

The Record

Spring 2022

 St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*



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Building a Fairer Australia



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NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

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.

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.

Our Strategic Goals: Spirituality and Membership, Our Advocacy, Our Governance and Leadership, Our Work Together, Our Sustainability

The Record is published regularly each year by the National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia acknowledges that we are on Aboriginal land. We pay respects to all traditional custodians. This publication may contain images of deceased members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are used with the greatest respect and appreciation.

Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the publishers.

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 45,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.



Available online:
record.vinnies.org.au



Vinnies CEO Sleepouts

Vinnies CEO Sleepouts in June this year, followed by community sleepouts in NSW, were a record success, raising more than \$9.25m to help fund the Society's good works. See our coverage on pages 32-34 of this issue.

Pictured is Mel Mairata, Director at WA company Atariam that assists organisations in the areas of strategy and cultural alignment through leadership development and organisational coaching. Mel would raise \$5,953 on the night.

Got a story to share?

Do you have a suggestion of an interesting article for *The Record*? Perhaps you would like to write or suggest a story and share your thoughts and photos with our readers? Plenty happens across the St Vincent de Paul Society, but we can't keep our fingers on the pulse of everything. Please contact media@svdp.org.au to discuss how we might help.

On the cover... Mark Monaghan, Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, with Rachael Burgess, owner of Darwin business Rachael's Designacake, and Jo Laverty, the MC for the Sleepout. Rachael is sporting the donated Ed Hardy women's sunglasses that were auctioned for \$750 to boost the night's fundraising.

Plenary Council is ‘a source of hope’

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

In October 2021, the Catholic Church in Australia gathered for the first Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council, the last having been held back in 1937.

A Plenary Council is a formal meeting of the bishops and other representatives of all the dioceses and eparchies of the Catholic Church in Australia. The purpose of this Plenary Council was to discern what God is asking of us in Australia at this present time. While the Church should be asking that question continually, a Plenary Council is a particularly graced instrument for seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and it has the authority to commit the Church to certain principles and actions and to seek amendments to canon law.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first Assembly was held online. The second and final assembly of the Plenary Council was held from 3-9 July 2022 in Sydney.

Claire Victory, National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, was among the 277 members of the Plenary Council who considered, prayed together and voted on more than 30 motions that emerged across the four-year Plenary Council journey. Here, she recounts some of her experiences of that journey...

Going into this whole Plenary Council process, I didn’t realise how physically, intellectually and emotionally taxing it would be. There was a huge amount of work involved prior to the First Assembly (conducted over Teams in October 2021) and then between that assembly and the Second Assembly in Sydney in July 2022.

The documents circulated following the First Assembly, culminating



Claire Victory

“I feel that these hopes were realised and that the Plenary Council will ultimately prove to have been a turning point in the history of the Church in Australia.”

in the Motions and Amendments document that formed the basis of the Second Assembly, suggested to me that truly radical or transformative outcomes would be unlikely. However, from the time the First Assembly began, I did feel some hope that the dialogue, the relationship building and the nature of the personal sharing – and the barriers being broken down in the process – would bring the Church in Australia to a better place.

Day 1: Sunday 3 July 2022

It was pleasing that the first words of the Plenary week, at the start of the opening Mass, were an acknowledgement of the Indigenous custodians of the

land. However, the sheer number of bishops and priests, in full vestments and seated together in the church, was a stark reminder of the difference between the clerical and non-clerical members of Council; a little odd and disappointing given that the synodal process about to unfold was predicated on the concept of all Council members having an equal voice by virtue of our baptism.

Day 2: Monday 4 July 2022

I found the introductory statement and motions for Part 1 (Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts) to be some of the most clear, definitive and action-focussed of the whole document.

I believe that having Indigenous Catholics involved in the process and being present as Plenary Council members – and thus able to share their stories and experiences – was of great benefit to the way the topic came together and the way we ultimately voted; all motions easily reached the requisite qualified majority on the consultative vote (and, the following day, on the deliberative vote).

The latter part of the day was spent focusing on the victims and survivors of abuse; we passed the motions for Part 2 (Choosing Repentance – Seeking Healing) after making some amendments that strengthened the motions by calling for ongoing pastoral and spiritual support for survivors of abuse and for acknowledgement and analysis of the systemic factors which have facilitated abuse within the Church. We also engaged in a ritual of lament for the suffering caused by abuse, expressing commitment to making the Church a safe place for everyone.

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Many of us were anxious about how the following day's discussions and voting would go, keenly aware that tucked away in the introductory statement to Part 3 was what we were sure would be one of the most contentious issues of the week: the acknowledgment of LGBTIQ+ people and their marginalisation within the Church.

A message I have heard consistently over the past three years – from Society members, volunteers, employees and supporters – is that many LGBTIQ+ people who have otherwise felt shunned by the Church have found a place of welcome within the Society, and I was keen to ensure that the voices of LGBTIQ+ Catholics, who were not given an opportunity to be represented in any formal way in the Plenary Council, were heard.

Throughout the evening, some of us received messages and calls from LGBTIQ+ Catholics expressing their distress at the erasure and gaslighting present in a proposed amendment that would have deleted the acknowledgment of LGBTIQ+ people; this only made us more determined to stand up for those who have been excluded from the Church and the Plenary process, and more anxious about how the following day would pan out.

Day 3: Tuesday 5 July 2022

Part 3 (Called by Christ – Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples) was a wide-ranging section covering inclusion and addressing the needs of marginalised people in the community, engaging with young people and families, the work of Catholic services and ministries, expressing sorrow to those hurt through an encounter with the Church, and seeking to foster a more just and compassionate society.



PHOTO: FIONA BASILE

The proposed amendment that would have removed the reference to LGBTIQ+ people from the introductory statement of Part 3 thankfully did not pass, and the introductory statement – including its acknowledgement that LGBTIQ+ people, indigenous people, those who have suffered abuse, women and divorced people have experienced marginalisation – received a qualified majority on the consultative vote.

All other Part 3 motions – on faith formation in Catholic education, a forum to look at service provision and advocacy, and the promotion of interfaith dialogue – received a qualified majority on the consultative vote.

Many of us remained worried that the following day's deliberative vote might reject the statement and its acknowledgment of those who have been marginalised.

We knew there would be some debate on Part 4 (Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men), particularly on the topic of female deacons, even though at its absolute highest it merely

called for women engaged in ministry to share their experiences with the bishops and report to Pope Francis' study commission, and for the Church to then 'consider' women for ministry as deacons should Pope Francis authorise it.

Ultimately, the references to the female diaconate stayed in the statement to be put to a vote, but a shock came when a general vote defeated an amendment that would have simply added words stating that "the Plenary Council has heard frustration and disappointment expressed by many members about women's exclusion from ordination."

This was not a call for women's ordination or even a request that we look at it; merely an acknowledgment that we had heard people express those sentiments. When the motion to include that simple sentence failed, I was shocked; for all the talk about listening, the Council was not even willing to simply acknowledge that that frustration and disappointment had been heard!

At this point I thought of all the

people from within and outside the Church over the course of and prior to the Plenary journey who had shared with me their feelings on this point – rarely people expressing an interest in ordination for themselves, but simply a frustration about the effect of this exclusion and the problematic hierarchy it helps to uphold – and felt angry tears start to well.

But then, we had to move on to the voting proper.

What many commentators have failed to understand/realise in their reporting of what happened the next day, is that while the consultative voters had voted in favour of motion 4.5, motion 4.6 failed to reach a qualified majority. At this point many of us were quite angry and upset; this was a distressing development.

Again, I felt the weight of the hopes and expectations of so many women who were not in the room and who had committed so much of their time and energy and talents to the church – and so many brilliant young women who are already leaders in their communities – and I felt that we had failed them by not even passing one simple, anaemic motion that called for us to foster new opportunities for women.

Several of us were in tears – tired, angry, sad, despairing tears. And we worried: would the bishops vote tomorrow against even the small acknowledgements we voted for today?

Day 4: Wednesday 6 July 2022

Day 4 started with the deliberative vote on Part 4, and both motions failed to reach a qualified majority. I really want to set the record straight on the extensively (often inaccurately) reported ‘protest’



PHOTO: FIONA BASILE

that followed. There was neither a coordinated nor a spontaneous standing up from our tables; a morning tea break immediately followed the announcement of the deliberative votes, so everyone got up from their tables.

