



NATIONAL OVERVIEW 2016



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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Accepting refugees makes sense all round

The issue of refugees has become increasingly politicised over the last decade in Australia, and indeed throughout much of the world. Perhaps it has always been so. But at the heart of this debate are people: mums, dads, brothers, sisters, the old and young seeking refuge from war and violence.

Some refugees are seeking to escape from war that has ravaged their homelands, just as those fleeing Europe did more than seventy years ago. Some are seeking asylum from a regime that targets them for belonging



Graham West

to a minority group. But they are all our fellow people.

As Christians we know that Jesus and his family sought refuge from Herod in foreign lands. How would our story have been different if Mary and Joseph had been interned for years in a camp? How would our Christian history be different if their child had grown up in an environment without community?

Most people who seek refuge have

little to do with initiating the violence and persecution in their home countries. They simply want a peaceful life and the chance for their children to grow in a safe environment, and to be happy.

As a society, the test for our refugee policies should begin with Jesus' commandment to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If we had been forced to leave our homes because of war and violence, how would we want our families treated?

Refugees have contributed to our wonderful land in so many ways, through engineering, the arts, business, government, science, sport and in every endeavour we so rightly celebrate.

As a country we are richer for their contribution. Who knows, our next Nobel prize winner may well be a child seeking refuge in our land today. ■

Graham West
National President

A short history of the St Vincent de Paul Society's work with migrants and refugees

Records dating back to a hundred years ago refer to efforts made by the Society to welcome and assist newly arrived migrants.

In the early part of the 20th century in Tasmania, for example, volunteers boarded ships as they arrived, greeting people before they even set foot on Australian soil. They would then assist with accommodation and other emergency needs.

Efforts to assist migrants and 'displaced persons' stepped up after the Second World War, when the Society became heavily involved with an influx of new arrivals. In the Victorian Annual Report of 1950, it was noted busloads of children housed at holding camps at Broadmeadows and Maribyrnong were regularly brought to the homes of parishioners in many suburbs, for lunch, an evening meal and church services.

By 1960, the Society was running substantial accommodation services for migrants. Six homes for refugees were available in Brighton, south-east of Melbourne, with funding provided by UNHCR and what was then known

as the Federal Catholic Immigration Committee. A further nine dwellings were built for new arrivals in 1965, in a community known as Vinton, in Preston, in Melbourne's North.

The next phase of the Society's assistance to refugees began in the mid-1970s, with the arrival of people from Vietnam and Timor, and a little later from Lebanon and South America.

In September 1975, the first 150 refugees from Timor arrived in Western Australia, where they were housed by the government in hostels. Vinnies immediately got involved with taking the

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Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees, Canberra 2016

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 ache for home

***The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.* – Maya Angelou**

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a beautiful expression of sacred solidarity; a solidarity built on our common humanity and dedicated to creating a better world through our common hunger for justice. One of the most obvious things we all have in common is the yearning for somewhere safe to call home. We're a rich nation, so how can we not afford something as basic, something as essential, as a place to live? What are the compelling economic reasons why we can't make sure everyone has a place to feel safe, a place from which we can go to school, take care of our health, and go to work? How is it OK to deny people, including children, a place where they can love and be loved, where they can connect with each other instead of being cut off and, sometimes literally, locked out?

We can afford to line the pockets of corporations that manage offshore concentration camps in our name, a highly expensive exercise in cruelty and barbarism; carefully constructing limbos to which we consign people who, as it happens, believe so strongly in Australia that they risk life and limb to come here as they flee the cruelty and barbarism that has sadly overtaken their countries of origin.

If we want to be clever, if we want to be innovative, these are the very people we should welcome with open arms—people who believe in us, who believe in and desperately want to build a different future with us. If we want to be clever, and I agree with the Prime Minister that we should indeed aspire to this as a society, we'll make sure everyone has a place to call home, along with a well-resourced, needs-based education system and universal healthcare. Let's face it: not having a place to live and feel safe in is just about as bad as it gets when it

comes to barriers to education. How long do we need to keep stating the obvious? The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society see this day in and day out:

families who do not have a place to call home, including those who are cramped into unbearable and overcrowded living conditions, parents struggling with the difficult job of trying to get a job (whilst being told that they are just not trying hard enough), or kids attempting the herculean task of studying when all they have is a tiny corner of a cramped and noisy lounge-room that doubles as a bedroom at night.

We believe that the problem of homelessness and the shortage of social and affordable housing is so huge that we need a massive solution and a massive financial commitment if we want to lay claim to being civilised and fair, let alone smart and innovative. This is why, among other things such as reforms to negative gearing and capital gains tax exemptions, the St Vincent de Paul Society is calling for the creation of a \$10 billion social and affordable housing fund.

There are more than 100,000 people experiencing homelessness, over 200,000 families on the waiting list for social housing and 850,000 plus households experiencing housing stress (where a household's income is in the bottom 40 per cent of incomes and it is paying more than 30 per cent of this income on housing).

It's true that to fix a massive problem there will be a massive cost. But to use a housing analogy, the longer you leave it to repair the roof, the more you'll end up paying to fix the damage being done in the meantime. Similarly, the longer we leave it to fix the housing problem in Australia, the bigger the social and economic cost will be, for all of us. Because the costs of condemning masses of people to unemployment, low education outcomes and poor physical and mental health are



Dr John Falzon

incalculable. That's in economic terms. In human terms we're staring down the barrel of a social crisis; a completely avoidable human tragedy writ large.

The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society are doers. I know, however, that we are going to be written off as dreamers. Perhaps that's because there are forces in Australian society that don't want to acknowledge, let alone address, the actual nightmare that those who bear the daily brunt of inequality are forced to live within. From the First Peoples all the way through to the most recent seekers of refuge, we see the people who suffer precisely because we have failed as a nation to bite the tax reform bullet; because there are those who persist in the fiction that it is justifiable to take away from those at the bottom in order to preserve the perks and privileges of those at the top.

I know too that we are going to be dismissed as bleeding hearts. But we're not bleeding hearts. We're just stating the bleeding obvious. You're not going to create the space for innovation unless you take care of accommodation as well as health and education.

And you're certainly not going to encourage innovation if you keep on relying on the blunt tool but sharp weapon of class-based, race-based, gender-based, and disability-based incarceration. Because right now, in the midst of the homelessness and housing crisis, we're making an art form out of locking people up instead of housing them.

