

NATIONAL
OVERVIEW
2015

POVERTY IS NOT A PERSONAL CHOICE



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.

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Environmental Profile

SVDP National Overview 2015 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.

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Passion to overpower poverty

True to its origins, the St Vincent de Paul Society continues to respond with hope and love to those living in poverty, working for a society in which everyone is valued.

I sometimes wonder if a passionate young Frenchman, challenged by the words of others, that if he spoke of the good works of the Church but did not get his hands dirty doing this work himself, could have contemplated the enormous impact that the Society he helped found would have in alleviating poverty in Australia, a continent on the other side of the world?

Rather than being stung by these words, he took it as a call to put his faith into action and help those most in need in his local community, recognising Christ in all by working with others. Since that time over 180 years ago, other men and women, moved by faith and compassion, have been working in service.

The National Overview shows a St Vincent de Paul Society responding to the poverty and challenges of a new age, but just as passionate in its service. The women and men who make up the Society share their time, possessions and joy with the lonely, the vulnerable and the forgotten.

They share a cup of tea in the living room of a family labouring under the crushing weight of debt arising from an illness that has prevented the parents from working, and help them look for a solution to their problems.

They offer a meal to a young mum and her children who have left everything behind to escape a violent relationship and seek refuge in our facilities.



Graham West

They sit and listen with a young man as he shares the story that led him to sleep rough in the streets before finding a bed in one of our services.

They laugh with a customer who regularly pops in to one of our Vinnies centres to check out what's new before returning to a lonely flat.

The women and men of the St Vincent de Paul Society do all of these things and more—they serve in hope.

They hope for a society that offers all Australians a chance to be the best they can be and to participate fully in the community.

They hope for a society where no-one need face an awful night worrying about their safety, hoping for the coming dawn, moving from place to place looking for a place to lay their head.

As a Society serving in hope and love we also share the stories of those in need in our community to ensure that no-one is forgotten and to encourage all of us to reflect and work on new ways to ensure that no-one need live in poverty in our home, Australia. ■

Graham West
National President

IN MEMORIAL - TONY THORNTON

During the period this report covers, our former National President and serving National Treasurer Tony Thornton died. Tony was a passionate Vincentian always willing to raise his voice in defence of the poor, the lonely, the sick and the forgotten.

His legacy lives on in many of the works within this report, a loving family and in a Society that remains committed to service in hope.

Vale Tony Thornton.



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 on 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. ■

Poverty is not a personal choice

The shameful treatment of asylum seekers, cuts to social expenditure, and failure to adequately address the causes of unemployment diminish our society as a whole. Our mission is to strive for a society that is structured so everyone has a share in its wealth.

Our history in Australia is laden with the long and violent act of dispossession, of forcefully taking members of the First Peoples away from their homes. Long before there was such a thing as Australia there were families who lived here, people who cared for each other and the earth, people for whom the world was a deeply spiritual place, people who loved to tell stories about the things that really mattered to them: their dreams and their struggles, their hopes and their passions.

Then there was a giant cataclysm.

Families were broken. Some were massacred. Many were taken away from each other. Dreams were torn apart, the sacred was trampled upon. It wasn't just the land that was colonised; families were made to feel the wounds of dispossession.

Life has taught us that an injury to one is an injury to all.

From the injury to the First Peoples all the way to the injury to the most recent arrivals—with the people seeking safety on our shores locked away in shameful offshore limbos of cruelty and punishment—all of these injuries against people who are crushed and cursed, scattered and discarded, excluded and exploited; all of these injuries are felt deeply by all of us who stand in solidarity with them.

We are injured when government cuts social expenditure whilst refusing to make major corporations and high wealth individuals pay their share.

We are injured when unemployment and underemployment are blamed on the individual instead of being addressed by the government through a Jobs Plan.

We are injured when universal healthcare is hammered, when public education is attacked, when TAFE is undermined, when universities are deregulated.

We are injured when the common good is dismembered, when people are forced into poverty, compelled to rely on charity while all they long for is justice.

We are injured when, in the words of the late Pope John Paul II, *the maximisation of profits takes priority over the rights of workers*, including the residualised and discarded.

As Pope Francis is fond of pointing out, the long, fruitless wait of the excluded for some of the wealth to trickle down is one of the most audacious con jobs in modern history.

We all know that our economic system is built not on the objective of the wealth trickling down but on the certainty that wealth bubbles up. In the meantime the excluded are being told to be patient; that their time too will come, once we get the budget back into surplus, once we've paid the debt and stopped the boats and cut the taxes; that they only need to wait a little longer.

But when you've got a rich country like ours supposedly unable to afford to ensure that the more than 100,000 people experiencing homelessness or the more than 200,000 people on the waiting list for social housing have a place to call home, it is not a misfortune or a mistake. When you have a single Newstart payment that sits at only 40% of the minimum wage, it is also the sound of the excluded still waiting.

Disability advocates have long made the excellent point that the construction of *disability* largely depends on how we structure our society and our economy.



Dr John Falzon

If someone cannot walk up the steps we can decide as a society that it's tough luck or even that they should be blamed. On the other hand, we can just use our common sense and build a ramp. The same goes for other experiences of exclusion. Poverty and unemployment are painted as moral failures. The causes, however, are structural rather than personal.

The ground-breaking Social Justice Statement of the Australian Bishops in 1996 articulated this bold prophetic message, saying that:

In the main, people are poor not because they are lazy or lacking in ability or because they are unlucky. They are poor because of the way society, including its economic system, is organised.

We need to be honest about the fact that we refuse to build the ramps. We need to acknowledge that, actually, we do the opposite. We build walls and then we condemn the people we've built the walls around for lacking the aspiration to scale them.

For the thousands of members of the St Vincent de Paul Society across prosperous Australia, our day-to-day work is focussed on helping people over the walls. Our historic task, our long-haul project, however, is to tear the walls down.

As Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, our founder, wrote so powerfully:

Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is the role of justice to prevent the attack.

To all who unsparingly carry out this sacred mission of compassion and justice and to all who so generously support us in this mission to build a better society, thank you.

Poverty is not a personal choice.