A lot of us – men and women, lay, clerical and religious – were shocked and dismayed and angry and, rather than going to get a cuppa and a snack, remained in the room just crying, supporting each other and hugging (throughout the room, although particularly congregating towards the back as there wasn't much room amongst the tables).

We knew, and I think most people knew, that the Council couldn't simply just proceed with the agenda after what had happened (the entire section on the equal dignity of women and men being erased) and so a number of us decided to just stand quietly together at the back of the room when the morning tea break ended.

Eventually, after Bishop Shane Mackinlay had acknowledged the shock of what had happened and some women shared their hurt

and disappointment, those of us standing at the back of the room collectively decided to return to our tables so that we could hear from those who had voted against the motions and ensure that they heard and understood our pain and anger.

Discussion from then on was fruitful, and our table submitted some suggestions which would improve (and not remove/water down) some elements with which people had expressed dissatisfaction. I understand that all but one table ended up submitting suggestions, and a group of four (including the incredible Sr Mel Dwyer, the then spiritual adviser to the Society in Queensland) took those suggestions and would spend the next 24 hours working on an improved Part 4.

Day 5: Thursday 7 July 2022

It is hard to describe the feeling that had settled over the Council by the Thursday morning... men in positions of power and authority in the Church had spent the previous day sitting alongside young women

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who were explaining through tears how they didn't know how they could return to their home and classroom and tell their daughters and students what had happened and what it meant for women in the Church.

By that night, we received the redrafted Part 4 and I was relieved to see that it was actually stronger and better than the original.

Day 6: Friday 8 July 2022

By Friday, there was a lot of exhaustion mixed with relief that we'd managed to pass so many motions, and trepidation over the fact that the Part 4 voting was yet to take place. For my part, I was giddy, hyped up on a cocktail of fatigue, emotional exhaustion, love for new friends, gratitude at having been part of all of this, and growing anxiety at how the Part 4 voting would go; I was not alone in those sentiments.

Bishop Shane Mackinlay did a particularly great job, in overseeing the discussion on Part 4, of making it clear that any amendments should be minor improvements only, and that we were not to vote out of fear or assumptions, or to push for something perfect, but rather to think "can I live with this?"

Ultimately, some minor amendments were made to the introductory statement and motions on Part 4, and every motion then easily reached a qualified majority on the consultative vote; this was a relief, but we had to wait until later in the day for the results of the deliberative vote. I felt a strong sense in the room that we would get there, but I was still so anxious.

Eventually, the results of the deliberative vote were announced – a decisive (if not quite

unanimous) passing of all Part 4 motions. I teared up a little bit at this point...Relief like I've rarely felt before washed over me, and at that point I felt so much love and gratitude for the experience of the preceding few days.

So, what did it all mean?

Going into the Second Assembly, I had made peace with the fact that nothing ground-breaking would arise from the motions to be considered; what I did hope was that we could agree to a new baseline: that what had previously been considered 'progressive' would now be the norm, and that this would be a good starting point from which the Church could steadily do better and become a force for good in the Australian community.

I had hoped that the Plenary Council process, despite all its flaws and frustrations, would go some way to dismantling the hierarchical nature of the Church, in the reality of daily practice if not in any formal/official sense, by allowing and compelling lay, religious and clerical Catholics to work together as true equals and to see the value in continuing to do so.

The discussions and the voting over the course of the Second Assembly have given me the strong sense that things previously considered as fringe or 'progressive' ideals are in fact values and concerns held by the majority of Catholics, as brought to the Plenary Council on the shoulders of those privileged enough to be members.

For people who have grown disillusioned with the Church because of its patriarchal nature and the resultant harm and its tendency to judge and exclude, I

think the Plenary Council can be seen as a source of hope.

It is truly encouraging for such a diverse range of Catholics to have reached agreement on a number of bare minimum principles such as endorsing the Uluru Statement from the Heart, incorporating Indigenous spirituality, expressing sorrow for those the Church has hurt and excluded, committing to care for the Earth and vulnerable people, acknowledging the diversity of the Church in Australia and using more inclusive language.

I hope Wednesday's disruption may have helped bring about real change and progress, and will inspire and empower lay Catholics to stand up and make themselves heard.

I also hope – and believe – that the week's events will encourage our bishops to be more open and honest with the people of the Church; that they will seek our counsel more and include us in discussions and decision-making, both informally and through structural changes.

I do feel that some bishops will have taken from the Plenary Council an understanding that the majority of Catholics want a Church that is more open and inclusive, and more responsive to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor; I understand that some of them are feeling emboldened and encouraged by this and I hope it gives them the moral authority and the sense of solidarity that they need to resist the powerful minority who would prefer the Church to remain an exclusive, judgmental patriarchy. **R**

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. She is a Member of the Plenary Council.



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ADVANCE NOTICE ELECTION OF 18TH NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Ms Claire Victory, the 17th National President of St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, has announced her intention for an election of the 18th National President to take place on Saturday 5 November 2022.

The term of the 17th National President concludes in March 2023.

The election of an incoming National President in November 2022 will allow an orderly transition to occur which does not interrupt the works being undertaken by National Council in line with its 2020-2023 Strategic Plan.

Two Returning Officers have been appointed and will oversee the nomination and election processes in mid-September 2022.

The timing is as follows:

- **Week of 18 September 2022:** Call for Nominations
- **Friday 7 October 2022:** Nominees notify the National Council Secretary of their candidacy and present their information to the Returning Officers
- **Week of 9 October 2022:** Returning Officers forward each Candidate's information to National Council members
- **Saturday 5 November 2022:** Election of the 18th National President

The Returning Officers will provide Candidates with two documents.

1. *Procedures for Electing the President of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia* approved by the National President and the National Council.
2. *Australia's 18th National President Background Information Prepared for Candidates Intending to Stand for Election* which is a comprehensive and contemporary summary of the functions and duties carried out by the National President.

Candidates are advised to read both these documents before submitting their documentation which ought include a succinct written overview of the vision they have for the Society during their term as National President.

The Returning Officers will notify State and Territory Councils of the call for nominations for the position of National President and will request State and Territory Councils to pass the information on to members in their jurisdictions.

An announcement of the incoming National President will follow the National Council meeting.

Enquiries to National Council Secretary: nationalsecretary@svdp.org.au

Celebrating a centenary of Vinnies NSW retail

The working bee on the site of St Vincent de Paul Society's 'Waste Collection Depot' in Newtown, Sydney. Dated to 4 April 1922, it marked the start of a century of Vinnies retail activities in NSW. The names of only two of the Vincentians are known, W.J. Coogan and D. Mulquinney. The photograph was donated to the Society's archives by Jack Langrell.

In April 1922 a group of ten shirt-sleeved men, two smoking pipes, all holding tools – a saw, spades, a hammer, trowel and a sieve for refining soil – posed for a photograph that is now treasured in the history of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The project they began continues to have profound repercussions, with the 'St Vincent de Paul Waste Collection Depot' creating a unique business model – the collecting, storing and where necessary, the repairing of unwanted items, dubbed "useless", that could be sold to raise funds for charitable purposes.

No item was too big or too small to be ferreted away for future sale: "Last week's deliveries included a cartload of furniture, another of timber and glass from a demolished building, a wire dummy such as is used by dressmakers, a bath, and a couple of wash-tubs," a newspaper reported.

"It will be seen that nothing, from a needle to an anchor, goes to waste at the depot, and everything means money for the Society's good works."

Nowadays, nobody wants second-hand needles and few need anchors, but the Society's retail presence has expanded to reach every part of NSW.

'On receipt of a postcard, or a phone call, the manager will at once arrange for the cart to call



The working bee on the site of St Vincent de Paul Society's 'Waste Collection Depot' in Newtown, Sydney. Dated to 4 April 1922, it marked the start of a century of Vinnies retail activities in NSW. The names of only two of the Vincentians are known, W.J. Coogan and D. Mulquinney. The photograph was donated to the Society's archives by Jack Langrell.

at any address given, so that the benefactors are not put to any trouble whatever.'

- St Vincent de Paul Society message to donors of unwanted items, Freeman's Journal, Sydney, 11 Sept 1924.

People's mobility now enables goods to be dropped off at our shops. A century ago collection was offered upon receipt of a postcard or a phone call to the Society. As a contemporary advertisement promised, "The manager will at once arrange for the cart to call at any address given, so that the benefactors are not put to any trouble whatever."

The converted shed – "dark and dingy... most unsuitable for its purpose..." – would herald one of the most substantial and best loved retail enterprises in the country.