If you're a member of the First Peoples or an asylum seeker or someone forced to bear the brunt of class or gender inequality or someone living with a disability, being locked up follows hot on the heels of being locked out. But as activist and philosopher Angela Davis reminds us: 'Prisons do not disappear problems. Prisons disappear human beings.' Making sure everyone has a place to call home on the other hand; well that's what makes us feel human. ■

Dr John Falzon
Chief Executive Officer

National Council Members



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Representative



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Shops



Celina Lai
Vice President,
Twinning



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and Goulburn Territory
Council



Denis Walsh
State President,
New South Wales



Fay Gurr
President, Northern
Territory



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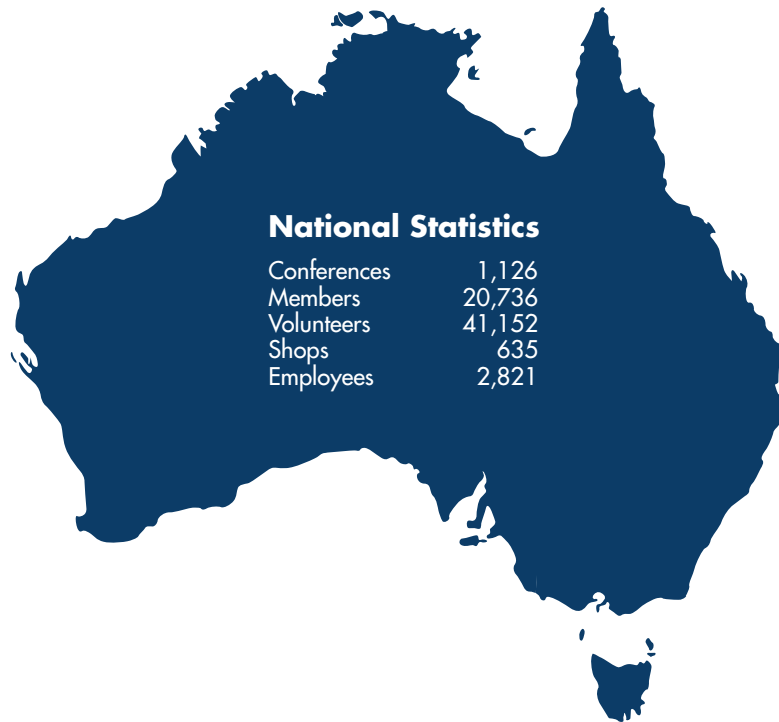
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National Statistics



New South Wales

Conferences	390
Members	10,392
Volunteers	14,967
Shops	235
Employees	1,672



South Australia

Conferences	61
Members	874
Volunteers	2,308
Shops	35
Employees	75



Victoria

Conferences	294
Members	4,507
Volunteers	12,142
Shops	104
Employees	225



Northern Territory

Conferences	7
Members	50
Volunteers	304
Shops	7
Employees	38



Tasmania

Conferences	30
Members	245
Volunteers	1,033
Shops	37
Employees	131



Western Australia

Conferences	78
Members	1,050
Volunteers	2,120
Shops	50
Employees	171



Queensland

Conferences	213
Members	3,155
Volunteers	6,761
Shops	142
Employees	372



Canberra-Goulburn

Conferences	53
Members	463
Volunteers	1,517
Shops	25
Employees	137

National Council Office

Volunteers	2
Employees	8

Advocacy Report: 2016 Overview

It's time we actually invested in people and communities. You don't build communities up by putting people down.

Structural changes to the economy have resulted in entire communities being left without work and often without adequate social and economic infrastructure. We see manufacturing jobs disappearing, the loss of jobs in some sectors due to privatisation, and the global quest for ever greater profits by using ever cheaper labour. We have seen a worrying trend towards casualisation and insecure employment and, on the latest ABS Labour Force figures, a decline in the total number of monthly hours worked in all jobs. Trends change rapidly and, as the Prime Minister is fond of reminding us, it is useful to be agile and innovative in a period of everlasting uncertainty and flux.

Which is why it really is time we actually invested in people and communities instead of putting people down and blaming them for their own exclusion. Living in poverty is not a sickness. Nor is it a crime. Yet we continue to fall into the ideological trap of either pathologising or criminalising people who sin against the dominant moral code by not being 'self-reliant' in the marketplace. This is not new. The earlier McClure Report, tabled by Minister Jocelyn Newman in 2000, began from the same premise; that we urgently needed to address the problem of 'welfare dependency' because it is seemingly spiralling out of control.

It's time we stopped disguising market failure as a personal failure to participate in the market. Australia does not have a welfare problem. We have a poverty problem and an inequality problem, but you know that these problems are going to be

ignored when the dominant discourse focusses our attention on the 'welfare problem.' It is true that providing someone with income support and forgetting about them is not the solution to unemployment. But neither is it the cause of unemployment. In short, it is neither the solution nor the problem. And the problem of unemployment and underemployment, which is a structural rather than a behavioural problem, is not going to be addressed by forcing people to live below the poverty line, which is what we appear to be comfortable with allowing to remain as the status quo, even after the welfare revolution. And in the meantime, we are still eagerly being told that corporations need welfare assistance via tax cuts and concessions!

Poverty is not a personal choice. Being a full-time carer, or living with a disability or mental illness, or leaving a violent partner, or being residualised by the labour market, should not result in poverty in a prosperous and progressive country. We should certainly not begrudge the money we spend to make sure that no one is left out or pushed out; that no one is excluded from having a place to call home, a place to work for those who can work (and appropriate income support for those who cannot), a place to learn, and a place to heal, from the First Peoples to the people who have most recently sought refuge in Australia, and everyone in between. We should not be comfortable with the retrograde notion that charity should be the default mode of providing social security.

If we take as our starting point the supposed need to reduce social expenditure, we will not arrive at the goal of reducing poverty and inequality. If our efforts as a society are predicated on the alleged need to 'get people off welfare', we will certainly go some way to cutting the welfare budget and getting people off the government ledger. It is time we actually invested in people and communities. It is time

we invested in a jobs plan instead of fantasising about a putting-the-boot-into-the-unemployed plan or a cutting-penalty-rates-and-undermining-the-minimum-wage plan. Unless we see a comprehensive investment in people and communities, in jobs, education, social and affordable housing, public and community health, community legal centres and social services, and unless we see the billions in cuts to these areas restored, and appropriately indexed and expanded, then instead of an investment in a more socially just Australia, we'll be staring down the barrel of divestment and the divisiveness that follows. And in the end, we'll be going down the US path of building profitable prisons instead of investing in the common good, for being locked up follows hot on the heels of being locked out.

Our advocacy work throughout 2016 included more than 300 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 is especially blessed with the work of the National Social Justice Committee, chaired by Frank Brassil, which sets social justice priorities for the year with the input of representatives from each of the states and territories. 2016 saw a strong and unrelenting focus on housing and homelessness, with the launch of the Social Justice Committee's paper, *The ache for home: a plan to address chronic homelessness and housing affordability in Australia*. Similarly the Vincentian refugee network provides a wealth of experience and expertise in the Society's advocacy for people seeking refuge.

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We also participate in a wide array of panels, committees, forums and working groups such as:

- Community Services Advisory Group (DSS)
- Settlement Council of Australia
- ACNC Research Network
- ACOSS Board
- UNHCR
- 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
- Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) Advisory Group
- Community Services Advisory Group, Department of Social Services
- Asylum Process Network, Refugee Council of Australia
- Detention and Offshore Processing Network, Refugee Council of Australia
- Tax Policy Network, ACOSS
- Health Policy Network, ACOSS
- Income Support and Employment Policy Network, ACOSS
- Housing and Homelessness Policy Network, ACOSS
- Community Sector Policy Network, ACOSS

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

- Inequality

- Poverty, including youth poverty
- Social justice and social change
- Budget 2016
- 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
- Social expenditure
- Economic priorities
- Tax reform

A SELECTION OF KEY SPEECHES BY DR FALZON

When your liberation is bound up with mine, ACU Social Work Orientation Week Guest Lecture, Australian Catholic University, Canberra, 24 February 2016

Mission making a difference in a changing world, panel presentation, Catholic Social Services Victoria Conference, Melbourne, 25 February 2016

Creating social change, presentation to UN Youth 2016 Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 12 March 2016

A place to call home, speech at CEO Sleepout Launch, Questacon, Canberra, 7 April 2016

The essentials of life, social justice presentation to NSW State Council, Sydney, 13 April 2016