But our willingness, as a society, to remove the causes of poverty and inequality, is a choice, and I thank all who join with us in building the social movement that makes it. ■

Dr John Falzon
Chief Executive Officer

National Council Members



Graham West
National President



Claire Victory
Deputy National President



Liz Callaghan
National Secretary



Pat Garcia
Vice President, Bailly



Rick Stankiewicz
Vice President Retail Centres



Tony Muir
Vice President Twinning



Toni Muir
Tasmanian State President



Kathleen Ferrero
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Bob Burns
National Treasurer (Acting)
Western Australian State President



Frank Brassil
Territory Council of Canberra and Goulburn President



Denis Walsh
New South Wales State President



Gerry McCormack
Northern Territory President



John Forrest
Queensland State President



Brian Spencer
South Australian State President



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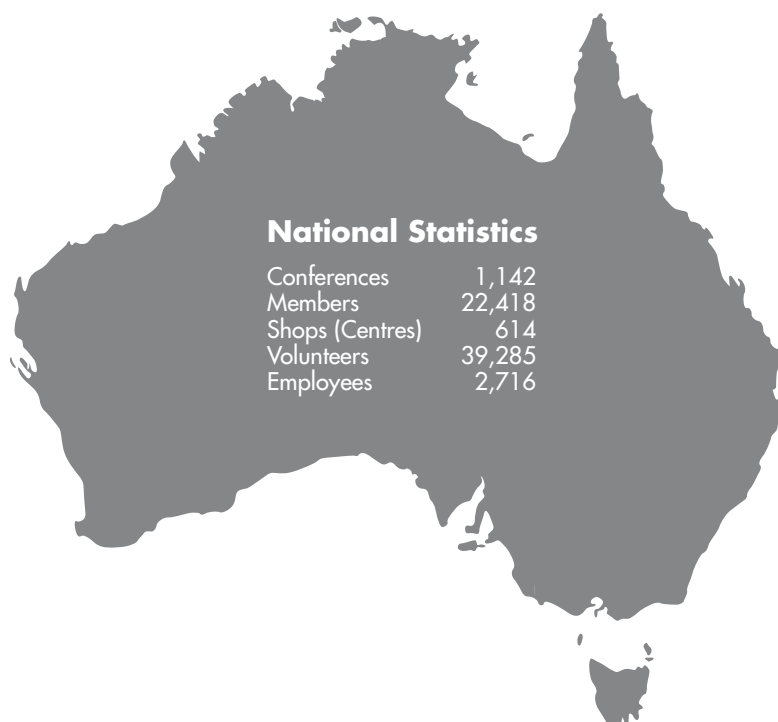
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National Statistics



New South Wales

Conferences	414
Members	11,691
Shops (Centres)	232
Volunteers	14,512
Employees	1,473



South Australia

Conferences	61
Members	836
Shops (Centres)	35
Volunteers	2,225
Employees	68



Victoria

Conferences	287
Members	3,810
Shops (Centres)	103
Volunteers	12,149
Employees	282



Northern Territory

Conferences	7
Members	70
Shops (Centres)	6
Volunteers	350
Employees	38



Tasmania

Conferences	22
Members	258
Shops (Centres)	34
Volunteers	952
Employees	226



Western Australia

Conferences	88
Members	1,673
Shops (Centres)	46
Volunteers	2,129
Employees	145



Queensland

Conferences	210
Members	3,410
Shops (Centres)	134
Volunteers	5,643
Employees	348



Canberra-Goulburn

Conferences	53
Members	670
Shops (Centres)	24
Volunteers	1,325
Employees	136

National Council Office

Volunteers	2
Employees	7

2015: Tackling poverty and inequality head-on

The St Vincent de Paul Society engages with government and key organisations to focus attention on the structural causes of unemployment and poverty and to advocate for economic and social policy that addresses these causes.

Our advocacy work throughout 2015 focussed on our struggle against the framing of economic and social policy in terms that deny the structural causes of unemployment and poverty, putting the blame squarely on the shoulders of the people we assist, and even claiming that social expenditure is a negative rather than something we should be proud of as a nation. In the meantime, health spending, education resources, community legal aid and social services have been cut and the single unemployment benefit remains at around 40 per cent of the minimum wage, the last being a situation that both sides of politics have presided over.

It was sad to see Budget 2015 being measured against Budget 2014 instead of being measured by its impact on inequality and poverty. Take, for example, the 2014 measure to force young people experiencing unemployment to survive on fresh air and sunshine for six months of every year. Such was the community outcry in the face of such viciousness that Budget 2015 has proposed one month without income instead of six. This change is a clear admission of the cruelty of this measure without actually abandoning it. Similarly, it has not abandoned the significant and ongoing cuts to social services, social housing, health and education.

Our message throughout 2015 was that if government wants to address unemployment it will need to create a Jobs Plan, including economic development in areas of high unemployment. What Budget 2015 should have been about is ensuring that no one misses out on the essentials of life: a place to live, a place to work (or income security), a place to learn and a place to heal.

Housing and homelessness remain issues that are desperately in need of national leadership—as is the issue of progressive and equitable tax reform. While the states and territories have an important role to play in our federal system, it would be short-sighted, at best, if as a nation we went down the road of pushing responsibility onto the states and territories for areas that are best funded and given direction at the national level.

2015 saw the release of the McClure Report on the Review of Welfare. The starting point of this review process was the twin assumptions that we need to cut social expenditure and that unemployment is fundamentally a problem that is addressed at the individual, rather than the structural, level. The people who are unemployed are not the problem. The problem is that there are not enough jobs. 2015 saw the Society persisting in its call for an immediate \$50 a week increase to the Newstart payment and the indexing of all payments to wages rather than CPI. The St Vincent de Paul Society supports an approach which actually invests in people and supports them so that they can participate in society and, where appropriate, in paid employment. A good social security system is meant to prevent poverty, not to humiliate people.

We have an important task ahead of us: to defend and extend the gains we have made in the areas of universal health, free education, and a social security system that keeps people out of poverty and supports them to live

with dignity. We are also desperately in need of a national plan for full employment, including an economic development component and, very importantly, a plan to ensure that no one misses out on social and affordable housing. Sticks on the backs of the unemployed will not create jobs. It is the role of government to allow society to achieve collectively what we cannot achieve individually. Governments must do what markets cannot. Markets are a very useful mechanism for generating profit, but woeful at guaranteeing equity and fairness. As Pope Francis points out prophetically:

Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.

Our advocacy work throughout 2015 included frequent meetings with members of the government, the opposition and key cross-benchers as well as departmental officials, like-minded organisations, researchers and fellow advocates. The Society has its own vehicles for social justice advocacy such as the Vincentian Refugee Network and National Social Justice Committee but we have also participated in a wide array of panels, committees, fora and working groups such as:

- Community Services Advisory Group (DSS)
- Settlement Council of Australia
- Major Church providers
- ACNC Research Network

- ACOSS Social Security Network
- ACOSS Community Sector Policy Network
- ACOSS Housing Policy Network
- ACOSS Health Policy Network
- ACTCOSS Policy Network
- CAPSA Steering Group
- ACOSS Board
- UHNCR
- Australian Energy Regulators – customer consultative group
- Australian Energy Market Operators – market leaders forum
- Australian Energy Market Commission – reliability panel
- Australian Energy Market Commission – east coast gas review
- Australian Gas Light (AGL) – national customer consultative council

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

- inequality
- poverty, including youth poverty
- social justice and social change

- Budget 2015
- homelessness, including homelessness funding and youth homelessness
- social and affordable housing
- employment participation
- unemployment, including regional unemployment and youth unemployment
- compulsory income management
- minimum wage
- low-paid, insecure work
- penalty rates
- mental health
- demand for services
- financial stress
- cost of living
- TAFE as a pathway out of poverty
- displacement and justice
- Medicare co-payment
- human rights
- asylum seekers
- energy costs and disconnections
- McClure review
- social expenditure

- Syrian refugee crisis
- economic priorities
- tax reform
- impact of GST increase on low-income households

A SELECTION OF KEY SPEECHES BY DR FALZON

‘We have only one enemy. It is called inequality’, keynote speech, AEU Federal Conference, Melbourne, 20 February 2015.