While this growth was

unimaginable at the time, the spirit that fired up the brothers in Newtown c1922 continues on, with actions, not just words, inspiring the commitment of the Society's people today.

In the words of Frédéric Ozanam, "When one does a deed of charity one need not worry about where the money will come from: it will always come."

From the very start the people of Sydney showed that "useless" goods had value in the right hands, and the same principle applies today. One person's outgrown dress is another's cherished Dior... and so it goes on.

*A special magazine celebrating the Society's 100 years of retail activity to fund Good Works is available online [this link](#). It features a wide range of historic photos and newspaper reports from 1922 until the present day. **R***

Membership and Conferences



*St Vincent de Paul Society members move quickly to assist Australians impacted by natural disasters. Here, members are shown meeting with bushfire affected residents in the Nymboida area of eastern NSW in the wake of the catastrophic 2019-20 bushfires.
Photo: Robin Osborne*

Membership

There are three categories of membership of the Society. **Conference members** are those who belong to the grassroots groups within the Society known as conferences. They live their Catholic faith in action through the spirit of Christian charity. **Associate members** are those who are committed to the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who assist the work of the Society, but do not attend conference meetings. **Volunteer members** are those who respect the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who volunteer in any of the Society's works. Associate and Volunteer members are registered by procedures established by the relevant State or Territory Council. Please visit the [Become a Member](#) section of our website for more information.

Conferences

A conference can be established within any community such as a parish, town, suburb, school, university, workplace, ethnic or social group providing they are endorsed by an appropriate Council within the Society. Conference members meet regularly, usually weekly but at least fortnightly and no work of charity is foreign to them. Together they visit people in their homes, in hospitals, institutions or wherever else they may be found needing aid or comfort. Conference work is not limited to home visitation; members also meet and pray together at other times. To read more about the role of prayer in conferences please visit [Spirituality of the Society](#). **R**

Meet the National Council Board

NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Claire Victory

NATIONAL DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Warwick Fulton

SPIRITUAL ADVISER

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VICE PRESIDENT

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VIC STATE PRESIDENT

Michael Quinn

WA STATE PRESIDENT

David Kennedy

Read more [here](#). **R**

Conferences well placed to welcome volunteers who may not fit our current mould

BY CASSANDRA BULL

Membership renewal and retention continues to be a focus within each of our State and Territory Councils. It is a key focus being faced by our membership and leadership teams across the country. The data gathering and strategic planning regarding membership renewal strives to remain agile and responsive to the changing landscapes some conferences are facing here and now.

The trajectory of our membership decline has been highlighted at various levels of the Society as far back as 2006. Most recently, it seems COVID-19 restrictions have escalated the urgency for a change in our practices and approaches if we are to halt the ongoing decline.

Doing things differently is not always easy

From a Society perspective, I am still considered quite youthful, but with some 15 plus years of involvement with the Society, I am still amazed (and at times challenged) by the reluctance of some areas to innovate and evolve... by a reluctant approach to innovate and evolve. Membership can no longer afford to be one of these areas.

I am drawn back to a 2012 article in *The Record* penned by Robert Fitzgerald AM titled, "[Reimagining home visitation](#)". Robert states "Too often, progress is seen as a threat or a negative reflection on past activities of members. Yet progress is one thing that has allowed this great Society of men and women to grow into the international body that it is today. To move forward we need to restate and recommit to our fundamental mission and purpose."

Ten years on, and the necessary



*Conference members meeting with a companion seeking support with daily essentials... women of advancing years now make up an increasing percentage of people needing assistance.
Photo: Robin Osborne*

reimagining Robert urged remains largely outstanding. Why might this reticence be so? Feedback and conversations within some parts of the Society around National Council's members and membership program reflect a strong belief that any innovation around the way in which conferences presently operate could result in a drift away from our Catholic roots. This fear may in part derive from the reality of the ongoing steady decline in the level of people we can draw from our local parish communities.

The world around us continues to move at an extraordinary pace.

The 2021 Census data informs us that whilst Christianity is still the most common religion in Australia, just 20% of Australia's population identifies as Catholic. This is a decrease of over 1 million people since 2016. And yet despite these declining statistics our Catholic

schools continue to expand and grow.

This longstanding trend in our schools should give us as an organisation hope that despite the growing decrease of people attending Mass, the values and teachings central to the Church are still sought and respected within broader Society. Just as in the early days of the apostles, we should be encouraged to cast our net further and wider; we should draw strength from trusting that at the heart of all we do we will remain an organisation that is deeply modelled on God's self-giving love in Christ.

When the Church {or the Conference} does not go out, it becomes sick with the many evils we have in the Church. And why are these illnesses in the Church? Because she does not go out.

– Pope Francis,
Sunday Angelus,
20 September 2020.

Pope Francis reminds us of the need to go forth and search out people, especially those who are in the so-called peripheries. The Society has a chance to be an evangelical space of welcome, renewal, and hope within the broader Church. Our practical witness of 'love thy neighbour' and our authentic opportunity to invite others to join a community that truly serves Christ in the poor through its love, respect, justice, hope and joy is a message that most people subscribe to.

Research conducted throughout this national program continues to find evidence to support the assessment that a Society Conference in 2022 needs to look and feel different to the way a Conference operated in 2012 – the ways in which most of our Conferences present and offer Vincentian mission opportunities to new, younger potential members must evolve. We have remained true to our ethos and our Founders' vision. We no longer deliver firewood as Frederic Ozanam and his friends did in 1833. Today we deliver food, material aid and financial assistance to those living in poverty. Our companions' needs also are different to those of 10 years ago and, in many instances, require different forms of service and support. This in turn has implications for how we engage with those who wish to volunteer their time to support the Society.

What the research tells us

Volunteering Australia (VA) has released [initial data into volunteer trends](#), different to the past, that affirms what we already know about how people are wanting to be involved and give back. The Society is not

alone in its mission to renew its membership to sustain and grow its work. The most recent reports being issued from the ongoing Volunteer Strategy research demonstrates that demand for volunteers across the sector is high, with most respondents reporting that their organisations need more volunteers in the short-term.

The most recent VA report suggests that *“Volunteers are increasingly valuing choice and flexibility. They want to engage with opportunities that meet their needs and provide a sense of agency. Volunteers do not necessarily seek recognition for their contribution, but they want to know their involvement is taken seriously and makes a difference.”*

Research findings like these give us clear benchmarks as to what today's volunteer is looking for. Practical findings like this must guide our organisational strategy and our agreed plans for membership renewal. Our challenges when considering how best to respond require us, as a federated organisation and as responsible custodians to reflect, to critically analyse and to be prepared to do things differently.

This could also be an opportune time to encourage volunteers from opposite ends of the age spectrum. A large number of well qualified, high achieving 'baby boomers' have been moving into their retirement and with some time on their hands and ample skills and social awareness they can be of immense benefit to the Society. The camaraderie and satisfaction that membership offers could help fill real gaps in their retirement years. In addition, there are younger folk who are aware of the need for social commitment and are likely to join us if we can make time-specific

opportunities that match their lifestyles.

We need to appreciate that creating innovative change requires all of us to want to be involved. The solution and the keys are held by all of us, and we each have a role. Our membership situation becomes critical if we fail to respond. It needs urgent attention and deliberate actions, with a trust that both current and new models can coexist and thrive. We must adapt to the changing world that surrounds us, just as our Founders adapted.

As the Membership Renewal project continues to research, liaise and connect possibilities around the country, it is my hope that we are active in creating new spaces that foster and honour not just the current rich story and tradition, but also create a space for new potential volunteers who don't quite fit what those outside the organisation might describe as our present mould.

It is my hope that we provide an authentic chance for new potential members to sit at our table and share their skills and talents with those in need. So, as we move forward together, serving and supporting the local communities we love, might you like to join me in prayer...

*Lord, give me the wisdom to discern rightly the signs of the times. Give me the courage to stand up for what is right and what is needed. Give me compassion for the companions you have placed in my path. Give me strength to reach out to them and to help them as best I can. Give me the courage to welcome new ways of serving and sharing, in hope. And, finally, give me faith to trust in you in all things. **R***

Cassandra Bull is National Project Manager – Members and Membership Support

‘Old bushie’ still has the drive to help farm families

Now in her mid-70s, self-described ‘old bushie’ Colleen Nash thinks it may soon be time to slow down, but not just yet. So two days a week (at least) she hops in her car at 6.30am, cranks up Bob Seger on the CD player and heads out of Moree to visit rural folk in the North-West area of NSW in need of assistance from St Vincent de Paul Society.