We must use what we have to invent what we desire, keynote speech, Justice through the Arts, Burwood, 13 May 2016

Social Justice and Hope, AMWU State Conference, Hobart, 18 May 2016

Our day will come, AEU State Conference, Darwin, 21 May 2016

No place for homelessness, address to the CEO Sleepout, Questacon, Canberra, 23 June 2016

The stone that the builder rejected, Social Justice in the City, Melbourne, 29 June 2016

Education yes. Incarceration no! Keynote speech, AEU Victorian State Conference, Melbourne, 30 July 2016

Advocacy: the struggle for social justice, Rekindle the Flame National Vinnies Youth Event, Mt Tamborine, 13 August 2016

Imagining a new society, Sisters of St Joseph Sesquicentenary Justice Conference, Sydney, 17 August 2016

Poverty and Homelessness, Sisters of St Joseph Sesquicentenary Justice Conference, Sydney, 17 August 2016

The movement for progressive social change, ACTU Innovation and Growth Taskforces' August Intensive, Melbourne, 31 August 2016

Change will not come from above, APHEDA Annual Dinner, Sydney, 8 September 2016

The cornerstone of a new society, Spirituality in the Pub, Clayton, Victoria, 13 September 2016

Changing the structures, panel presentation, What Now? Forum: Advocating for change in the current political environment, Canberra, 16 September 2016

Addressing access and equity in health care for priority populations, panel presentation, Primary Health Network National Forum, Canberra, 20 September 2016

Love is the Heart of Everything, speech to the Vincentian Leadership Program, Melbourne, 17 October 2016

Poverty and Disempowerment, keynote speech, Anti-Poverty Week Forum, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, Melbourne, 19 October 2016

Addressing the causes of poverty, panel presentation, Anti-Poverty Week Forum, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, Melbourne, 19 October 2016

The opposite of poverty isn't wealth; it's justice, speech to the Vincentian Leadership Program, Perth, 21 October 2016

Reconfiguring power, keynote speech, Blue Mountains Community Anti-Poverty Forum, Katoomba, 22 October 2016

Poverty and Inequality, guest lecture, Sociology Program, Narrabundah College, 24 October 2016

The struggle against inequality, keynote speech, Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association Annual Conference, Sydney, 25 October 2016

The power of stories, speech, Nagle Centre Staff and Volunteers Reflection Day, Wivenhoe, 25 October 2016

Fighting for Social Justice, keynote speech, Mini Vinnies Social Justice Day, ACU, Canberra, 18 November 2016

PUBLICATIONS

'The bleeding obvious about homelessness', *Eureka Street*, 29 March 2016
<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=46151#.VvtlwOJ96Un>

'Budget 2016: Entrenching inequality,' *Pro Bono News*, 4 May 2016
<http://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2016/05/budget-2016-entrenching-inequality/>

'The kind of Australia we want', *Australian Educator*, June 2016

'TAFE is a national treasure', *TAFE Teacher*, June 2016

'Our youth need a jobs plan, not a rip-off', *Canberra Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, 18 May 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/our-youth-needs-a-jobs-plan-not-a-ripc-off-20160517-gox3ks.html>

Households in the dark: Mapping electricity disconnections in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and South East Queensland, <https://www.vinnies.org.au/content/Document/VIC/2016-June-Households-in-the-dark2.pdf>

'Waiting for the wealth to trickle down', *Canberra Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, 23 May 2016, <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/waiting-for-the-wealth-to-trickle-down-20160622-gpoxvv.html>

'Australia does not have a welfare problem. We have a poverty problem', *The Guardian*, 20 September 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/20/australia-does-not-have-a-welfare-problem-we-have-a-poverty-problem> (reproduced above)

'Mission: making a difference in a changing world' (with Maria Harries, Jayne Lloyd, Al Curtain and Deb Tsorbaris), in: Gabrielle McMullen, Patrice Scales and Denis Fitzgerald (Editors) (2016) *Review, Reimagine*,

Renew: Mission making a difference in a changing world, Brisbane: Connor Court.

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

'Australia does not have a welfare problem. We have a poverty problem', *The Guardian*, 9 November 2016

'Housing inequality is a failure to govern, and the market is not the answer', *The Guardian*, 29 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/29/housing-inequality-is-a-failure-to-govern-and-the-market-is-not-the-answer>

INQUIRIES

Pre-Budget Submission

Inquiry into Social Services Legislation Amendment (Family Measures) Bill 2015

Inquiry into Social Services Legislation Amendment (Social Services Legislation Amendment (Family Payments Structural Reform and Participation Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2015

Submission to the Council on Federal Financial Relations Affordable Housing Working Group – Innovative financing models

Submission to RCOA on Australia's 2016-17 Refugee and Humanitarian Program

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Human Services: Identifying sectors for reform

Submission to DSS Consultation on Homelessness Services

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Budget Repair) Bill 2016

Privatisation Inquiry, Presentation of Evidence to Canberra Hearing, 27 October 2016

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RESEARCH PROJECTS

Poverty in australia 2016 report (in partnership with ACOSS, UNSW, Salvation Army and Mission Australia)

The ache for home: a plan to address chronic homelessness and housing unaffordability in Australia

MEDIA RELEASES

‘St Vincent de Paul Society welcomes establishment of a national affordable housing working group’, 8 January 2016

‘Housing, health and income equity must be 2016 Federal Budget priorities: Pre-budget submission’, 8 February 2016

‘Overwhelming whole-of-community support to let asylum seekers stay’, 11 February 2016

‘\$10 billion social and affordable housing fund required to fix national homelessness crisis’, 2 March 2016

‘Budget 2016 entrenches inequality – St Vincent de Paul Society’, 3 May 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society says election should focus on housing and homelessness’, 3 June 2016

‘Households in the dark: Mapping electricity disconnections in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and South East Queensland’, 9 June 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls on incoming government to increase Newstart Allowance by \$50 a week’, 10 June 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls for fair tax rather than unfair cuts’, 16 June 2016

‘World Refugee Day: we can do better for people seeking our protection’, 20 June 2016

‘Detainees at Manus Island and Nauru should be brought to Australia now’, 18 August 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society urges Parliament to protect Energy Supplement’, 22 August 2016

‘Australia’s leading community groups join with ACOSS to oppose cuts to social security payments, Joint Media Statement’, 12 September 2016

‘More than half of \$6.3 billion Omnibus savings will come from social security payments, Vinnies warns’, 16 September 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls for humane response to asylum seekers ahead of New York talks’, 19 September 2016

‘Australia must stop driving Manus and Nauru detainees to despair’, 7th Oct 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society report shows households falling behind’, 20 October 2016

‘Vinnies calls for an end to the cruelty towards asylum seekers’, 20 October 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society condemns new immigration laws’, 6 November 2016

‘St Vincent de Paul Society calls for more certainty with homelessness funding’, 8 December 2016

JOINT CAMPAIGNS

- National Oral Health Alliance
- Joint Letter from Civil Society Organisations to Foreign Minister Julie Bishop on the Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT)
- Joint statement with ACOSS and ACFID in support of asylum seekers’ rights
- Joint Letter with Refugee Council of Australia on better access to education for people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas
- Joint Letter to the Prime Minister calling on the Australian Government to support vulnerable migrant women escaping family violence
- Joint Statement calling for increased resources for the Department of Human Services
- Civil Society Statement of Concern regarding the media and Mr Duncan Storrar
- Joint Campaign to halve homelessness
- Law Council of Australia national legal aid campaign
- Doctors for Refugees challenge to the Border Force Act
- Open Letter on the inadequacy of Newstart and the removal of the Energy Supplement
- Family Matters – kids safe in culture, not in care Statement of Commitment
- Redfern Statement
- Anti-Poverty Week 2016
- Open letter to the Prime Minister urging action to reduce poverty in Australia and overseas ■

Summary of National Council media releases and statements on matters affecting refugees and asylum seekers

The St Vincent de Paul Society has a long history of helping migrants and refugees.

