passionate about providing good, nutritious food to those who are disadvantaged and between houses. The role offers him the chance to feed people at a needy point in their lives. Ben also loves the diversity and autonomy of his job. It gives free rein to his creative flair as he waits to see what donated ingredients are delivered by OzHarvest and Foodbank to determine the menu for the week—not unlike the 'mystery box' on MasterChef.

A typical day for Ben is to put donated stock away, wash and prepare anything that needs it, freeze other things and generally prepare his kitchen for the start of the day. He then starts to cook. The Vincentian Centre kitchen is more like preparing a home cooked meal, just on a grander scale for 35 men. Ben prefers it that way and so do the men he serves. Any leftover food is packaged up and sent down to the Vincentian Centre for snacks or for those who may have missed dinner.

At around 5.30pm, Ben greets his reinforcements—the volunteers who give their time every day to support the kitchen. The volunteers are rotated on a fortnightly basis and assist with



Ben Lewis is the chef at Vinnies Men's Crisis Centre in Adelaide.

cooking and the less glamorous jobs such as peeling and chopping onions and putting the final touches on the meals before serving. In addition to the practical support, Ben encourages the volunteers to be at the counter serving, to add a human face to the dining experience by interacting with the men.

Ben is hoping to implement a plan to set up a structured work experience program in the kitchen so interested residents are able to assist and develop some skills while they are living in the Centre.

The best compliment Ben receives is when the men tell him the meal they have just eaten is 'as good Mum's' or 'like my Grandmother's cooking'. It fits with Ben's philosophy that a good meal is essential to doing anything in life. Ben says, 'To see the guys in a much better state of mind with a comforting meal they are familiar with, and one which conjures up positive memories from the past, that's really rewarding'. ■

Ben Lewis
Vinnies Men's Crisis Centre Chef

Kathy's return to good health



How Kathy Jones, a once-independent single mother of three teenaged girls, fell through the cracks is a cautionary tale for our times. It shows that the shock of injury and trauma of illness can touch anyone.

A few years ago, the Melbourne mother and her brood lived together in the suburb of Greensborough and enjoyed simple family pleasures—tennis, lively dinners and compulsory daily hugs.

Kathy worked four days a week and, at the recommendation of a workplace public health campaign,

undertook a routine medical procedure. It left her paralysed and unable to move. A one-in-a-million viral reaction rendered her completely unable to care for herself and her children.

‘I thought I was dying, it was just slowly taking over my whole body. I couldn’t move, I couldn’t talk, I couldn’t swallow, I couldn’t close my eyes. It affected me head to toe in two weeks,’ Kathy says.

She was hospitalised for six months, before defiantly returning home to be with her daughters. She had the promise of daily support from loved ones, so she could feed herself, do the washing and take the kids to school, but her dignity and independence were

gone. Kathy was also now living off Newstart payments alone - as Centrelink deemed her condition as viral and not a disability. Therefore, Kathy could not receive the Disability Support Pension (DSP) which would have helped her enormously.

‘Going from being an energetic mum, working and running kids around to sports, to being taken away from them for six months was a horrible, horrible thing to have to live through. I wouldn’t wish it on anyone,’ said Kathy.

Kathy’s unbelievable situation somehow found its way the ears of several members of the St Vincent de Paul Society of Victoria’s Greensborough Conference.

Diamond Valley Regional President John Ellis recalled his first encounter with Kathy with a tear in his eye.

‘Listening to her story was quite emotional. When you hear the story, you think “How on earth did that happen?”’ he says.

Fortunately, the conference had the means to help, thanks to their efforts hosting a Vinnies Community Sleepout in 2016.

‘We took it one step at a time and decided that the first major thing we could do would be to help with part payments of rent,’ says John.

Conference members such as John regularly extend their compassion to people coping with illness, which is often a time of overwhelming stress. This compassion can range from financial assistance to meet many daily living, to a friendly voice able to share in frustrations or sadness.

‘Vinnies has really been wonderful,’ adds Kathy. ‘They came in when I was really hitting rock bottom. It’s been a struggle to get through week to week and to know that they’re there and offering assistance is just incredible.’

‘Whenever the day comes that Kathy walks 10 steps by herself, I want to be there at the end of those 10 steps to give her a hug,’ he says.

No-one was holding their breath—least of all Kathy. Her medical practitioners wouldn’t give too much away, only saying that due to the severity of her paralysis, recovery—if she was lucky enough to recover movement in her legs—could take three years or more.

Two years since that fateful day of the routine procedure, Kathy is now progressing well. As John tells it, she is a long way from the desperation, depression and



Kathy Jones seen here with her daughters in early 2017.

feelings of helplessness that marked those early days of her condition.

Kathy’s return to good health will be a long process and the St Vincent de Paul Society is glad to play a role in helping her gain the confidence to cope with these challenges.

‘At a recent visit Kathy walked—walked! —to the front door of her property to meet us with a big hug, just as she promised us in the early days of our visits. I was so happy to be there and to witness that.’

Kathy, says John, was exhausted with the effort and there is still a long way to go, but thanks to the

love and support of her inner circle of family, friends and Diamond Valley Vinnies, she is finally on the path to recovery.

‘It was a highly emotional and powerful experience to see her out of her wheelchair, but I don’t think I’ll ever get over how easily such a strong, healthy, independent woman like Kathy fell through the cracks in the first place.’