Mostly they haven’t asked for assistance, because as Colleen remarks, “People in the bush are too shy, or even embarrassed, to seek help. They’ll try to tough things out, no matter how desperate they might be.”

Nearly all those she visits, which currently is around ten households a day, have been referred by other people aware of their circumstances, and she needs to approach them tactfully.

This reluctance to reach out says a lot, for after the drought years, a mouse plague and in some places, floods, many in north-west NSW still find themselves in dire circumstances. Money is tight and mental health concerns are common. She sees the rising costs of food, fuel and other commodities causing an upsurge in stress and people needing help.

Colleen vividly recalls farm visits during the height of the drought: “To see the devastation, the dead animals, the dust storms... sometimes I’d wait an hour before being able to drive on.”

In advance of a proposed visit, she calls up to seek permission and ask if there’s anything people might particularly need. Then, stocked up with supplies, she hits the road, often covering hundreds of kilometres a day.

Colleen Nash has been managing this workload, often more, for decades, pioneering a model of long-distance outreach that has



Colleen Nash (at right) with Kylie Heffernan, manager of Woolworths Moree, with Christmas gifts donated for local women on the land.

assisted hundreds of struggling families and even helped save lives, although she’s unwilling to share details. Many need practical support such as food hampers or vouchers for supermarkets, while others require referrals to support services, or just a friendly ear to listen to their stories.

‘The distances are great out here, and isolation is a big factor. A lot of partners have to go away to find work. Just having a yarn can be a real help.’

In 2016 Colleen was awarded Lifetime Membership of the Society. In 2022 she now has 46 years’ service under her belt, as well as volunteering in the Vinnies shops in Mungindi and Moree.

Colleen was born and raised in the local village of Weemelah

and, to put it mildly, she is well known locally, both by the rural community and many of the Aboriginal people living in the local towns and villages.

‘I don’t see colour,’” says Colleen in her typically direct way, ‘the Elders and their communities are wonderful people and very accepting.’

This attitude and her work with First Nations people have gained her various Moree Reconciliation awards over the years. While stridently averse to accepting praise she’s proud of the recognition for this work.

She is also grateful for the backing of the Society’s Members, Volunteers and Regional Operations North West Staff, the Moree Catholic Parish and



Dust storm in the NSW North West, captured by Colleen Nash whilst on the road to visit local households in need.

the Rural and Remote Ministry of Sisters of Charity Australia, local stock and station agents and commercial donors such as Woolworths and Coles.

Colleen has mustered support for those further afield as well, organising deliveries of non-perishables and animal fodder to flood-stricken communities around Lismore.

Colleen Nash's involvement with Vinnies began in 1976 when three Vincentians, all men, formed a Conference based around a collection shed to distribute donated furniture to people in need.

'They asked me to join them because they thought I was a woman with some get up and go.'

At the time, getting up and going was central to Colleen's working life.

'I was an interstate truck driver,' she says, a revelation that may raise eyebrows.

'I liked nothing more than jumping in the rig, putting on some music and driving alone. Still do, except it's just a smaller vehicle now. My loves are family, music and helping those less fortunate.'

Colleen lost her husband four years ago but maintains a close bond with her two adult children, both in Moree, has a passion for country-rock music, and an ongoing commitment to visiting people in need.

Her efforts have been well recognised, not only by those the Society has helped ('People are just so appreciative,' she says) but by the wider community.

In a statement to NSW Parliament, Adam Marshall, the MP for Northern Tablelands, recognised Colleen for "her committed trips to the isolated farms where drought is still a reality... Colleen will travel hundreds of kilometres on her own at her own cost to bring essential vouchers and goods to people who would not think to turn to town for charity, yet are very much in need.

'Colleen works extra jobs and uses the money to buy a special something for children and tired wives... Very few people in Moree know of Colleen's trips and she probably would not be comfortable with me sharing them in this place... but... she is an unsung hero, a community champion and a selfless individual who deserves to be acknowledged and congratulated.'

The Federal MP for Parkes, Mark Coulton, adds, 'Colleen is one of Moree's hidden treasures, who has quietly dedicated much of her life to helping others without pomp or a need for praise.

'It is people like Colleen who are the heart of our bush communities, going above and beyond to help those less fortunate. Colleen truly is a wonderful asset to the Moree community and her immense contribution to Vinnies and various other community groups is to be commended.'

In response, Colleen says, 'I'm just an old bushie, not some local hero.' **R**

Reflecting with Saint Vincent and Blessed Frederic

BY SR THERESE HAYWOOD DC

September is a significant time for the Society with the feasts of Blessed Frederic and Saint Vincent de Paul providing us time for reflection. We often think of people like these two saintly men as very far removed from us. There is of course much time separating us from the 17th and 19th centuries in which they lived. However, they are role models and have something to say to each of us living in the 21st century.

It goes without saying that Saint Vincent would not have imagined that we would still be talking about him and reflecting on what he said and did 400 years after he really discovered his true mission. One of the things that stands out for me in Saint Vincent's legacy is the way he saw the needs around him and responded to them. He heard the voice of God in the events of his life and took up the challenge.

Zeal is one of the virtues that we learn from Saint Vincent. It can be described as passion, energy and enthusiasm for what we do. Vincent says:

[Zeal consists] in a pure desire to become pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbor; zeal to spread the kingdom of God and zeal to procure the salvation of our neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect? If love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is unconditional in the love of God.¹

Vincent exemplified this zeal in his tireless work for the people

in need in his time and this is what motivates Vincentians today to serve people who are in need today. Zeal is what gives us the energy to keep going in our service and it is also what attracts others to join us in our service.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam's feast day is also in September, and we also look to him for inspiration today. Although Frederic was a deeply reflective person he was a man of passion too. He said:

Let us learn, first of all, to defend our belief without hating our adversaries, to appreciate those who do not think as we do, to recognize that there are Christians in every camp, and that God can be served now as always! Let us complain less of our times and more of ourselves. Let us not be discouraged, let us be better.

These words inspire us to be passionate about our own beliefs but also to respect others who are different. Frederic was someone who always tried to be better and to do more in his life. In these challenging times we can also be inspired to constantly learn how to improve in our responses to the needs before us.

Saint Vincent and Blessed Frederic are great examples for us and reflecting on their words teaches us a great deal. We are called to take their example and adapt it for ourselves in Australia today. **R**

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Sr Therese Haywood DC is the National Council's Spiritual Adviser

Ozanam Learning Centre helps songbirds sing out

The SongBirds song-writing program creates a unique opportunity for creatively minded people to explore their song-writing capabilities under the guidance of professional musician facilitators.

The Ozanam Learning Centre (OLC) studio space, adjacent to the Society's Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo, Sydney is resourced with state of the art digital and analogue equipment which enables participants to enjoy a professional studio experience and potentially see their work germinate from seed idea to fully finished product.

Songbirds' participants worked with facilitators in an informative, relaxed and trauma informed setting to hone their song-writing and practical theory-based knowledge. The program is a core component in the provision of "musical pathways" for motivated participants who wish to further their creative performance endeavours by signing up and attending the OLC music programs.

Robert Crosby, Communications Coordinator for St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, spoke with some of the talented members of the Ozanam Learning Centre community whose original music features on the album *SongBirds*, produced by SVDP in partnership with the Community Restorative Centre.

Jyran's story...

Born in Sydney, Jyran, now 24, is a self-described 'small dude' who performs hip-hop and rap under the name of Tiny Tones. His new song 'Nice To Meet You' combines 90s funk grooves with touches of modern production, and OLC music coordinator Omar says it's the only track on the *SongBirds* album that wasn't completed in the studio although it celebrates the



Jyran

participants who come to the OLC and record there.

'This guy's really talented and deserves to have people hear his music,' Omar says.

'I loved it so much and thought it deserved to be on this recording.'

'As a kid I listened to the radio with my mum and always felt that music was the essence of life because it just lifted you up and was able to put you in a trance,' Jyran explains.

He vividly recalls hearing Australia's own Hilltop Hoods for the first time and going from a listener to trying his own hand on the mic as an aspiring MC.

'My first releases were really focused on a street vibe - helping youths break free from the chains of addiction and stay hopeful while living on the streets. I was doing drugs at that time and venting. I was in a dark place.

'I came into the OLC, I wanted to work in the studio and get work done. I wanted music mixed and mastered. I was staying next door at the Matthew Talbot Hostel when I was 20.