This includes lobbying the federal government on behalf of those seeking asylum under international law, and providing financial and other support.

In 2016 the Society's National Council office regularly called on the federal government to end the detention of asylum seekers and refugees at Nauru and on Manus Island, and bring them to Australia.

The following media releases and statements were issued.

FEBRUARY

- **Joint media statement: Australia's international aid and community sector backs church sanctuary offer for asylum seekers**

On 3 February 2016, the High Court of Australia ruled offshore detention was legal. Responding to the ruling, the Society backed a joint statement in support of an offer by Australian churches and cathedrals to offer sanctuary to asylum seekers facing deportation to offshore detention facilities.

It said: 'The High Court of Australia may have ruled against the challenge to the legality of our offshore detention centres, what's at stake here is the safety and wellbeing of traumatised and vulnerable people, including 37 babies and 54 children. This goes beyond technical legalities, it's about our humanity, our morals and values, our human rights obligations and what the humanitarian thing to do is.'

- **Overwhelming whole-of-community support to let asylum seekers stay**

The St Vincent de Paul Society welcomes statements by Melbourne Archbishop Denis Hart and other welfare groups, health agencies, politicians and community leaders across the country, calling for 267 asylum seekers in Australia to be cared for in the community, rather than condemned to offshore incarceration in Nauru.

APRIL

- **Bring Manus Island detainees to Australia**

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia welcomes a ruling by the Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea that states the detention of refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island is illegal.

'The ruling should be a wake-up call for the government to rethink its refugee policy, end the inhumanity of indefinite detention of vulnerable people on Manus Island, and develop a humane alternative that treats those seeking asylum with fairness, compassion and respect', CEO Dr John Falzon said.

JUNE

- **World Refugee Day: we can do better for people seeking our protection**

Ahead of the 2016 federal election, the Society's CEO Dr John Falzon urged the incoming government to pursue genuine regional agreements when responding to the problem of irregular boat arrivals. He maintained these would ideally break the business of people smuggling without breaking the bodies and spirits of asylum seekers.

AUGUST

- **Detainees at Manus Island and Nauru should be brought to Australia now**

Following revelations of mistreatment and abuse at Nauru, and confirmation that the Manus Island Detention Centre would close, the Society called on the federal government to take responsibility for all 1300 detainees at both offshore processing centres.

'It is time the Australian government abandoned the practice of offshore punishment and honoured its international obligations to people seeking a safe place to call home', the Society's CEO Dr John Falzon said.

SEPTEMBER

- **Detention no place for children (National Children's Week)**

The Society marks National Children's Week by highlighting the number of children and families in immigration detention.

In June 2016 Australian government statistics showed 49 children were being held in detention facilities at Nauru. Another 296 children were in community detention on the Australian mainland.

- **St Vincent de Paul Society calls for a humane response to asylum seekers ahead of New York talks**

To coincide with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull joining world leaders for two summits on refugees in New York, the Society issued a media statement urging the federal government to increase Australia's annual intake of refugees to 30,000.

'Contrary to the government's assertions, breaking people's spirits in offshore processing facilities is not the unavoidable alternative to deaths at sea', the Society's National Council CEO Dr John Falzon said.

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OCTOBER

- **Vinnies calls for an end to the cruelty towards asylum seekers**

The St Vincent de Paul Society points to the growing number of reports and evidence cataloguing the suffering of asylum seekers and refugees at Nauru and on Manus Island. These include ABC television footage documenting the deteriorating mental health of children residing on Nauru, along with an Amnesty International report that says Australia's regional processing regime on Nauru amounts to the intentional torture of refugees.

NOVEMBER

- **St Vincent de Paul Society condemns proposed new immigration laws**

The Society issues a statement describing legislation that bans asylum seekers who arrive by boat from ever entering Australia as cruel and draconian.

Full media releases and statements can be viewed at:

www.vinnies.org.au/page/news/National_Media_Releases/

and

www.vinnies.org.au/page/News/National/

PUBLICATIONS

- ***In Limbo*, by Felix Delhomme.** Nearly 29,000 people seeking asylum live in Australia on temporary bridging visas. Left in limbo and pushed into poverty by work rights restrictions, they are prevented from rebuilding a new life. *The Record*, winter 2016.
- ***On the ground in Lebanon*, by Ella Salhab Bitar.** An account of the Society's work in Lebanon, a country which has always been a refuge and haven for persecuted people. *The Record*, summer 2015–16. ■

◀ continued from page 4

asylum seekers on outings, connecting them with other services, and organising Christmas parties for them.

In the ACT, a special group was established to assist people from Vietnam and Laos—the Caritas Christi conference.

In 1976 alone, the Society in Victoria helped more than 1000 refugees from Asia resettle, through providing goods worth more than \$70,000 at the time.

In the late 1970s, the government was starting to express reservations about migrant intakes, given local unemployment, the cost of settling refugees, and perceived threats caused by the new Australians. The shift in attitude prompted the Society's National Council in March 1977 to write to the government and plead for the true facts about refugees to be known, and for the government to increase its intake of those seeking asylum.

In 1986, the Society's National Migrants and Refugees Committee was established, which kept state

committees informed of changes in government policy, statements by the Pope, and other world leaders.

Meanwhile Queensland was seeing growing numbers of refugees, particularly from Latin America. In 1988, the state formed its own Migrant and Refugee Committee to deal with the influx of new arrivals.

In the 1990s, the then head of the National Migrant and Refugee Committee, John Atkinson, witnessed and noted the depression that permeated in refugee camps, as people slowly gave up hope, including many children.

In 1993, following the commencement of mandatory detention in Australia, the Society vehemently opposed the policy in a 23-page submission to a Parliamentary Inquiry, arguing it was harmful to all involved and incredibly expensive.

At the same time, a wide range of on-the-ground support for refugees continued across Australia. In Tasmania, the Society

rented at least one house to provide accommodation for refugees in West Hobart. Outings were also organised, including a cruise to Bruny Island, which was followed by a barbecue.

In Sydney the Society provided funding (for at least two years) for a counsellor to work with torture and trauma victims. More remarkably, it ran discos for detainees at Villawood.

Nowadays it is not only Catholics who are assisted by the Society. Material and emotional support is given to any refugee who needs it, regardless of their background. The Society continues to run a wide range of programs for refugees, including tutoring, settlement assistance of all varieties, material aid, housing, white goods, legal assistance, visits to detention centres, and much more.

At the national level, we continue to advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. We hope that—learning from the past—the Society can help move Australia's policy and practice in this area towards a better future. ■



Migrant and Refugee Centre in South Australia

The Society's Migrant and Refugee Centre in South Australia provides assistance for those who have fled war, persecution or significant injustice.

Services include housing and immigration information; material assistance (food, clothing, basic furniture and a contribution towards the payment of essential services bills); budget and financial counselling, advocacy and referrals to other agencies for specific services.