Kathy’s story is a wonderful example of how unique each person’s encounter with the Society is and how local advocacy can ensure that people negotiate their own solutions in a way that is most appropriate for them. ■

Proud to support our partner countries

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia is proud to support our partner countries and the past year has been no exception.

Our partner countries are referred to as 'twins' and we have a very personal relationship with them.

TWINNING

A conference in the Asia Pacific region supported by an Australian conference is known as their twin. Twins are supported through prayer and the sharing of experiences and are sent funds each quarter to assist them in carrying out their work.

COUNCIL-TO-COUNCIL GRANTS

Councils in Australia are encouraged to twin with a council in our twinned countries. These funds provide necessary support to help that council administer its Society affairs in its area; for example, to assist with office space, equipment or transport for conference visitation. Councils in developing countries have no financial support for their operations. Council-to-council twinning payments are set and paid quarterly to help with managing budgets.

PROJECTS

Conferences in the Asia Pacific region, through their National Council, can ask their Australian twin to assist with projects to meet a special need in their area. These types of projects are encouraged as this process is an essential part of our twinning relationship with the Asia Pacific region.

ASSIST A STUDENT

The 'Assist a Student' program gives donors the opportunity to provide the funding for the education of a student in one of our partner countries for one year.

Throughout our partner countries, local St Vincent de Paul Society members select students from families in need to be supported by the program. They receive funding for one year and the money donated contributes to their education needs. Poverty is a vicious cycle. In many Asia Pacific countries poverty means talented individuals lack opportunities. The education of a person develops self-esteem and skills and in turn has a positive effect on the whole community. Education is the key to enabling an individual to

support themselves, their families and their communities independently in the future.

See Table 1 for a summary of the support the Society has provided through these programs.

Australian donors have provided the opportunity for education to 4553 students who might not otherwise have had the opportunity.

Pakistan	167
Kiribati	100
Thailand	900
Philippines	1400
Sri Lanka	920
Fiji	1066
Total	4553

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Overseas Development Council oversees our works with our partnered countries.

Celina Lai

Chair
Northern Territory

Tony Muir

Projects
Tasmania

Ron Sullivan

Promotion
Queensland

Incoming members:

Hannah McIntosh

AAS
Victoria

Brian Headford

Promotion
Queensland

Table 1

	Council-to-council (\$)	Twinning (\$)	Projects (\$)	Grants (\$)
Fiji	4,000	7,680		1,350
Thailand	5,300	41,680		9,260
Solomon Islands		320		400
Philippines	5,610	62,480		17,170
Indonesia	4,740	83,120		10,926
India	18,000	417,360	89,663	106,878
Pakistan	3,395	20,640	112,200	14,200
Kiribati		320		200
Sri Lanka	3,942	1,600	7,992	400
ECI		320		
Vanuatu		720		200
Myanmar		9,980		200
Totals	44,987	646,220	209,855	161,184

St Vincent de Paul Society National Financial Statements 2017

The financial accounting is done largely at a State and Territory level, where the various incorporated entities function. The Society uses a common chart of accounts across Australia, enabling an aggregated view of the Society's financial position.

	Revenue \$	Operating Expenses \$	Net surplus / (deficit) \$
Community Services			
Aged Care	91,863,393	92,777,061	(913,668)
Community Housing	11,333,024	10,429,044	903,980
Disability Services	43,887,251	41,556,182	2,331,069
Financial Assistance Services	1,054,083	2,110,280	(1,056,197)
Help for People in Crisis	25,927,622	70,830,592	(44,902,970)
Home assist Services	100,649,139	76,340,227	24,308,912
Homeless Services	61,227,573	65,630,637	(4,403,063)
Accommodation and Support Services (Vic only)	23,341,207	23,400,777	(59,570)
Migrants and Refugees	637,095	1,354,879	(717,784)
Natural Disaster Recovery and Relief	442,061	341,931	100,130
Overseas Development	49,250	541,301	(492,051)
Youth Services	901,267	1,878,671	(977,404)
Total Community Services	361,312,965	387,191,581	(25,878,615)
Supporting Services			
Fundraising	41,615,718	9,167,024	32,448,694
Operational Support Services	5,896,452	15,907,649	(10,011,197)
Retail Operations	175,018,884	115,187,889	59,830,994
Total Supporting Services	222,531,053	140,262,562	82,268,491
Shared Services			
Management and Administration Services	23,244,952	34,724,359	(11,479,407)
Finance Services	17,161,167	13,837,750	3,323,417
Human Resource Services	20,978	4,796,003	(4,775,025)
Information Communication Telecommunication Services	-	8,907,667	(8,907,667)
Legal and Compliance Services	-	1,660,097	(1,660,097)
Total Shared Services	40,427,096	63,925,875	(23,498,779)
Other comprehensive income			
Reclassification adjustment on impairment of available for sale financial assets	755,565	-	755,565
Net changes in fair value of available for sale financial assets	2,133,572	460,568	1,673,004
Total other comprehensive income for the year	2,889,137	460,568	2,428,569
Total comprehensive income for the year	627,160,252	591,840,587	35,319,666



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA, PO BOX 243, DEAKIN WEST, ACT 2600.
WWW.VINNIES.ORG.AU