'The way Omar teaches me and takes me under his wing, I'm getting a better ear for music and producing, mixing and mastering. It doesn't sound like a lot of stuff released in the Australian hip hop scene.'

Jyran now lives in an apartment in Redfern, saying, 'I always wanted my own place, my own sanctuary where I can set up a studio in my spare room.'

He hopes to continue recording and honing his craft as an artist with the support of Omar.

'All the staff are so loving, so kind, so supportive, very understanding, great people.'

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Julie Noreen's story...

Julie Noreen had a bucket list and a high priority was getting into the OLC studio and recording a song, an opportunity she'd never had, despite singing and dance lessons and performing in fringe festivals in Brisbane, Sydney and Perth.

Having also studied art at the Fremantle School of Art and Design she wandered into the OLC art class one day and 'it all sort of took form from there. I started getting brush up guitar lessons from Omar, then I got invited to SongBirds, then lockdown happened - it was all Zoom, we became very used to each other'.

A diagnosed bipolar sufferer the 62-year-old has a diverse work history, from prawn trawlers to radio work, first at 2SER, then Koori Radio breakfast and now Skid Row FM who put her through Certificate 3 in radio. She also makes garments for a fashion shop.

'At school my mum managed to scrape enough money together to do guitar lessons, I went to one of the local music outlets and learnt Spanish Flamenco. I did grades 1 and 2 at the Sydney



Julie Noreen

Conservatorium. Then when I left school I found that on my wage I couldn't afford it.'

She came to the OLC in 2019, after interacting with the service while participating in a local theatre company. This gave her the opportunity to brush up on guitar lessons with Omar, the centre's musical coordinator, which led her to the SongBirds project. The Koala Song is her contribution to the album.

'Before I went to bed one night I thought I'll sit down and write a

little poem about the koala and thought this'll do until morning. I'd say thank you to everyone who helped develop it. It was stress free, we only had to record it once or twice to get it right.

'The OLC staff are great. I've made a couple of friends from the women's library there. I haven't seen any aggression. It's all very well done. Everyone who goes there has a huge amount of respect.' **R**

A portrait of Julie is a finalist in the [Australian Life](#) photography competition 2022.



Tom, a former social worker who spent three homeless years on the streets of Sydney, contributed his song 'Shadowlands' to the SongBirds project. He is pictured with fellow participant Heather and (left) OLC music coordinator Omar. 'Music brings you together, that's all there is to it,' Tom says.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, in partnership with the Community Restorative Centre, has released SongBirds, an album of original music written and recorded by members of the Ozanam Learning Centre community.

SongBirds is available to stream/purchase on [bandcamp](#).

Learn more with these ABC stories:

- [Songbirds: Rehabilitation and music behind bars](#)
- [How the 'Songbirds' program is helping prisoners, one song lyric at a time](#) **R**

Federal Election heralds upcoming changes to Australia

Change is afoot in the mindset of the voting public. And, in many respects this change seems to have caught the two major parties off guard. The federal election results speak for themselves, with the significant shift in community attitudes demonstrated by over 30 percent of the primary vote going to candidates outside the major parties. And different dynamics are at play across the country, with the Coalition tending to lose to Labor in suburban areas and to independents in wealthier areas of capital cities.¹

While the Labor Party holds a majority in the House of Representatives with 77 seats, there are now 10 independents, and four Greens. The Senate composition is even more diverse. The 40 seats up for grabs in the last election saw a significant shift away from the Coalition to the crossbench, with its seats reduced from 36 to 32, while Labor holds 26 seats and the Greens 12. This means that hostile Senate motions can be blocked, but Labor will need the Greens and one crossbench Senator to pass legislation.²

For the Society, focussing our advocacy efforts on the Independents is therefore critical.

Commitment to improving social justice

Prime Minister Albanese's acceptance speech and policy priorities reflect strong ties to social justice as he has committed '... to leaving no one behind' and '... leading a government worthy of the people of Australia.' While this sounds promising, we must not rest on our laurels. Much remains to be done, both in terms of pushing for timely implementation of the Government's policy mandate and influencing policy direction.



It is worth noting that of the 23 significant policy reforms implemented in Australia over the last 10 years, none was unpopular with the electorate, none was actively opposed by powerful vested interests, only one ran counter to a party shibboleth, and only one involved a big budget outlay.³ We must keep this in mind while mapping our advocacy pathway over the term of the newly elected Government. Similarly, we need to be aware of what the voting public considers important, namely cost of living (65 percent), strengthening the economy (54 percent), assisting people living in poverty (42 percent), improving disaster relief (40 percent) and improving the job situation (40 percent); while reducing the budget deficit was a low priority.⁴

The strong alignment between the public's areas of concerns and our advocacy priorities augurs well for the Society. Of our 28 policy asks contained in [A Fairer Australia](#),

the Australian Government's policy mandate commits to addressing 57 percent of them, with 10 fully addressed and six partially addressed.

However, no commitment has been made to address the remaining 12 asks, most of which concern welfare reform and increasing the rate of working age payments, the single leading cause of poverty in Australia.

Let's Build a Fairer Australia!

Against this backdrop and based on feedback from the National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network, National Council has reviewed the Society's social policy and advocacy priorities. Resources will be updated in the coming months and accessible on the website under the banner, Let's Build a Fairer Australia! A members' webinar will also be

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conducted to discuss priorities and share information. We hope to build on the momentum initiated by members in the lead up to the election and continue our call to action. The quest to improve social justice is ongoing and cannot be achieved without the grassroots support of our members. A summary of our policy priorities is as follows, with more to come in the following months.

Welfare and Taxation Reform

Rising inflation and cost of living pressures are front and centre in people's minds. Within this context, the Australian Government's significant expenditure commitments to aged care and childcare and a trillion-dollar budget deficit mean there is little political appetite to change the taxation system to cover the cost of increased welfare payments at this time. However, National Council will continue calls for welfare and taxation reform, as outlined in the ANU-commissioned paper on [A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia](#), particularly in the Government's second year of office.

The three options outlined in the paper do not require significant change to existing systems and would apply to between 4 to 40 percent of high wealth households (depending on the option chosen), representing an additional \$3,000 per year in tax. Asking those who can afford it to pay a little more in taxation, would increase working age payments and lift one million people out of poverty.

In the interim, the earnings threshold of income support recipients must be increased to improve the living standards of those who are able to obtain some work. This would also help transition them to full-time employment.

Housing

Australia is in the grip of a housing crisis. Rising interest rates are increasing housing stress and increased costs are likely to be passed on to renters. Rental affordability has reached an all-time low, particularly in regional locations that were once affordable. National Council will continue calls to review and increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 50 percent and to find a replacement for the National Rental Affordability Scheme to incentivise private investment in affordable housing. National minimum standards for renters and landlords are also needed to provide more certainty for both renters and landlords and improve the living arrangements of over 6 million people in the private rental market.

The energy efficiency of low-income households must be improved, not just for the climate but, more importantly, for the health and wellbeing of low-income households. Co-investment with Commonwealth, state/territory and local governments in upgrading energy efficiency in social and community housing and low-income rentals would also deliver between \$3.4 billion (low) and \$4.9 billion (high) in Gross Domestic Product between 2021 and 2025.⁵

First Nations People

The Society has long been a supporter of the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart. This is also consistent with the Plenary Council's First Decree: Reconciliation: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts which endorses the Uluru Statement and commits to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in continuing to work towards recognition, reconciliation and justice.

The Society has been heartened by the Prime Minister's support for a referendum on constitutional recognition of Australia's First Nations people and will continue to stress the importance of not decoupling a National Voice to Parliament and constitutional recognition.

We will also continue calls to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, while paying regard to current international standards, and what is best for children, their families, and the communities in which they live. The Society supports the [Change the Record campaign](#), an Aboriginal-led justice coalition of legal, health and family violence experts, whose aim is to end the incarceration of, and family violence against, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

With respect to Closing the Gap, the Government has committed to work with the Coalition of Peaks and all levels of government to raise ambitions and ensure sustained progress on the current National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Yet, no significant additional financial commitments have been made, other than restoring funding for Indigenous housing. The Productivity Commission recently reported that only four of the 17 targets are on track and while modest improvements have been recorded for life outcomes for children, healthy birth weights, school attendance and lowering youth detention, the gap is worsening across adult imprisonment rates, deaths by suicide, out of home care rates and children being developmentally ready once they reach school age.⁶

Secure Work

The Society is concerned about the welfare of vulnerable job seekers using the Workforce Australia

online platform and will continue to monitor the rollout of the Points Based Activation System to ensure vulnerable job seekers are not adversely affected by breaches.