The centre also administers an interest-free loan for eligible refugees so they can purchase household whitegoods.

In late 2015, the centre moved from its premises at Allenby Gardens to its new home behind the Sacred Heart Church on Port Road, Hindmarsh.

In the 2015–16 financial year, \$279,000 worth of assistance was given to 5383 people.

The centre relies on the generosity of its many benefactors to continue its mission, due to increasing numbers of people needing help.

Two small grants were received from the South Australian Government in the 2015–16 financial year.

An amount of \$8140 from the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion enabled the purchase of new office furniture and computers.

The South Australian Government's Multicultural SA Grant Program provided \$5200 for community engagement and consultation activities.

Volunteers have been the life blood of the Migrant and Refugee Centre, with an average of 18 rostered to provide services on either a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday.

Volunteer financial counsellors provide advice on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

CASE STUDY: FINDING A SAFE HAVEN IN AUSTRALIA

Aziz and other members of his family were shot at by rebel forces in Afghanistan and everything he owned, including his house and business, was taken.

His 15-year-old son was kidnapped, thrown out of a four-storey building, and left for dead.

With the help of neighbours, Aziz found the boy, broken and barely alive. He and his family fled to Pakistan.

It was another five years before they were issued with a refugee visa (subclass 200) to come to Australia, where the disabled boy was treated at Lyell McEwin Hospital, Adelaide. He has now made a near full recovery.

The Migrant and Refugee Service provided Aziz and his family with food, clothing and a wheelchair for his son. Aziz and his wife have also been learning English through a TAFE college, and the children have settled into school.

The biggest challenge Aziz now faces is finding suitable long-term accommodation for his family, which includes seven children, and a job. In the meantime, out of gratitude for the assistance he received from the Migrant and Refugee Centre, Aziz is now helping there as a volunteer.

Remarkably, he is optimistic about the future.

'I am very happy. My children are very happy. We have no problems and I don't worry here because life is safe and that is a big thing', he said. ■



The long fight for freedom

When he was living in Pakistan, Abdul* was part of a group that defended the rights of the marginalised Shia Islam.

Due to his religious sympathies, he was targeted by Sunni militants and was forced to leave Pakistan to avoid being murdered. Since then, the Society's Refugee and Migrant Support Program in Western Australia has offered him ongoing assistance.

The 20-something-year-old arrived in the country in March 2012, and managed to complete a certificate and diploma in Business Management in just 14 months.

At the same time, Abdul held down a job and was paying rent and other expenses.

He applied for a protection visa in June 2013, with the aim of obtaining permanent residency. Applying for the visa comes with a financial cost and is only available if you are a refugee currently residing in Australia.

After six months, Abdul was informed his application had been rejected by the Department of Immigration. He appealed the decision at a further financial cost, only to find out two years later that his appeal had again been rejected.

Because of this, Abdul has incurred a Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Border Protection debt, and has to adhere to a monthly payment plan.

As a last resort, he applied for a Judicial Review of his refugee status.

He also approached Law Access, a not-for-profit organisation that arranges low cost and free legal assistance for people who satisfy a means and merit test.

Despite being eligible for pro bono legal assistance, Abdul was advised by Law Access a week before his hearing that there were no available lawyers to represent him. Out of desperation, he contacted a lawyer in Sydney who was recommended by someone in a similar situation.

In order to represent Abdul, an initial legal fee was required to launch the case in the Federal Court, as well as a

consultation fee to start the process, forcing Abdul to reluctantly borrow money from a friend.

Eventually a preliminary court hearing took place, and his case was approved to proceed.

Abdul now has another year to wait until his court case takes place.

While awaiting the final outcome of his refugee status, recent changes to the immigration conditions of his bridging visa mean Abdul is not entitled to work or get any form of social welfare benefits. He is also not able to access Medicare assistance.

Unable to afford his rent, he lost his home and is squatting with friends. A man of pride, he struggles with depression and embarrassment over being unable to pay his own way.

He doesn't like to ask for money and as a result, often goes without food. He has a medical condition which affects his right hand. This causes a lot of pain, but he bears with it because he has no access to medical benefits.

The St Vincent de Paul Society's Migrant and Refugee Committee in Western Australia has been assisting



The eye of all by Veronica Gauci, was one of several artworks displayed at the Society's inaugural Just Art exhibition in Melbourne. For the full story, please turn to page 24.

Abdul with emergency relief by covering the initial payment and first instalment of his Department of Immigration and Border Protection debt, along with providing regular food parcels and vouchers.

Abdul has many sleepless nights as he anxiously awaits his time in court. He lives in constant fear of being deported to face death, which was the fate of his brother and uncle. The Society continues to support Abdul and he is greatly appreciative of any help he receives. He regularly states that when he is able to work again, he would like to repay or make a contribution to the Society.

Fortunately, Abdul has recently received confirmation from Law Access that a pro bono lawyer is now available to represent him. Abdul is greatly relieved, as he was unsure how he was going to meet the ongoing legal costs of pursuing his application in court.

The Society continues to provide Abdul with opportunities to connect with others so that he does not feel alone.

We will continue to advocate for his right to become a welcome citizen, where he is free to make a better life for himself. ■

** Name changed to protect identity*

WHAT IS THE REFUGEE & MIGRANT SUPPORT PROGRAM?

The Refugee & Migrant Support Program assists newly arrived individuals and families with settling into their new home in Western Australia. Support provided includes:

- household goods assistance
- emergency clothing
- pastoral support
- activities including picnics, sporting matches and excursions to Western Australian sites
- support at Christmas
- advocacy and awareness raising.

Twice a year, the committee organises a 'Welcome to Western Australia Picnic', which offers newly arrived families the chance to come together and support each other.

HOW CAN I ASSIST THE REFUGEE & MIGRANT SUPPORT PROGRAM?

The Refugee & Migrant Support Program is always looking for more volunteers to get involved. There are lots of jobs to do—volunteers can do as much or as little as they like.

Donations of food, clothing and household goods are also needed for newly arrived individuals.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

For further information, please contact the Refugee & Migrant Support Program on (08) 9475 5400 or email info@sudpwa.org.au. ■



A big message in a little bottle by Shereen D'Costa, was one of several artworks displayed at the Society's inaugural Just Art exhibition in Melbourne. For the full story, please turn to page 24.

Our obligations

The Society's refugee services in NSW extend from the NSW Riverina to Sydney's inner-city; and from the NSW Hunter Valley to the far NSW North Coast.

The United Nations defines a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence.

Australia is a signatory to the international organisation's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. For this reason, we are obliged under international law to offer protection to people found to be refugees.

People seeking safe refuge in a new place are at risk of experiencing homelessness or living in substandard accommodation.

The majority are ineligible for Centrelink benefits or earning their own income, forcing them to rely on charities and communities for basic necessities.

Our Refugee Support Service (RSS) team aims to work together with asylum seekers and refugees who are living in NSW and experiencing severe financial hardship and social isolation.

We advocate on behalf of our clients, provide employment advice for those who have work rights, and encourage participation in recreational and educational activities. Assistance with short-term accommodation and access to counselling for victims of torture and trauma are also given.

WHO CAN ACCESS THIS SERVICE?

If you are currently seeking asylum you are welcome to contact us. We also accept referrals from other services, hospitals and community members. Some of our programs are available to RSS clients only, while others are available to the broader asylum seeker and refugee community.