‘Our struggle for a new society’, keynote speech, SACS Roundtable, Adelaide, 27 February 2015.

‘We have only one enemy. Our struggle against inequality’, Annual Outrage keynote address, RMIT University, Melbourne, 17 March 2015.

‘The side of the oppressed’, May Day event, Stary Norton Halphen Criminal Law, Celtic Club, Melbourne, 1 May 2015.

‘An injury to one is an injury to all’, May Day rally, Sydney, 3 May 2015.

‘The politics of hope’, National Environment Meeting, Melbourne, 6 May 2015.

‘Resistance and Hope’, keynote speech, Progress 2015 Conference, Melbourne Town Hall, 7 May 2015.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – RESEARCH AND RESULTS

In 2014, the Society produced its first piece of policy on domestic violence, identifying its deep causes in inequality between men and women, and rigid gender stereotypes. We called for a national plan that addressed not just domestic violence, but gender inequality broadly. In 2015, the Society followed this up with a submission to the Human Rights Commission on the impact of Domestic Violence on Children, and our President Graham West provided oral evidence. Then, National Council’s Policy Advisor Rik Sutherland was invited to present the research at the annual Stopping Domestic Violence Conference, held in Sydney in June, alongside Rosie Batty and Anna Bligh. This work was followed up by the adoption by National Council of our first ever human resources policy on domestic violence, which provides employees and volunteers with support if they experience this crime. We are all very proud to be leading the way on such an important issue in Australia today.

If you would like to know more or get involved, please contact policy@svdp.org.au

'A Bridge to Dignity', Mission: One Heart, Many Voices Conference, Sydney, 19 May 2015.

'From each according to their ability; to each according to their needs', presentation to the University of Newcastle 70th Anniversary of the White Paper on Full Employment Workshop, Trades Hall, Sydney, 30 May 2015.

'Humanity will win against humiliation', keynote address, NTCOSS Conference 2015, Alice Springs, 3 June 2015.

'The deliberately silenced and the preferably unheard: families and children in a polarised society', Blackfriars lecture, Australian Catholic University, Canberra, 9 June 2015.

'Our struggle against inequality', AEU Public Forum, Hobart, 17 June 2015.

'Housing Justice', CEO Sleepout, Aurora Stadium, Launceston, 18 June 2015.

'New forces and new passions: youth in a polarised society', National Youth Mentoring Conference, Canberra, 29 June 2015.

'Social Justice, Social Conscience', keynote, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, ACT Branch, Biennial Conference, Canberra, 10 July 2015.

'A Bridge to Dignity', keynote, Vincentian Leadership Program, Melbourne, 8 September 2015.

'Sick with Worry', SDOHA Anti-Poverty Week oration, ACT Legislative Assembly, Canberra, 14 October 2015.

'Justice is inevitable, like birth', Anti-Poverty Week presentation, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, Melbourne, 15 October 2015.

'Pushed to the Margins', panel presentation, Newcastle Town Hall, 21 October 2015.

'Revolutionaries, not supplicants', keynote, Progressive Canberra Summit, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 14 November 2015.

'Political Perspectives on Inequality', National Complex Needs Alliance 2015 Conference, Canberra, 18 November 2015.

'Social Justice: Preventing the attack', address to students, Mini Vinnies Social Justice Day, ACU, Canberra, 27 November 2015.

'The cornerstone of a new society', address to teachers, Mini Vinnies Social Justice Day, ACU, Canberra, 27 November 2015.

PUBLICATIONS

'We have only one enemy: inequality', *The Record*, Summer 2014/2015 <http://bit.ly/1SvxIZP>

'Do they know it's Christmas?' *The Age*, 14 December 2014. <http://bit.ly/1wO8ddX>

'The personal is political', *Council to Homeless Persons Annual Report 2013/2014*

'"Welfare reform" but where are the jobs?' *Pearls and Irritations*, 5 March 2015 <http://bit.ly/1Q5joCE>

'#illridewithyou shows the kind of world that is possible', *Eureka Street*, 18 December 2014. <http://bit.ly/1TvOsAU>

'Are the unemployed supposed to be grateful for "Budget 2015: still cruel"?' *The Guardian*, 21 May 2015. <http://bit.ly/1NKF8Su>

'From each according to their ability; to each according to their needs', *Common Cause*, Vol. 81, No. 3, June/July 2015. <http://bit.ly/1VAwrA5>

'Tony Thornton: a social activist who will be sadly missed', *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Canberra Times*, 22 July 2015. <http://bit.ly/1OZDHnj>

REFUGEES – POLICY AND PASSION

The National Council's work on refugee policy is informed by the Vincentian Refugee Network, a group of 15 of our members and employees representing every jurisdiction around the country, who meet regularly to discuss our work with people who come here seeking asylum. This year, the Network created content for National Refugee Week, and updated our national Policy on People Seeking Asylum, which is available online. We also wrote a submission to the Refugee Council of Australia on our vision for Australia's Humanitarian Intake Program, collaborated extensively on advocacy with the new Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum, and put together National Council's first Advocacy Plan, focussing on refugees. This Network brings together all the strengths of the Society, with a diverse and representative membership.

If you would like to know more or get involved, please contact policy@svdp.org.au.



'Social activist will be sadly missed', *Eureka Street*, 23 July 2015
<http://bit.ly/1TvOUiC>

'Social activist who will be sadly missed', *The Record*, Winter/Spring 2015 <http://bit.ly/1QRCdhj>

'There's no such thing as the voiceless', *The Record*, Winter/Spring 2015 <http://bit.ly/1QRCdhj>

"'Sick with worry...' Stories from the front-line of inequality", *St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia National Report 2015*.
<http://bit.ly/1SlzZZi>

'Revolutionary love', *The Record*, Summer 2015/2016
<http://bit.ly/1JT9d04>

'Sick with worry', *The Record*, Summer 2015/2016 <http://bit.ly/1JT9d04>

INQUIRIES

Submission on Constitutional Recognition

Pre-Budget 2015–2016 submission

Submission to Senate Select Committee on Health

Submission to Productivity Commission Workplace Relations Framework Inquiry

Submission to Australian Labor Party Discussion Paper on Housing Affordability

Submission to the Standing Committee on the Environment Inquiry into the Register of Environment Organisations

Submission on Re:Think Tax Discussion Paper 2015

Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Submission on Matters Relating to Credit Card Interest Rates