Mutual obligation requirements and employment service providers must be reviewed. We know that the most vulnerable people, including those experiencing homelessness, those living with disability, and First Nations people, are disproportionately affected by welfare payment suspensions.

The number of long term unemployed has not shifted, with only 25 percent of people who are out of work for more than two years able to gain full time employment. Mutual obligation and the employment service network are not working as effectively as they could and should.

Targetted wage subsidy programs in the private sector, along with subsidised vocational training programs that match people's skills and interests and fill the labour force gaps, must be prioritised.

Finally, casual workers were the group most adversely affected by the pandemic. They are engaged in low paid sectors, such as hospitality, retail, health and childcare sectors, often with no leave entitlements, irregular hours, limited job tenure and poor work/

life balance. Many are female, temporary visas holders or live with disability. Those who have less educational skills or training also find it more difficult to obtain work, with only 15 percent of jobs advertised at 'entry level'. Changes to the definition of casual worker, along with pathways to permanency, are essential. And a national system of labour hire licencing including same job, same pay conditions must prevail.

People Seeking Asylum

The Society, along with other Catholic organisations, has a long history of advocating to assist and protect people fleeing war and persecution.

The Society welcomes the Government's commitment to end temporary protection visas. However, the Government has not provided any detail on how this change will be managed and has made no commitment to increase family reunion in the interim. Research has found that while refugees in Australia were resilient during the pandemic, they suffered greater financial stress than the general community and increased psychological distress due to family separation. Family reunion must be prioritised.⁷

We also call on the Government to

implement its party's policy to end the unfair fast-track processing of people who arrived by boat. The Society continues to call for work rights for all asylum seekers in the community who do not have them and for an adequate safety net for those who are unable to find work. As a start, we call for reinstatement of 2017 eligibility criteria and funding of the Status Resolution Support Service.

The Society also calls for the release of the hundreds of people in arbitrary and indefinite immigration detention (except those detained on national security grounds). While continuing to oppose offshore processing, the Society calls for permanent and safe resettlement options for the 500 people not covered by the US, Canada or New Zealand arrangements.

Not only would many of these approaches save government administration and contract costs, finding permanent settlement for the 19,000 people currently on temporary visas, of which 90 percent are at peak earning age, would generate \$6.75 billion for the economy over five years.⁸

The progressive increase to the annual refugee intake to 27,000 is welcome but needs to occur more quickly, starting with a minimum increase to 20,000 for 2023-24. **R**

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Rate rises continue to impact vulnerable Australians

The continuing increases in the official interest rate—the latest was the fourth in as many months—is another blow to Australians struggling to cope as the cost of life’s essentials—shelter, food and fuel—continue to rise.

The Reserve Bank of Australia announced a 50-basis-point increase in the official cash rate from 1.35 per cent to 1.85 per cent. The cash rate has now jumped 175 basis points since May.

National President Claire Victory said the Society is seeing a sharp increase in the number of people who need help as costs rise sharply; and urged the Albanese Government to provide urgent help to those in need.

‘More and more people are turning to Vinnies for help as they struggle to cover the cost of accommodation, food and heating – the basics of life,’ Ms Victory said.

‘A lot of people are feeling very vulnerable and embarrassed that they’re having to ask for help.

‘There has been a significant increase in people asking for help for the first time – many have jobs but still can’t make ends meet.

‘Most of these people budget very carefully – they pay their bills, rent and debts as a first order of business – and then there’s nothing left for food and other essentials.

‘That’s an awful situation for a growing number of people across Australia,’ Ms Victory said.

The Society is calling on the Albanese Government to scrap stage 3 tax cuts to free up funding for an increase in JobSeeker and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

While an increase in housing stock is urgently needed, it is not a quick fix. A review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, to ensure it is properly targeted to those who



PHOTO: MELISSA WALKER HORN ON UNSPLASH

need it most, along with an increase of 50 percent, would support renters now.

‘These are choices that the Government makes about who misses out and who benefits,’ Ms Victory said.

‘We need to say that it is not good enough that people in Australia cannot afford to feed themselves and to feed their children,’ Ms Victory said.

The cost of today’s official interest rate rise will in large part be passed from landlords to renters, who are already suffering

after a 12 per cent year-on-year increase in average rents and a national vacancy rate of just 1.0 per cent.

‘Those on the lowest income levels are finding it the hardest at the moment and are in desperate need of assistance,’ Ms Victory said.

‘We call on the Albanese Government to raise income support and lift Commonwealth Rent Assistance, both of which no longer provide sufficient support to keep recipients out of poverty,’ Ms Victory said. **R**

NSW flooding under close scrutiny



PHOTO DAVID LOWE

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

SVDP welcomes commitment to boosting social housing supply

In the wake of the catastrophic flooding that hit the Northern Rivers, especially the city of Lismore, early this year, two senior staff members of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW provided oral testimony to the [NSW Parliament's Legislative Council \(LegCo\) Select Committee on The Response to Major Flooding Across New South Wales In 2022](#).

Their comments to the inquiry, like those from other not-for-profits involved in flood recovery, as well as community members, added further criticism to a report that would highlight inadequate warning systems, poor rescue responses and communications by government agencies and an overly

complex system of providing assistance to those left homeless or with severely damaged properties.

Appearing before the Committee on 14 June were Clare van Doorn, Regional Director, North-East, and Joy Kyriacou, Manager, Volunteer and Member Programs.

The LegCo report issued in early August noted, that 'Major flooding in NSW in February-March 2022 was a catastrophic disaster, causing widespread devastation and damage – particularly in the Northern Rivers and Hawkesbury regions. Tragically, lives were lost, thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed, and significant local infrastructure was damaged.'

Around 11,000 homes were damaged in the Northern Rivers in the floods, and more than 4000 are deemed uninhabitable, mostly in Lismore. The Lismore City Local

Flood Plan notes that only 60 per cent of houses in the flood-prone areas are raised above the one-in-100-year flood level, which was over-topped by more than two metres in the 2022 event.

'The charities with the statewide or nationwide footprint play an important role in responding to community needs following disasters,' Ms van Doorn said, adding, 'One of the key roles of St Vincent de Paul Society is our housing and homelessness, making sure that our communities are resilient and have capacity replaced for those times when properties are lost and also how we can actually support that moving forward.'

Ms Kyriacou told the Upper House MPs, 'We're a second-tier responder—we're in recovery centres and we're there to help

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Clare van Doorn, Regional Director, North-East NSW, inspecting flood damage in central Lismore. Photo: Robert Crosby, SVdP NSW.

communities recover... One of the things that Clare and I spoke about on day dot for this disaster is that we didn't want to force people to retell their stories but, because we were one of the agencies first off offering cash grants to people to help them rebuild their lives, we needed to take particular information for them to make sure we were supporting them in the way that they needed.

'We wanted to support and listen to them... and their stories. That is something that our members who led the response on the ground are very keen on. But, as much as we would have wanted to work into a system where you tell your story once, there wasn't necessarily a way for us to do that.'

The report was released by its chair, Walt Secord MLC – who soon afterwards would resign

his shadow ministerial positions, including for the North Coast, after being criticised for extreme bullying in another report, [Leading for Change - Independent Review of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct in NSW Parliamentary Workplaces 2022](#), short-handed as the 'Broderick report', after its author.

With reports coming thick and fast, the next cab off the rank was the much awaited [Independent Flood Inquiry 2022](#) led by NSW Chief Scientist and engineer Mary O'Kane and former police commissioner Mick Fuller. A weightier document than its 200-page predecessor, it bore the authority of the NSW Government. Both flood reports focus mostly on the North Coast but also take in the flooding that hammered Western Sydney.

It was released in Lismore on

17 August by Premier Perrottet, brought forward from 30 September 2022 on the advice of its authors who said 'The need for urgent action has come into even sharper focus in light of the further flood events experienced across eastern NSW earlier this month.'

On the day of its release the media was reporting predictions of an exceptionally wet La Nina spring and summer on the Australian east coast. Should this occur it seems unlikely that many of the Inquiry's often-complex recommendations will have been implemented.

Floodplains are assets... productive as sporting and recreational activities, garden plots and community gardens...