WHERE IS THE SERVICE LOCATED?

Our team is based in Surry Hills, though anyone who is an asylum seeker and living in NSW may be eligible for our assistance.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

For more information, contact the Refugee Support Services Team. Opportunities to volunteer with RSS are also welcome.

Phone: (02) 8093 6724

Email: refugee.services@vinnies.org.au



SPECIALIST CONFERENCE

The Migrant and Refugee Conference assists newly arrived migrants and refugees in the Catholic Diocese of Maitland and Newcastle. Its 10-member group visits families in their homes to offer friendship and assistance with food, clothing and furniture. We remain in contact with families until they feel safe and secure.

Referrals are accepted from settlement service providers, schools, Centrelink, multicultural and neighborhood centres.

For assistance, call the referral centre on 02 4961 6885.

NORTH COAST SETTLEMENT SERVICE

The Society's North Coast Settlement Service has a main office in Coffs Harbour, and an outreach office in Lismore, where a permanent staff member is available. The service supports newly arrived migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants who are living along the coastal corridor between Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads. Those benefitting from the service include people residing in Clarence Valley, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Murwillumbah and all areas in between. The service is funded by the Australian Government's Settlement Services program.

For assistance, call 02 5612 1370

NSW RIVERINA REGION

The St Vincent de Paul Society has welcomed families and individuals in the NSW Riverina from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burundi, Togo, Congo, Ethiopia, India and Fiji. Services the Society provides in the region are funded by the Australian government's Humanitarian Settlement Services program.

For assistance, call 02 6971 7175

SPARK

Spark supports newly-arrived children and families from refugee backgrounds. With the support of 150-plus volunteers, it runs educational, social and cultural programs in partnership with primary schools in Western Sydney.

In the last two years, engagement has increased steadily from 330 children and 150 parents to 1220 children and 700 parents.

Its activities include:

- early learning programs for toddlers and babies and their parents
- English classes and citizenship courses
- programs for primary school aged children.

The after-school activities club Bright Sparks comprises of a team of volunteers who assist children with homework and practising English.

In 2015 SPARK introduced three six-week long circus programs for 240 children. They were coached by a team of three circus trainers, staff and volunteers. More than 120 parents came to watch their children perform.

Here is some of what participants had to say about the program.

'During Circus I felt happy and it was fun and a good experience and I want others to enjoy it.'

'I love working in a team now.'

'I learned how to spin the plates and make a pyramid. I know it is even okay to fail.' ■



Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support (VoRTCS)

The Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support (VoRTCS) program is a special works of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland that provides educational, vocational and social opportunities for refugee families.

The group visits families in their homes, where community support and English language assistance is given. We believe that refugees have a lot to contribute to Australian society, and that they should be assisted and encouraged to reach their full potential.

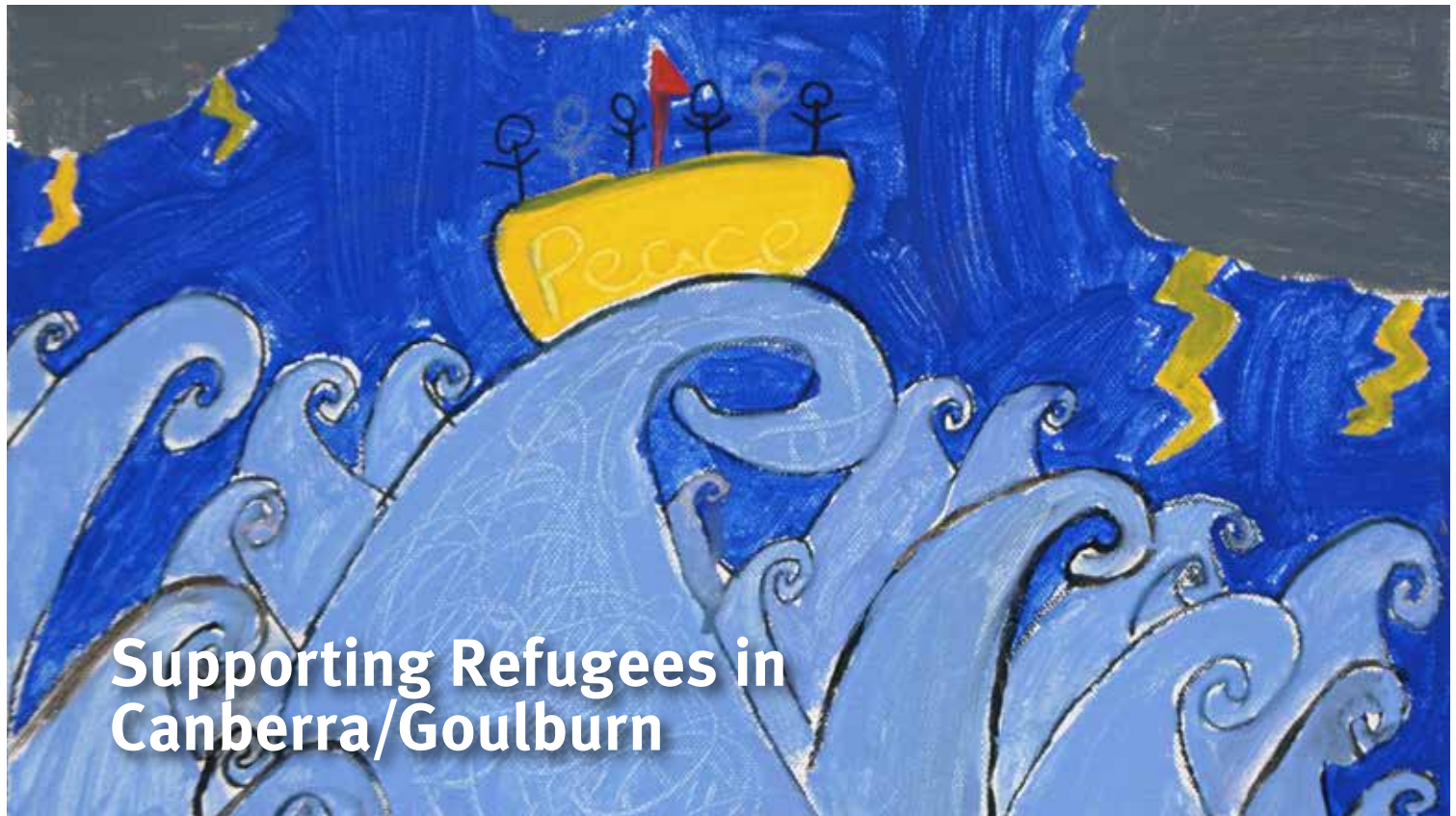
In 2016, some 620 volunteers visited 155 families (comprising of a total of 889 people) in their homes.

In July, children from both the VoRTCS and Vinnies Youth programs were brought together for a kids' camp. The aim of the camp was to build the children's confidence and give them the chance to make new friends. For many of the VoRTCS children, it was their first time away from their families. It was also their first camp, with some of the children having previously only experienced a refugee camp.

In August VoRTCS received laptops that had been donated from a local business in Brisbane. They were given to three refugee families who each had five children. The families are now learning how to use the computers and the internet at home, to support their schooling, TAFE and work studies.

In addition to this, VoRTCS held two multicultural community picnics in 2016. Families and tutors were invited, as well as friends and members of the community. The initiative is aimed at breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for people to truly connect and feel welcome in the community. More than 110 people have attended the events. Local schools have gotten involved through putting on a free halal BBQ, along with organising sport and craft activities for the kids.