Submission on Children with Disability in the School System

Submission on Draft Workplace Relations Framework Inquiry

Submission to Inquiry into Social Security Legislation Amendment (Debit Card Trial) Bill 2015

Submission to the Inquiry into the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Further Strengthening Job Seeker Compliance) Bill 2015

Submission on the Economic Security for Women in Retirement

Submission to the Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Youth Employment) Bill 2015

2016–17 Refugee and Humanitarian Program submission to the Refugee Council of Australia

Submission to Senate Community

Affairs Committee inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Budget Repair) Bill 2015

Response to the Reform of Federation Green Paper

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Stories from the frontline of inequality

ACOSS Inequality report

Mapping electricity disconnections in the NEM

A right to housing: a gendered perspective on housing and taxation (with ANU)

Resident voices (with UWS, Loyola University Chicago)

MEDIA RELEASES

Response to report on children in detention, 12 February 2015

Budget must address the real intergenerational theft, 13 February 2015

Joint statement – end detention of children, 13 February 2015

Flow on effects of utility disconnections, 23 February 2015

Government will not create jobs by cutting spending, 25 February 2015

Intergenerational report fails to address rising inequality, 5 March 2015

Vinnies elects Graham West as its National President, 30 March 2015

Youth homelessness: a call to action, 15 April 2015

Joint statement on refugees: Call for moratorium, 24 April 2015

Federal Budget 2015–16: Our common ask, 11 May 2015

Struggle Street just got a whole lot worse, 12 May 2015

Volunteers are happier, 15 May 2015

Vinnies supports National Families Week, 18 May 2015

Vinnies marks National Reconciliation Week, 28 May 2015

The Rohingya people need our support, 29 May 2015

Celebrating Refugee Week, 15 June 2015

Vinnies stands on sacred ground, 8 July 2015

Vale Anthony Thornton MBE, 12 July 2015

Vinnies backs report on entrenched disadvantage, 21 July 2015

Tony Thornton: A social activist who will be sadly missed, 22 July 2015

Homelessness Prevention Week, 3 August 2015

More worrying developments in asylum seeker policy, 11 August 2015

Vinnies says people seeking refuge are welcome here, 8 September 2015

St Vincent de Paul Society vows to help all refugees, 9 September 2015

Penalty rates vital for low income earners, 7 October 2015

Tackling homelessness key to reducing mental health issues – time to recommit to a national homelessness agenda, 10 October 2015

Vinnies Report: People's desire to participate shines through, 14 October 2015

Bring compassion and respect back into the asylum seeker and refugee debate, says St Vincent de Paul Society, 11 November 2015

JOINT CAMPAIGNS

Joint letter to Minister Morrison on DHS tendering for social services

Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum

Social Determinants of Health Alliance

ACOSS Principles for Social Security Reform

ACOSS Response to Forrest Review

Joint letter to Minister Morrison calling for NPAH funding certainty

Joint statement on children in immigration detention

National Day of Action on social and affordable housing

Joint statement by Australian organisations and community groups calling for immediate moratorium on sending asylum seekers offshore

Joint statement with ANTaR and AHRC on racism

International Youth Day 2015

National Oral Health Alliance

.....
You can find out more about any of these at www.vinnies.org.au

HOUSING – ADVOCACY AND ACTION

As always, housing remains of major concern to National Council. Our Pre-Budget Submission in early 2015 highlighted the inadequacy of Commonwealth Rent Assistance for many Australians, and this theme was picked up again in our submission on Labor's Housing Policy in May. Much of the federal government's focus on housing has been through the Reform of Federation process, which we continue to engage with. In Anti-Poverty Week we released our report *Sick with Worry* which presented case studies provided by our members around the country, and analysed them to reveal that lack of affordable housing, along with inadequate health services and insufficient income support, is a significant cause of poverty and disadvantage today. Our work on housing continues with a major report being prepared by our Social Justice Committee. There is no doubt that unaffordable housing is one of the biggest issues affecting Australia today, and we will continue to take action that influences our leaders to do more.

If you would like to know more or get involved, please contact policy@svdp.org.au

Targeting energy bills to help families in need

The realities of poverty mean that the St Vincent de Paul Society must often begin with the basics—food, clothing, housing—and then help to upskill those in need to achieve long-term change.

Poverty is not going away. Despite all the talking, meeting, thinking, funding, campaigning and volunteering, we have an unrelentingly consistent need for the works the Society offers.

We talk about ‘a hand up, not a hand out’ but we are called on by families with no food on the table. The Society is pretty good at putting food on the table and when children are hungry it is no time to talk about lifestyle transformation. The pointy end of addressing poverty is where the Society is most often found—delivering food and clothing, keeping people in housing, providing soup, sandwiches and warm clothing from the night patrol van. It is easy to dismiss this as sustaining the status quo, but the alternative is to let people sink into a worse situation. So we continue to work with people when they need it most urgently.

The Society in Canberra/Goulburn is built on the Conference structure which is the Society’s core and maintains a strong program of home visitation—helping tens of thousands of people from one end of the archdiocese to the other. Our Vinnies Shops provide a great locus of community in most towns and in Canberra suburbs and are continuing to grow. We offer many opportunities to help people change their lives. Our Special Works provide a wide portfolio of services with specialist skills and resources devoted to mental health, homelessness,

building life skills, reaching out to people in the street, giving people access to education and helping people improve their living skills.

A lot of the families we meet experience hardship when they receive large energy bills at the end of winter. They are simply doing what they learned from their parents, using heaters to keep warm and air conditioners to keep cool. Our Energy Efficiency Program educates low income households on the best ways to cut costs on their energy bills, a major cause of strain and often a tipping point for people into poverty. It can be as simple as educating families that running a heater without curtains on the windows is a futile endeavour. The Energy Efficiency Program not only educates but assists these families to get the tools they need, from quality curtains to more energy efficient fridges and washing machines. We are upskilling those in need to provide long term relief, putting in place preventative measures.

We ask ‘why does poverty persist?’ The simple answer is that our social structures are not good at providing resources equitably so that everyone gets a fair share. In a community based on wealth production, those who have something to trade can trade, while those who have little or nothing are the vulnerable. The complex answer is about the kind of society we want to be, and the extent to which our community values every member as a person rather than for what they have or can produce. The Society has no choice but to persist as long as inequity persists and to persist because of our deep commitment to the intrinsic worth of every person, which is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching, and because of the moral obligations to our neighbour that come directly from the gospel that enlightens our lives. ■



More than money: Financial Counselling at work

Rob has finally found a place to call home through the intervention of the Society's financial counselling offices and the kindness of a woman who had herself been helped in the past by the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Rob* walked into one of the St Vincent de Paul Society's financial counselling offices. He was unkempt, hungry and cold. He was living on a nearby beach and Centrelink had stopped his payments due to him having no fixed address.