While more detailed, if less numerous, than those in the LegCo report (28 compared to 37) the findings and recommendations of

both are similar. In short, Resilience NSW did a poor job and will be reshaped to 'Recovery NSW', flood warning systems failed, rescues were left in the hands of well-meaning but untrained locals, and a grand vision and a huge financial outlay – how many billions remains to be seen – will be necessary to compensate and assist those wanting to relocate from the floodplain.

The Perrottet government quickly accepted six recommendations in full and the other 22 in principle. These include the need to 'Treat floodplains as assets, specialising in uses that are productive and minimise risk to life during major weather events. Such uses would include sporting and recreational activities, garden plots and community gardens, agriculture and forestry, renewable energy production, biodiversity offsets, parks and outdoor education activities. (Land below the flood planning level would be returned to Government ownership).

In other words the residents and businesses currently situated close to the Wilson River's banks will be incentivised, if not mandated, to move elsewhere so their land can be turned into open space. The flood has ensured that Lismore will never look the same again.

Other recommendations include:

- The establishing of a permanent state-wide agency, the NSW Reconstruction Authority (NSWRA) dedicated to disaster recovery, reconstruction and preparedness. This body will be charged with managing expressions of interest for a buy back and land swap scheme, commencing the end of August.
- Developing a 'Community First Responders Program', and the creation of a high-level Government standing committee, Task Force 'Hawk'
- The back-office merger of SES and RFS
- Disaster education courses in schools and rescue
- An online visualisation tool to display, for all land parcels (land titles) in NSW, the extent of known disasters that have affected each piece of land in NSW in the past.
- Emergency training for community members
- A longitudinal study on the effect of consecutive disasters on community mental health
- Starting a process of revising all flood planning level calculations in the state's high-risk catchments
- Building a disaster adaptation plan for each city and town, with planning instruments discouraging (and in many cases forbidding) development in disaster-likely areas

Housing supply, or the lack of it because of flood damage, is key:

'There are still some 1300 in emergency housing across the Northern Rivers, more than four months after the floods. This is driving more demand for social, affordable and market rental housing and has worsened homelessness. Urgent action is needed to provide fit for purpose, resilient homes for the displaced or those who continue to reside on high-risk floodplains. This includes homes for Indigenous peoples which are respectful of culture and kinship.'

After the report's release SVDP-NSW welcomed the recommendations on social housing, with SVdP-NSW State Council President, Paul Burton, saying, 'Members were some of the first on the ground, helping people worst-affected... Our response is ongoing and we are providing people with food, clothing, and other everyday essentials.'

'The recommendation to boost social housing supply made by the report, if followed, will help build communities that are more resilient to disaster. Housing is scarce and expensive and cost is a significant factor in what has driven people to living in homes that are at high risk of damage from floods... a disaster like the floods should not end up compounding a pre-existing crisis.'

NSW CEO, Jack de Groot, added, 'It's particularly good news that the inquiry is recognising the need for and recommending more housing, particularly social housing, be built... Thousands more people were made homeless by the floods when there were already many people in the Northern Rivers on the social housing wait list or experiencing homelessness.'

It must be hoped that the weather will hold and the Northern Rivers will not face further deluges over the coming months. Otherwise, more inquiries are likely to be needed, with a key question being why couldn't the recommendations of these reports be implemented sooner? **R**

Robin Osborne is National Publications Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Federal Government and Society Governance – an Update

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

The first sitting of the new Federal Parliament took place on 26 July 2022 with due ceremony. It was quickly followed by the Albanese Government getting down to the business of implementing its election promises. In this edition, we provide members with a comprehensive summary of what we believe will be the social justice agenda of the Albanese Government's term in office.

We assess the alignment of the Albanese Government's social policy agenda with the Society's social justice demands as espoused in the *A Fairer Australia* campaign noting that of the asks we raised during the election campaign almost 60 percent of them will be addressed in some measure over the coming three years.

On behalf of the National Council I congratulate our members for the enthusiasm they brought to promoting *A Fairer Australia* within local electorates. A well attended national webinar provided members with an opportunity to discuss National Council's strategy to pursue a social justice agenda during the election campaign using an apolitical framework steeped in Catholic Social Teachings. Dr Ben Phillips was on hand to provide members with an explanation of the Society approach to tax reform as an essential element to deliver benefits to people on income support.

A Fairer Australia 'went live' on 4 April 2022. Most pleasing for the Society is the fact that the number of website visits to *A Fairer Australia*, from April to end June accounted for 40 percent of all website traffic to the Society's whole website over a 12 month period. This statistic strongly reinforces the interest the general



Toby O'Connor

public has for topics that hold a strong relationship to striving for a fairer Australia. The Society as the voice for the voiceless and as a social justice advocate does resonate in the public domain.

There is no doubt that the 2022 Federal Election result and the reasons for the huge shift away from the traditional political parties will be written about in the coming months.

However, in the immediate aftermath, it appears that not all our politicians understand the mind of the contemporary electorate or appreciate the reasons for some of the swings against former sitting members. The majority of the new members in the House had clear voices that addressed tackling housing, poverty, climate change, respecting diversity and supported an Indigenous voice. These subject areas strongly correlate to some of the Society's asks during the election campaign.

The strong alignment between the public's areas of concerns and our advocacy priorities augurs well for the Society. Here we are on solid common ground with much of the Australian population. Feedback on *A Fairer Australia* received from a variety of sources suggests the Society's role in civil society as a spokesperson for those without a voice is well regarded and

recognised. We have an obligation to build on this

Later in this edition we outline the social policy agenda National Council has endorsed be pursued over the next three years. Help Build a Fairer Australia! has the support of the social justice network and the Vincentian Refugee Network both of which are drawn from our members and employees across each state and territory. National Council will keep members informed of specific initiatives that will help us build a fairer Australia for all peoples.

There will be opportunity to work with cross bench Senators to insert social justice into new legislation.

We have commenced dialogue with the other major church charities and with ACOSS to join forces wherever we can to be a united and strong voice on a range of matters that concern people who are struggling to live on income support and those with no access to secure and affordable housing in particular. We are also exploring how the major church charities can work together to assist our Indigenous sisters and brothers with bringing about a successful outcome for the referendum.

On a matter that concerns the Society's own governance, I am pleased to provide members with the following update on the National Council review of *The Rule*, Part III.

National Council announced and advertised this review in May 2021. There was an initial consultation period of over 12 months. We have now received submissions from individual members, Conferences and Councils. A drafting group including members of the Legal and Governance Standing Committee has been established and is well into the tasks of reviewing comments and



PHOTO BY ADITYA JOSHI ON UNSPLASH

suggestions, discussing the merits and the placement of particular words and preparing a first draft of an amended Part III.

Members of the drafting group include:

- Mr Warwick Fulton – Deputy National President (Canberra-Goulburn)
- Ms Jocelyn Cull – SVdP-NT Council President
- Mr Patrick Wallis – National Council Vice President (WA)
- Ms Alyssa Caplan – Chair, Board of Directors VincentCare (Vic)
- Mr Kerry Muir (NSW)

As the National Council CEO, I am providing administrative support and offering governance advice to the drafting processes.

The review process includes reference to the Part III documentation from England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, USA and New Zealand. The

International Statutes are being consulted.

From the material forwarded to National Council, it is clear that rather than a 'light touch' redraft, there is support for a major overhaul of the present Part III. The original timeline for completing a draft for presentation to the International General Council has been revised.

It is not expected that we will be in a position to forward proposed amendments to Paris until around April 2025. We do not want to rush such an important initiative which, amongst other contemporary matters, is having to consider the movement of State Councils towards being companies limited by guarantee.

Importantly, the timeline has two periods of five (5) months consultation with members. These consultations are scheduled as follows:

- Consultation 2: December 2022 to April 2023

- Consultation 3: May 2023 to September 2023

Because the Society does not have an established online communication tool or mechanism to directly communicate with individual members and Conferences, National Council relies on State and Territory Councils and Regional/ Diocesan Councils to assist with communicating updates about the progress of the Part III review and to distribute the first draft of an amended Part III. We will continue to provide updates in *The Record*.

With respect of the Rule review, National Council is cognisant that work being undertaken across the country around members and membership will likely have implications for how some of the present Articles may need to be revised. **R**

Toby oConnor is CEO St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Devil of a choice – domestic violence or poverty

New study by **Dr Anne Summers** shows that the true extent and consequences of domestic violence remain largely hidden, while fleeing from abuse is often an unaffordable option.

[The Choice: violence or poverty \(paulramsayfoundation.org.au\)](http://paulramsayfoundation.org.au)

One of the ‘regrettable’ (to use the author’s term) aspects of this report is that, ‘there is no standard language in Australia to describe violence against women by the men who they live with.’