VoRTCS is currently supporting local North Brisbane conferences with settling more than 140 newly arrived refugee families and individuals. ■



Supporting Refugees in Canberra/Goulburn

Asylum Seekers by Grace Adams, was one of several artworks displayed at the Society's inaugural Just Art exhibition in Melbourne. For full story, please turn to page 24.

Our Caritas Christi Conference provides support for migrants and refugees across the whole of the ACT. In the past year, the conference responded to 85 requests for assistance—these came from 30 individuals.

Amira*, Farid* and their six children were one of the families we supported. They fled their home in Syria as a result of the war, and spent time in Lebanon and Egypt before coming to Australia.

Farid was the first to settle in Australia. Amira and the children followed on a spousal visa.

Caritas Christi first had contact with the family in early 2016, as they were experiencing financial hardship. Because of the high cost of private rental housing, they were also at risk of becoming homeless.

The children were not attending school and this was adding to a sense of social isolation.

The Conference contacted our Family Services team to talk about how we as an organisation could effectively support this family. Initially, Farid and Amira were advised of more affordable short-term accommodation and given financial counselling to assist them with managing their debt.

The Caritas Christi Conference continues to provide food, furniture and clothing for the family, as needed.

All of the children are now enrolled in a primary school close to where they are living, and a volunteer tutor is teaching Amira to speak English. The children are also receiving tutoring.

Farid and Amira are now on track to secure permanent housing. With their children attending school, their social isolation is slowly being broken down, and the tutoring is helping Amira feel more confident each day.

The situation of this family highlights challenges faced by many refugee and asylum seeker families. It also reminds us of our responsibility to ensure that these people are not forgotten.

In May 2016, the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn office continued to voice our concerns about the voiceless. In the ACT there were approximately 150 asylum seekers awaiting an invitation to apply for a

temporary protection visa under the federal government's 'fast-track' system of processing boat arrivals.

Where applications are refused, asylum seekers are no longer eligible to receive government-funded support services; this includes loss of work rights, removal of access to any Centrelink benefits, and loss of access to casework support through the Status Resolution Support Services program.

The community sector refers to people facing this predicament as 'asylum seekers without income'.

'We are extremely concerned that these vulnerable men, women and children will fall through the cracks', Paul Trezise, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, said.

With no capacity to receive income, they have no choice but to rely on the support of organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul Society.

We do not take that responsibility lightly and are working across the whole of the organisation to put in place supports and assistance, to ensure everyone is able to have the quality of life they deserve. ■

** Name changed to protect identity*



Entering at a trickle

In September 2015, in response to the Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crisis, the Tasmanian Government wrote to the federal government outlining the state's willingness to accept 500 asylum seekers and refugees to settle in Tasmania.

Delays in processing refugees hoping to enter Australia have placed a large question mark over when Tasmania's offer might be acted upon—if at all. While the Tasmanian Government is still hopeful it can play a part in responding to this humanitarian crisis, the federal government's screening process has seen refugees enter Australia at a 'trickle'.

As at March 2016, less than 30 of Australia's promised 12,000 Syrian refugees had arrived. Of those, most went to Perth. The Settlement Council of Australia says rigorous screening processes involving security checks, health checks and character checks are delaying further arrivals.

The same council says there are no immediate plans to settle anyone in Tasmania, but that doesn't rule out the possibility of people coming in the long term.

Meanwhile, the Office of the Federal Minister said there had never been a guarantee Tasmania would receive 500 refugees.

All these delays and changes of attitude are proving to be most frustrating to those of us who are standing by, ready and able to provide assistance.

The Tasmanian Government has awarded CatholicCare the tender to provide extra settlement services at a cost of \$250,000 a year, but the people who would benefit from the services are yet to arrive in the state.

We fully understand and agree with stricter security measures being enforced to protect us, but we need to speed up the process before many more die, not only from persecution and war, but also as a result of international neglect. ■

- People with refugee backgrounds live all over Tasmania, but those awaiting refugee status tend to be based in the Hobart area.
- Vinnies Tasmania has a proud history of supporting new arrivals. The Society's records show that in the early part of the 20th century, volunteers met migrants before they even set foot on Australian soil by boarding ships as they arrived. They then assisted them with accommodation and other emergency needs.
- More recently, in late 2015 the Society became part of a working group set up by the community sector and the ALP in Tasmania in preparation for the arrival of refugees from Syria.
- The erosion of funding for key social services such as legal assistance, housing and emergency relief has severely impacted asylum seekers living on bridging visas in Tasmania. This has pushed people deeper into poverty, resulting in increased numbers relying on charity to fulfil their basic needs.
- A real concern is that many are falling through the cracks. This includes a failure to fund educational opportunities for asylum seekers who are over the age of 18 and stranded on bridging or temporary visas.
- Vinnies Tasmania has consistently advocated for a more humane and compassionate approach, including lobbying the Tasmanian Government around funding for education and legal assistance, and drawing attention to the impact of policy decisions on the everyday lives of asylum seekers.

Where appropriate, the Society has urged the Tasmanian Government to put pressure on the Commonwealth to commit funding to areas of profound and unmet need.

Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (OPCAT)

The St Vincent de Paul Society is pushing for independent monitoring to stop the abuse of asylum seekers in detention, through an agreement known as the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

Countries that ratify the OPCAT are required to set up a system of unannounced and unrestricted visits to places like immigration detention centres and prisons, with the aim of safeguarding the dignity and rights of people locked up inside.

By its very nature, detention puts people in a vulnerable situation—they are shut off from outside scrutiny and are entirely reliant on the authorities that have detained them for their basic needs, Corinne Dobson, the Society's National Policy Advisor and co-convenor of the Australia OPCAT Network, says.

She warned examples of ill-treatment of those deprived of their liberty were all too common in Australia.

'It has often been said that prisons and other places of detention are a mirror of society and its values,' she said.

'Nelson Mandela famously observed that "no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.'

More than 80 countries have ratified the OPCAT since it came into force globally in 2006. While Australia became a signatory in 2009, it is yet to put the treaty into effect via legislation or other necessary measures.

Postscript: At the time of publication, the federal government announced an intention to ratify the OPCAT by December 2017. In the meantime, the Society will continue to push for the prevention of human rights abuses in detention and closed institutions.



The crying dove, by Lucia Roohizadegan.

The art of humanity

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria held an art competition in late August to advocate for asylum seekers.

More than 260 artworks were displayed at The Stables in North Melbourne for the Society's inaugural Just Art exhibition. The theme 'Asylum seekers: Stories of humanity' attracted entries from primary and secondary school students across the state. There was also an open age category.

'Art has, for centuries, challenged our perceptions of life, politics, ethics and culture—which is why Just Art is such an important forum for facilitating conversations about people seeking asylum and refugees in Australia,' the Society's Victorian CEO Ms Sue Cattermole said.

Paintings, photography, stop-motion animation and creative writing were on display.

Lucia Roohizadegan won the highest accolade of the competition, the Ozanam Award, for her visual arts piece titled *The crying dove*.

She said it was a symbol of hope, freedom and peace when people were trapped in the process of seeking asylum.

'The golden wattle represents the safety that Australia would be giving to asylum seekers and could also serve as an invitation to Australia', she said.