Rob's hands were covered in charcoal from making fires on the beach to try and stay warm. He had no shoes and as result his feet were covered in sores. Our financial counsellor, Mavis, contacted the local St Vincent de Paul Society volunteer group. Conference President, Ben, came out and gave him food, took him for a shower and organised clothing and a blanket from the local Vinnies shop. They also got him some socks and shoes.

Meanwhile, Mavis liaised with Centrelink on Rob's behalf and found some short-term emergency accommodation. She offered to take his clothing home to wash it. Ben remembered that a lady had contacted him and left her details, saying she would like to help someone to re-pay what the Society had done for her in the past.

Ben and Mavis organised a meeting with Rob and this kind lady and they got along straight away. She said to Rob, 'You're not going to spend another night in the rain. I've got a room ready and you can move in right away.' She immediately took Rob to pick up his stuff.

So after 11 years living near beaches and here, there and everywhere, Rob now has a home. His Centrelink payments have been reinstated and he now has a real chance. Ben and Mavis were left with smiles from ear to ear! ■

**All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.*

OUR FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES

Financial counselling plays an important role in helping many people avoid homelessness. This service offers free, independent information, options and advocacy to help people take control of their own financial situation, ultimately helping people through a difficult time and to avoid finding themselves in extreme poverty or without a place to live. In the 2014/2015 financial year the Society was able to assist 783 people struggling with financial issues through its Financial Counselling service.

In early 2015, the state government of

WA announced that on 30 September 2015, all state funding for financial counselling services throughout the Perth metropolitan region would be cut. Fortunately there will be no impact on the current financial counsellor positions within the St Vincent de Paul Society. In WA the Society receives funding from the federal government for three of these positions, with the other funded by the Society itself.

However, the Society is extremely concerned about the impact this decision will have on the people it serves and the many other people already struggling in the community. The number of financial counsellors

available will reduce significantly, meaning people will need to wait longer to see a financial counsellor or may be unable to access one at all. Even more worrying is that we know the number of people accessing this service is continuing to grow.

The St Vincent de Paul Society believes the decision is short-sighted and will not help people create sustainable change in their lives. It will continue to advocate for the decision to be reversed so people in need in our community do not continue to suffer the financial stress of increasing costs of living and declining housing affordability. ■



Nathan's story: Overcoming adversity through education

With the help of the Nagle Centre in NSW and the Clemente program, Nathan has moved forward from childhood tragedy and found purpose through education.

At only eight years of age, Nathan lost both his parents and younger brother in a horrific car crash—a loss and trauma most people cannot even begin to imagine. Alone in the world, the young boy was moved from one foster home to another, his life slowly sliding out of his control.

As the years ticked by Nathan found he was making many decisions that set him on a destructive and troubled path. Marrying and becoming a father at a young age, Nathan struggled to keep things together. His marriage ended and left Nathan caring for his young daughter on his own. Struggling to make ends meet and cope with the

responsibility, Nathan visited the Nagle Centre, a Special Work of the St Vincent de Paul Society located in South West Sydney.

A family care and support service, the Nagle Centre provides crisis assistance, referral service and education and skills programs for people experiencing disadvantage and homelessness. In the beginning Nathan would visit the Nagle Centre for help with bills, food and clothing. However, in the 15 years that have passed since, the Nagle Centre has played a bigger role in Nathan's life than he ever could have imagined, helping him get his life back on track.

With the encouragement of one of the case workers, Nathan became involved in Clemente, a university education program hosted at the Nagle Centre. Clemente aims to break the cycle of disadvantage by providing university education and study opportunities to people who would otherwise not be able to participate. Despite leaving school when he was only 15, Nathan knew that his eagerness to learn and good listening skills would help him

transition into study. Nathan excelled in his learning and studied subjects such as liberal arts, politics and sociology, receiving distinctions and credits in numerous subjects. Nathan credits the Nagle Centre for getting him where he is today.

'If study and support weren't offered to me, I think I would have come out the other end a completely different person to who I am now. I think Vinnies is good for building up people's strength and offering people a foundation in their lives. They gave me a purpose', says Nathan.

The Nagle Centre has an open door attitude and manager Donna plans to keep it that way.

'There are no appointments needed and, most importantly, there is no judgement. People can drop in when they need to get a bite to eat, have a shower, get linen or clothing, or even just for a chat', explains Donna.

Nathan agrees.

'Everybody feels comfortable to just come in and talk to someone when they need. The case workers and staff



PHOTO: WWW.ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/USAPX

do an amazing job and are always available for you.'

With the right support and through his own hard work and determination, Nathan has been able to get his life back on track. The Nagle Centre's approach has meant that Nathan was not only able to get through a rough financial period in the immediate term but also develop skills that would help change his life in the long-term. Nathan is now living in independent and affordable housing, studying at university and deepening his connection with his family and community.

Looking ahead, Nathan is positive about his future and the direction he wants to take.

'I really want to go out there and help people. I want to give something back. Each night before I go to bed, regardless of the day I've had, I always smile because when you wake up the next morning, it will be a better day. That's the philosophy I get through life with. It's a nice one to have. In the end you've got to make yourself happy', says Nathan. ■

THE NAGLE CENTRE

WHAT IS THE NAGLE CENTRE FAMILY CARE & SUPPORT SERVICE?

The Nagle Centre is a family care and support centre for people and families experiencing crisis and disadvantage in the Macarthur Region of NSW. The Nagle Centre is a joint venture between the Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga and St Vincent de Paul Society, Wollongong Diocese.

WHO CAN ACCESS THIS SERVICE?

Everyone is welcome at the Nagle Centre. There is a particular emphasis for people and families experiencing crisis and needing support.

WHERE IS THE SERVICE LOCATED?

The Nagle Centre is located at 22 Iolanthe Street, Campbelltown NSW.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE SERVICE?

People who are experiencing disadvantage and homelessness in the Macarthur region can benefit from the crisis and emergency assistance we are able to provide. This assistance can take many forms and may include: help with electricity, telephone, advocacy and rental, referrals to brokerage service, clothing vouchers, hot breakfasts and lunches five days a week, from Monday to Friday and an evening meal on Wednesdays.

Members of the local St Vincent de Paul Society groups, known as Conferences, are also able to assist with food vouchers and home visits. Other services include free tax help, craft groups and general care and support.

The Wagga Wagga Presentation Sisters run the following programs at the Nagle Centre: Nagle Centre for Youth Nano Nagle children's camps for children aged 6 to 12 years; and the Macarthur No Interest Loan Scheme, which provides access to affordable credit for essential household items without creating additional financial hardship.

A free literacy and numeracy course is conducted at the Nagle Centre each Monday. The Centre also offers the Clemente program, a free tertiary course provided in conjunction with Australian Catholic University. The Clemente program is held on a Wednesday.

CAN I VOLUNTEER FOR THIS SERVICE?

The Nagle Centre operates with a handful of paid workers; the majority of work is carried out by dedicated volunteers, be that in the kitchen, maintenance or administration. We welcome any enquiries to volunteer.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT NAGLE CENTRE FAMILY CARE & SUPPORT?