Evalina Mabena-Bai, a 13-year-old girl whose parents fled war-torn South Sudan, submitted a powerful piece of writing, *A flood of humanity*, while Kate Solly won the Open Age creative writing section for her piece, *Wipe your feet*. ■

Wipe Your Feet

by Kate Solly

ive taken in the welcome mat
ive bolted up the door ive made
a sign: No Visitors dont come
here anymore you might turn
up uninvited you might try a
different door you just have to
turn around you cant linger to
implore dont interrupt my coffee,
i dont care about your war read
the sign: No Visitors dont come
here anymore ive taken in the
welcome mat theres dirt tracks
on the floor theres a certain
hostile sameness to these rooms
not there before and the harsh
and distant screaming i must
focus to ignore this house it feels
so filthy i cant live here anymore



Space to move on

Basaam was referred to the Bakhita Centre in Darwin, a hostel run by the St Vincent de Paul Society that provides medium to long term accommodation for men over the age of 18.

He was a haunted man—he escaped religious persecution in his home country and came to Australia seeking a better life. He feared being returned to detention when his temporary visa expired, as he didn't know how to go about obtaining permanent residency in Australia.

When his temporary visa lapsed, Bassam was also unable to sit his learner test for a motorcycle licence, continue English classes at Casuarina Senior College, or do online courses to give himself better employment prospects. He remained in this situation for quite some time while relying heavily on staff at the Bakhita Centre. When Basaam's application for permanent residency was denied, staff

at the hostel wrote letters of support and character references for him, in an attempt to get his final appeal across the line.

We were successful. We say 'we', because although we went through none of the intense roller coaster of emotions experienced by Basaam, we were deeply invested in the outcome.

It was heartbreaking for us to sit with Basaam when it looked like his situation was hopeless, yet he wanted to go through the road rules book one more time just in case he got his motorcycle license.

Basaam eventually moved out of the Bakhita Centre and into private rental accommodation.

He also secured employment. He is now a permanent resident of Australia, and has a new name, Michael.

When we see him out and about in the community, he is the first to approach and embrace us; his appreciation and his genuine love for those who invested in him are evident.

For us it was something small—providing a space in which someone could begin to get his life together, an

ear for a man who had not felt heard for quite some time; and recognition that just because English is not someone's first language, it does not mean they do not have the same kinds of dreams and hopes as us 'Aussies.' For Michael (Basaam), it was the difference between sinking and swimming ... and ultimately sailing.

WHAT IS THE BAKHITA CENTRE?

The Bakhita Centre provides medium to long term accommodation for single men over the age of 18 in Darwin. We have capacity to accommodate 30 people and we also provide a meal service for residents.

WHERE IS THE SERVICE LOCATED?

The Bakhita Centre is located in the Northern Suburbs of Darwin, at 107 Dick Ward Drive, Coconut Grove NT, 0810. On Bus Route 4.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THIS SERVICE?

The Bakhita Centre provides residents with a safe and welcoming environment. Safe social interaction helps residents to develop a sense of self respect, belonging and purpose. ■



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

Many of us have experienced a time in our lives when we have moved to a new town, state or country due to a change in our circumstances. We can recall feeling displaced, uncertain and alone. We wonder if our new neighbours are nice or if the other kids at school will include us in their games. We hope we don't get lost, that we like our new job, and that the supermarkets will have food that we recognise.

All our responses are heightened at this time too. Things that are familiar or remind us of our old place make us feel safe. When something happens that upsets us, this can be unbelievably devastating, no matter how small. Now, imagine you need to move to save your life.

The UN Refugee Agency reported that there were more than 63 million people in the world who were forcibly displaced in 2015. Of these, 23 million were recognised as refugees. A large percentage of this group is under 18 years of age. A number of the hosting countries for refugees have active Vincentian Conferences working with the poor in their communities. These Vincentians also offer assistance and basic supplies to refugees, seeking to create something familiar in their chaotic world as they build new lives. Some of these host countries are in the Asia-Pacific region and are already recipients of financial and spiritual aid from the Society in Australia. The overseas projects that we support help all people in need, including those who have found refuge in a new country.

While the debate continues in our parliament as to how asylum seekers and refugees should be processed, may we as Vincentians continue to always be generous in sharing our resources and time with those in need, regardless of how they arrive.

The following is a small sample of the work Australian Vincentians have supported in the past year.

OVERSEAS PROJECT DETAILS

SSVP Medical Dispensary Building Shillong
Through the Shillong Central Council, India

Objective: Health Care and Medicines for the rural poor of Lyngkholi and 11 surrounding villages.

Items: construction of dispensary building.

Sheep Bank Project
Through St Joseph Conference, India

Objective: To create and generate a source of income.

Items: Interest-free loans of \$152 to purchase 3 small sheep for each of the families involved in the project.

Milk Cattle Project
Through Resurrected Christ Mahila Conference, India

Objective: To create income and generate a source of income.

Items: Interest-free loans of \$304 to purchase 1 cow for each of the families involved in the project.

Sewing Machine Project
Through Our Lady of Lourdes Conference, India

Objective: To provide 2 training courses in tailoring within a year to 70 women.

Items: 7 sewing machines. ■

St Vincent de Paul Society National Financial Statements 2016

The Society in Australia operates principally at a local level—it does not have a large central administration office. Decisions are made as close to the workforce as possible.

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 a big picture view of the Society's work. We do not measure ourselves primarily by financial outcomes, but it is nevertheless vital that the Society's work is managed and accountable to the highest standards. The following extract from the consolidated statement of comprehensive income gives a picture of the extent of the work of the Society in Australia.

	Revenue \$	Operating Expenses \$	Net surplus / (deficit) \$
Community Services			
Aged Care	45,979,275	23,776,526	22,202,749
Community Housing	9,375,386	8,465,715	909,671
Disability Services	23,551,433	23,903,921	(352,488)
Financial Assistance Services	309,785	282,218	27,567
Help for People in Crisis	41,233,447	78,551,536	(37,318,089)
Home assist Services	6,327,066	7,755,648	(1,428,582)
Homeless Services	39,072,036	51,932,811	(12,860,776)
Migrants and Refugees	1,657,299	1,817,175	(159,876)
Natural Disaster Recovery and Relief	453,045	503,010	(49,965)
Overseas Development	117,982	848,855	(730,872)
Youth Services	487,591	2,337,678	(1,850,087)
Total Community Services	168,564,344	200,175,092	(31,610,748)
Supporting Services			
Fundraising	50,789,917	9,001,875	41,788,042
Operational Support Services	5,484,115	9,989,043	(4,504,928)
Retail Operations	170,558,772	113,568,690	56,990,082
Total Supporting Services	226,832,804	132,559,608	94,273,196
Shared Services			
Management and Administration Services	28,288,999	27,619,907	669,092
Finance Services	96,846	3,858,218	(3,761,372)
Human Resource Services	10,082	3,639,804	(3,629,722)
Information Communication Telecommunication Services	16,908	3,983,148	(3,966,240)
Legal and Compliance Services	50	822,993	(822,943)
Total Shared Services	28,412,885	39,924,071	(11,511,186)
Other comprehensive income			
Reclassification adjustment on impairment of available for sale financial assets	-	4,468,413	(4,468,413)
Net changes in fair value of available for sale financial assets	243,059	673,769	(430,710)
Total other comprehensive income for the year	243,059	5,142,182	(4,899,123)
Total comprehensive income for the year	424,053,092	377,800,952	46,252,140

Table 1: Financial Summary 2016



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

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