Please contact The Nagle Centre Manager Donna Said for more information (02) 4628 2928.

Systemic disadvantage: Striving for change

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria has been privileged to be a part of alleviating some of the effects of systemic disadvantage for one mother and her son and making their dream of home a reality.

The setting for this story encompasses a large rural city and a very small rural community. The players are Jenny* and her son Ben*, from our First Peoples, who have their roots firmly planted in a small rural community. Both suffered from the entrenched disadvantage experienced by so many of our rural-based First Peoples: educational disadvantage, unemployment, poverty and dislocation through the need for specialised services. These disadvantages were replicated in the two generations of this little family. For Jenny, we add legal blindness and for Ben the dislocation of removal from family and lack of appropriate school experience. Through fierce determination, Jenny had managed to hold on to a small piece of land with a house that had belonged to her family and now belonged to her. However, the service providers and case workers deemed it inappropriate housing (no electricity etc) and too far away from services and facilities available in the rural city environment. Jenny had been coming to the local SVDP conference for some time for a variety of assistance and her son had been assisted in finishing off his education. He was now old enough to seek employment and to help look after his mum. They wanted to go home to their little piece of land and be together in a stable environment for the first time in many years.

The Conference members galvanised



themselves, their financial resources and the myriad of tradespeople at their disposal to support these two people to make their dream of returning to their place a reality. They took up the task of advocating for Jenny with her service providers to get the appropriate support for her relocating back to her home. They contacted the local Conference closest to where Jenny's house was situated and involved them in the project of 'returning home'.

House repairs were undertaken, bathroom and kitchen facilities were built; a generator was loaned by the electrician pending purchase of a new one by the Conference; some services were provided pro bono, others at a reduced rate and all paid for by the Conference. The little house was ready for the return home. Furniture was

provided by the local Vinnies Store; for the first time in his life the teenager had a room and a bed to himself! A second-hand pushbike had been donated and repaired to enable him to ride to the small town. They moved in ... they had returned home! For their first night home the technician who had installed their gas stove had left instructions for it not to be used over the weekend until he could return and ensure all was well with the installation. So Jenny decided to build a small campfire out the back to make a cuppa and cook some tea. With her poor eyesight, the fire got out of control spread to the house and the house was engulfed and destroyed. Jenny and Ben both suffered some injuries in trying to battle the fire and were hospitalised ... DESPAIR.

“Sick with worry...”

STORIES FROM THE FRONT-LINE OF INEQUALITY, 2015

The Conference President who had presided over the project had received a suggestion the week prior to insure the home. He took this advice and paid for the policy out of Conference funds. After a full investigation by police and the CFA the fire was proven to be a terrible accident and the best news of all was that the insurers were willing to pay on the policy.

The house is now re-built, with enough insurance money left over to install solar panels to help with future costs. The family home has been restored, Jenny and Ben have returned home and all is well!

This précis of the story doesn't provide details of the amount of time, energy and resources, the hard work and local advocacy, the Conference members put into this project, and nor would they want it detailed; but it is so important to recognise the foresight, willingness to go the extra mile and to think outside the box of the Conference members that has provided hope and a solution. Most importantly of all, though, was the capacity of the Conference members to LISTEN to what would give this little family HOPE and a FUTURE. They were willing to take the risk of using Conference funds (with the support of their Regional and Central Council) and make a dream possible.

It is a wonderful example of the capacity of our Society to recognise that 'no work of charity is foreign to the Society' and how local advocacy can ensure that people can negotiate their own solutions in a way that is most appropriate for themselves. ■

**All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.*

In late 2013, the St Vincent de Paul Society published research outlining some startling statistics about poverty in Australia today. *Two Australias: A report on poverty in the land of plenty* showed that 13 per cent of the population is living in poverty, 1.5 million people are unemployed or underemployed, the bottom fifth of households receive only 2.5 per cent of wages, and a quarter of us live with a long-term health condition or disability. The report concluded that, under Australia's prosperous veneer, there is a significant group of people who are struggling just to survive.

Behind the numbers are the faces. Following from that quantitative survey, the St Vincent de Paul Society decided to conduct the present research because we wanted to hear the stories of those doing it toughest. Those for whom every day is a battle. Stories from the other Australia.

We sent out a call to our members and volunteers, and over 70 interviews were conducted around the country. When we read the stories, some key themes emerged. These themes will not be a surprise to anyone who is familiar with disadvantage in Australia today: there is a severe shortage of stable, affordable housing; incomes for many are not sufficient for a decent standard of living, and secure work is very hard to find; and Australians living with disability continue to face severe structural barriers to participation. Cutting across all three areas were several further issues: the stigma faced by those on the edge; the inherent insecurity that life entails for many in the other Australia; and the disproportionate impact of poverty on women.

However, what also shone through our research were three remarkable opportunities for change. First, supportive, rights-based services can and do help many people out of poverty. Secondly, people's overwhelming love for their children presents a wonderful lens through which to see change happen. And, finally, what almost everyone desires above all else is to be able to participate.

Therefore, while it seems there are structural problems around housing, employment and disability that are systemically excluding people, the research shows that the way forward involves better service provision and harnessing people's keen desire to contribute. ■



The view from the street

Cel shares her story of the time she and her infant daughter experienced homelessness, and how the drop-in centre and meals from Fred's Van were much-needed highlights of her day.

When you think of a homeless person what do you think of?

What is your stereotypical thought?

What is your idea of homelessness?

I, like many before me, have used the services of organisations like Vinnies to help me get back on my feet. I grew up in a loving family, not my biological family, but a family who took me in and loved me as their own.

I left home in my teens because I felt I didn't belong anywhere. To try to figure out who I was I travelled across states and territories for many years before I had my daughter. It was at that moment I found acceptance of who I was.

My struggles didn't end there though. I have found myself homeless on numerous occasions over the years. At one point, with my baby I searched for a month for stable accommodation. We slept in cars, waking in the morning to be greeted by strangers walking their dogs. We could have been worse off—we had shelter at least.

At times I would find blankets and teddies left on my window from kind-hearted strangers who noticed my car parked in the same place day after day. We'd go for showers and breakfast at a drop-in centre and then wait all day, eager for an evening walk to get dinner from Vinnies' Fred's Van.

We'd have our feed and stroll back through the city back to our car, full and sleepy. Then the next day it would continue again, day after day until I finally secured my own private accommodation.

Happiness of the utmost extreme was baking home-cooked meals and cakes and raiding our own fridge for food.

Hundreds of people throughout Australia go through times which leave them homeless or at risk of homelessness. Without the support of places such as Vinnies, people in need would be far worse off than they already are. ■

Cel Rowe generously shared her story at the CEO Sleepout. She is now happily living in stable accommodation with her family.



LAST YEAR, WITH THE SUPPORT OF YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS, VINNIES PROVIDED:



365,164 BED NIGHTS



1,197,633 MEALS



ASSISTANCE ON 1,161,239 OCCASIONS

TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE AND HOMELESSNESS.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING VINNIES WRITE A NEW CHAPTER IN THE STORY OF HOMELESSNESS.

2015 CEO SLEEPOUT – 10TH ANNIVERSARY

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout began as a local community venture in Sydney's Parramatta in 2006, the brainchild of a local business leader, Bernard Fehon, Managing Director of Tactical Solutions.

With the help of Vinnies, business associates, volunteers and his family, Bernard held the inaugural event on 21 June 2006 at Sydney Olympic Park.

In 2010, the event went national and exceeded expectations, attracting almost

700 CEOs in seven cities nationally and raising \$2.9 million to directly assist people experiencing homelessness.

In 2013, some regional events were also added in NSW in Wollongong and Newcastle. With over 1,000 participating business leaders, the event surpassed the \$5.3 million fundraising mark.

In 2015, the event celebrated its 10th anniversary. Behind every dollar raised is the potential to not only provide crucial assistance to people

experiencing homelessness but to make inroads in addressing the root causes of homelessness, with the aim of breaking the cycle of homelessness permanently for as many people as possible.

The reality is that as we head into the 11th year of the event, whilst we should celebrate all that we have achieved together, we must also remember that so much more still needs to be done.

Get involved in the 2016 CEO Sleepout at www.ceosleepout.org.au ■

The risk of poverty

For the people we work with, hunger, cold, danger and sacrifice can be everyday experiences. The immediate assistance we offer helps to alleviate suffering while we continue to lobby for a more just society.

The everyday people in our society do not choose a life of poverty but circumstances can lead them down this path.

The risk of poverty is highest among people who rely on Centrelink payments and the causes of poverty can include limited affordable housing, homelessness, family violence, addictions, mental health issues, medical reasons and loss of employment.

Listed below are just two examples of the everyday experiences that our members are confronted with. We continue to deliver the varied assistance that is required to offer a hand up to those suffering in our communities.

'I grew up in a household that can only be described as difficult and dysfunctional. By the age of seventeen I could no longer take the abuse. I thought I would be safer living on the streets.

This was difficult but in a different way. My days were spent wandering aimlessly around the streets, looking for somewhere safe to spend the night that was also dry. I was always hungry and sad. I would break into buildings to sleep somewhere warm; I would get arrested regularly and ended up having a mountain of charges against me.' *B, aged 26 years.*

And another example: 'I would love to be able to take my daughter out, buy her toys that all her friends have. I have to tell her I am sorry but there is just not enough money. This happens time and time again and it breaks my heart. At the supermarket the other day

ice-cream was \$2 cheaper than the day before. I would have done anything to be able to give my daughter a treat, but as always there is just not enough money to go round. My income is spent on rent, electricity and the basic food supplies; there is no money left over for treats.' *Ann, aged 24 years.*

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout highlights the issues of homelessness and poverty to an advantaged audience and raises much needed funds and awareness for us to continue our work in this pivotal area.

The Society is lobbying for change to the current regulations in a number of important areas that prevent people from getting off the merry-go-round of poverty. We will continue to be the voice of the disadvantaged in promoting change and advocate on their behalf for a fairer and more just system to help rebuild lives. ■



Rebuilding lives, renewing hope, and restoring faith: Kevin's story

When Kevin decided he was ready to rebuild his life, the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland was there to provide him with the support he needed.

The generous donations made to the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland by our supporters have provided assistance to thousands of Queenslanders experiencing homelessness, just like Kevin. After losing his father and some close friends, Kevin started down a path of helplessness and despair. Kevin was able to start rebuilding his life with the help of the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland. This is his story.

Kevin is from Bendigo, Victoria. After his father and five of his close friends passed away, he moved to Queensland. He struggled to find a place to live, and began sleeping rough. For 30 years he had been using drugs and alcohol and was constantly in and out of jail. Despite several attempts at detox and rehab, Kevin always ended up drinking again. He was depressed and considered suicide.

'I didn't know what to do or where to go for help,' Kevin explained.

He attended the local Community Centre and was introduced to one of Queensland's Homelessness Support Workers, who arranged temporary accommodation at a caravan park and supplied him with clothing and toiletries.

Kevin battled with his addiction for some time, and then his final thread of support was cut. His sister, who had been providing him with money from time to time, told Kevin that she would not help him anymore if he did not attend detox. The St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland helped Kevin commence the difficult journey through detox and rehab.

'I finally hit rock bottom again. I felt like I had nobody to rely on ... I was running out of resources and had burned so many bridges,' Kevin said.

When one of our members arrived to transport Kevin to detox, he was a mess. He'd been drinking heavily again and became agitated on the way to the detox centre.

'I realised this was it! I had to do it,' Kevin said.

He spent the next three months working hard in rehab. Kevin's case worker told Vinnies she couldn't believe the difference in the man who walked out the door compared to the state he was in when he arrived.

By the time Kevin left rehab, Vinnies had arranged a one bedroom unit for him and a household full of furniture from their warehouse. Kevin left rehab, signed his new lease and began to rebuild his life in an affordable and safe home.

'It was tough coming out of rehab and I was worried about lapsing, but Vinnies supported me and encouraged me not to give up. I love my new home. I'm settled and doing really well.'

When Kevin decided he was ready to change, the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland was there to provide him with the support he needed.

While Kevin's story has a positive outcome, many do not. Close to 20,000 people in Queensland face homelessness every night, and we rely on the compassion of Queenslanders to help these people rebuild their lives. ■



Reaching across borders to address poverty: The St Vincent de Paul Society's Overseas Development Program

Poverty is a complex issue, and one of developed countries and developing nations alike. Poverty is imposed and maintained by governments and broken systems, corruption, birth and greed. The issue is not cultural, but political, social and structural.

The Overseas Development Program, which is made up of Twinning, Projects, Assist a Student and Disaster Relief, provides the tools and education needed or the hand up in times of disaster to enable our developing partners to begin to see a better way of life.

Conference to Conference Twinning provides funds quarterly from an Australian Conference to their Overseas Twinned Conference. These funds are then used by the Overseas Twinned Conference to assist the poor in that country. Extra grants are sent twice a year for Easter and Christmas to assist

with the pressures and demand at these busy times.

Projects within the Overseas Development Program either meet basic human needs, such as food, water or shelter and are classified as Welfare Projects, or promote community, sustainability, employment, training and development, such as a farming project, and are thus classified as Development Projects.

Welfare projects are important, especially in the months or years following a disaster. These projects can follow on from the initial Disaster Relief sent by the National Council of Australia and offer the extra assistance needed to help create a strong and healthy population that can get back on its feet.

Development Projects are a great way for our overseas partners to take ownership and be empowered. Within the development project arena there are important opportunities for employment, which often lead to independence from assistance and promote a sense of purpose and dignity. There are also opportunities within the development project arena for expression of new ideas and experiences with teamwork, management and training.

The best assistance is the kind that gives locals the ability to craft their own institutions that can continue long after the trickle of relief funds has come to an end. Travelling to teach English for a month is not near[ly] as impactful as funding the local schoolteachers who will live and work there for their entire careers.¹

One of our projects, the Pakistan Literacy Project, does just that. In 2015 the project helped employ six teachers in Karachi for one year and in 2016 this will expand to a further six teachers. In Myanmar, sustainable businesses are created for our overseas partners with development projects like sewing machines for tailoring and rice growing for selling.

Assist a Student is an education program aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty.

Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom. – George Washington Carver

Millions of children are unable to attend school because of their circumstances. Families do not make enough money for food, so education becomes a low priority. Every child has the right to basic education for free; however, governments often charge

for education. This is where our Assist a Student donors come in and reach out to make a huge difference in the lives of these students. 100 per cent of donations goes to the student for a year of education and most students complete high school level, at least, with some going on to further tertiary education. We receive photos of children proudly wearing their school uniforms and many letters of thanks. The students in our overseas partner

countries are longing to go to school and, if given a choice, will choose education every time.

A child without education is like a bird without wings. – Tibetan proverb

Education breeds confidence.

Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace. – Confucius

The gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow wider, but there are

times when love, mercy, intelligence and generosity prevail and there is a 'reaching out' with respect and dignity, a 'bridging' from places that do have to places that do not. ■

1. Michelle Kennedy, '27 myths about the developing world', *Global Citizen*, 22 May 2014 <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/27-myths-about-the-developing-world/>

CURRENT AUSTRALIAN TWINS BY COUNTRY	
Bangladesh	50
Cambodia	23
Chuuk Islands (formerly East Caroline)	1
Fiji	24
India	1367
Indonesia	269
Kiribati	1
Myanmar	70
Pakistan	12
Philippines	265
Solomon Islands	1
Sri Lanka	5
Thailand	133
Vanuatu	9
Total Twinning Partnerships:	2230
Total AUD in Twinning Contributions (for 2015):	\$713,600.00 (\$80.00 per twin, per quarter)
PROJECTS (for 2015)	
Cambodia	\$12,600.00
India	\$4,088.00
Myanmar	\$2,000.00
Pakistan	\$110,694.00
Sri Lanka	\$7,000.00
Thailand	\$8,330.00
Total AUD in Projects:	\$144,712.00

DISASTER RELIEF	
Country	Amount Sent
Philippines	\$40,000.00
India	\$20,000.00
Nepal (not Twinned with Australia)	\$20,000.00
Vanuatu	\$70,000.00
Total AUD in Disaster Relief:	\$150,000.00
ASSIST A STUDENT (students sponsored to date 2015)	
Cambodia	400
Bangladesh (new to the program)	134
Fiji	677
Pakistan	185
Indonesia	500
India	1000
Sri Lanka	820
Philippines	1152
Vanuatu	210
Thailand	900
Total Students Sponsored:	5978

Reaching out to remote communities

Volunteers from the St Vincent de Paul Society Northern Territory work with members of Indigenous communities to bring Vinnies shops to them.

Michael from the St Vincent de Paul Society has been running 'Pop-up Op Shops' over the past year in two Indigenous Northern Territory communities. Twice a month members of the community, volunteers and staff load up a truck and go to Palmerston Indigenous Village (PIV) and Knuckey's Lagoon communities near Darwin, which are properties managed by the Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation.

The communities are closed to outsiders so that people can live their lives without intrusion. The PIV and Knuckey's Lagoon community elders were asked whether they would like assistance from the Society, as they receive the least money from government bodies and are readily accessible from Darwin. Standards of living in the communities vary, with some people living in very basic concrete block housing with sheets on the windows and mattresses on the floor. Neither community has any shops and sometimes the residents don't have access to cars to transport items; bus stops are a reasonable walking distance. Many are on income management, thereby limiting their purchasing power. Having a mobile Op Shop means that members can buy affordable items inside the community.

A range of items are sold from the back of the van including clothing, blankets, curtains, crockery and bric-a-brac. The clothing is chosen

with a community member present from the range at Vinnies so that they are in the style that members of the community would like to buy. Items aren't given away—although the prices are low, everybody pays something, even if it is \$1.

Masela is a volunteer who travels to Knuckey's Lagoon: 'It has been an incredible experience to see how other people live, and to have the chance to start developing relationships. Seeing the kids' eyes light up when we have a toy that takes their eye and having them come up and hold your hand are both amazing experiences. It is nice to sit and chat with the older people too, over a cup of coffee.' Volunteers are asked to make an ongoing commitment to volunteering with the Pop-up Op Shop so that they can make meaningful and trusting relationships rather than have a parade of different people with various degrees of cultural appropriateness.

Having the residents feel comfortable with the staff and volunteers visiting the community means the Society can also help in other ways, such as visiting people who are sick. In consultation with the community, we arranged for a contractor to remove old cars that were dangerous for children. This has meant the mowers can keep the grass down around the community, making it look better and keeping it safer from fires.

The Pop-up Op Shop concept has gone so well that other communities around the Territory have requested that Vinnies provide goods to their residents. However, the long distances in the Territory mean that there are logistical, accommodation, capacity and transport issues in fulfilling these requests. Larger vehicles that include accommodation and enough space to transport a substantial range of goods are being investigated. ■



What we do

People-in-need Services

Provision by Conference members on a one-to-one basis of:

- food, clothing, household goods, furniture
- accommodation and rental assistance
- assistance with utilities and transport expenses
- medical, dental and allied health needs
- school clothing and equipment
- legal and related assistance
- representations to Centrelink and other government entities
- companionship and friendly assistance on personal and family matters.

Vinnies Retail Centres

Vinnies properties owned or leased by the Society, enabling:

- people in need of help to make contact with the Society
- the provision of people-in-need services
- the receiving and processing of donated goods
- the sale of donated goods surplus to the provision of people-in-need services.

Funds raised by the sale of goods are applied by conferences and councils to the delivery of services for the poor and disadvantaged.

Homeless Services

Facilities owned and leased by the Society, providing for homeless women, men and families:

- accommodation, meals, clothing
- medical and dental services
- legal assistance for victims of domestic violence
- services for people with alcohol and drug addiction problems
- training and learning services to encourage and assist homeless people to return to independent living with security and dignity.

Funds raised through these facilities are applied to delivery of the services.

Mental Health Services

Assistance to people living with mental health problems to obtain:

- professional services
- volunteer friendships for social activities
- training and productive work in supported employment facilities.

Aged Care

Accommodation and services for aged people in need of low to high-care in Society-owned and leased premises:

- independent living units with access to care services
- home care services.

Audited Financial Statements

The St Vincent de Paul Society has eight state and territory legal entities. Each is incorporated under the relevant Associations Act and produces its audited annual accounts in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements.

For a detailed breakdown of income and expenditure please see State and Territory Annual Reports available online at www.vinnies.org.au