As Dr Summers notes, there are various definitions and ‘it is to be hoped that the federal government, via its National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032, might lead the way.’

Meanwhile, as she says in her fore-note, ‘This report will use ‘domestic violence’ when referring to violence against women in the home or by their current or former partners. I prefer that we use language that is widely known and understood.’

Then it’s into the fray, and the story that unfolds over the ensuing 101 pages is not only unhappy, despite a range of positive recommendations (e.g. ‘teaching respectful relationships in schools’) but infuriating when it comes to the unjust allocation of taxpayers’ dollars.

A quote from Anne Hollonds, National Children’s Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, aptly summarises the situation: ‘In my consultations with children, young people and families on ‘Keeping kids safe and well’, I have been staggered at how many homeless young mothers I am meeting who are couch-surfing or cycling through caravan parks and short-term refuges with babies and toddlers in tow. Typically, they



PHOTO: JENNA NORMAN ON UNSPLASH

have left violent relationships and end up homeless.’

The numbers, based on ABS data, are stark and terrifying, and include the 2016 finding that, ‘Of the estimated 311,000 single mothers living in Australia in 2016, 185,700 – 60 per cent – had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a previous partner.’

The other part of the awful equation, apart from the need to develop violence prevention strategies, is the poor financial support for single parents (largely read mothers).

Summers concludes: ‘The findings illustrate unambiguously that around 50 per cent of single mothers escaping violent relationships receive incomes that are clearly inadequate. This finding is so incontrovertible that the only issue for government ought to be how quickly, and by how much, the payments for single parents can be substantially increased.’

She makes six recommendations, including that, the Australian Government:

- should change the eligibility rules so that the Parenting Payment Single allowance is available to all single parents until their youngest child reaches 16 or is still in high school,
- and should increase the Parenting Payment Single allowance rate so it is equal to the age pension single rate.

Summers concludes with a challenging question:

*On what planet does an aged couple require an income from the state that is greater than that of a single mother trying to raise growing children, aged anywhere from 8 to 17, who need clothes, food, childcare, school uniforms and excursions and other educational expenses, not to mention the occasional treat? **R***

Summers, A. (2022). The Choice: Violence or Poverty. University of Technology Sydney. <https://doi.org/10.26195/3s1r-4977>

Dr Anne Summers AO PhD is Paul Ramsay Foundation Fellow 2021-22

Tas Govt's \$5m cost-of-living boost welcomed



Tasmania's Parliament building in Hobart

St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania has welcomed the state government's \$5 million cost-of-living booster package, announced in mid-August 2022, with Acting CEO, Dr Les Baxter saying it could not have come at a more necessary time.

Adding that the Society is discussing the most expedient way to distribute these funds through its Emergency Relief services to the most disadvantaged families and people across Tasmania, Dr Baxter said, 'The Society's understanding from government advice is that the \$5m cost of living booster package will mean an additional one-off payment of over \$300,000 in Funding Assisting Programme for Vinnies, which we will put to work helping people immediately.

'We will also receive an uplift in indexation, which offers us a further three per cent to existing state government grants, over the next 12 months.'

He said the Society in Tasmania had been inundated in recent weeks with calls for assistance.

'More people than ever are in need of assistance with everything from utility bills to food for their families. It is absolutely heart-breaking. Hundreds of Tasmanians across the state are suffering fuel and food poverty at the coldest time of the year.

'This windfall \$300,000 funding from the Tasmanian Government represents much-needed money to buy food, pay electricity bills, and subsidise fuel costs.

'It is estimated that 120,000 Tasmanians are now living in poverty, a fact supported by the number of meals served on our food vans – over 20,000 last year alone. There has also been a high demand on our pantries as a steady stream of people – many of them families in need for the first time – knock on Vinnies' door looking for food or warm clothing, mostly for their children.'

'All told, the Tasmanian Government has distributed \$1 million in additional support for the Family Assistance Program, allowing the Society and other

charities to extend more support to vulnerable Tasmanians. This represents a doubling of current funding for the next twelve months.'

Dr Baxter said the Tasmanian Government's offer of an additional \$1M to Aurora Energy for its hardship program will provide assistance to families experiencing financial difficulty paying utility bills, due in part to the recent hike in electricity prices of 11.88 per cent.

'No Tasmanian should be forced to make the decision to heat their home or cook a hot meal in the middle of winter.'

The Society has been discussing with Loaves & Fishes to find a way to increase the number of meals for delivery to the homeless and families who are going hungry at least one day every week. The announcement of \$500,000 of additional funding for emergency food relief to providers like Foodbank Tasmania, and Loaves & Fishes to help purchase and distribute food has been welcomed. **R**

Book reviews

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Amnesty

Aravind Adiga
Picador 256pp

This slender novel by Booker Prize-winning author Aravind Adiga – *White Tiger* was also made into a Netflix film – recounts a day in the uncertain life of Dhananjaya Rajaratnam, a.k.a. Danny, an undocumented Sri Lankan asylum seeker adrift in Sydney.

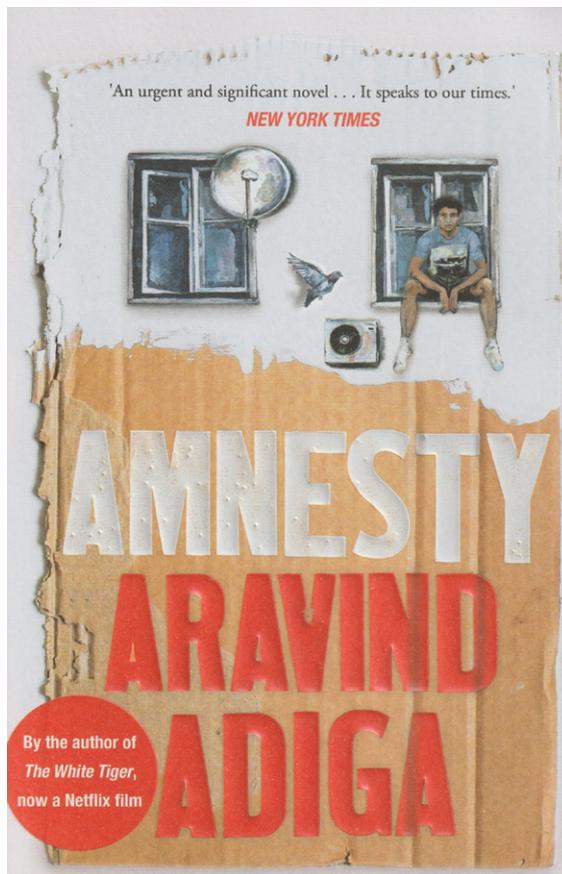
Denied refugee status and bereft of papers he works as a self-employed house cleaner, living in a storeroom above a grocery shop whose immigrant owner regularly hints he may report him to the authorities.

Into Danny's life come Indian lovers Prakash, a ne'er-do-well gambler, and Radha, a homeowner who is cheating on her Aussie husband. Engaged to clean their houses Danny becomes increasingly embroiled in their lives until Radha's body is found near a local waterway and Danny suspects that Prakash, a former soldier, is the perpetrator.

The murder mystery serves to frame the story of Danny's struggle to survive in Sydney, living cheaply, avoiding the police, and agonising about whether to report what he believes is Prakash's involvement in the killing, knowing that to do so would also lead to his own arrest.

Using savings from working in inhospitable Dubai and a loan of \$8,000 from his father, Danny had come to Australia four years earlier to study at what he found was a "rip-off" college. Dropping out, he soon caught the attention of officialdom.

In a lengthy exchange on an online immigration forum, footnoted by the author to have actually



occurred, Danny is told, "Mate, can't you read a calendar? As a law enforcement officer, I can tell you what is going to follow very accurately because I have arrested dozens like you: I know perfectly well that you did not overstay by mistake..."

"This is not France. This is not America. We are an island, and you cannot get on or get off without our clearance. Kindly surrender at once to an immigration office and receive the sentence of deportation immediately."

Other threats follow, including incarceration with "lots of strangers... Hope you enjoy Arabic for breakfast!"

With a keen sense of place – marginalised Sydney has seldom been so well described – this is a disturbing insight to the behaviour and thoughts of an ordinary man denied justice in his own country, where he'd been accused of supporting the Tamil Tiger terrorists, and then in the one where he had sought education and later, sanctuary. **R**

My Fourth Time, We Drowned

Sally Hayden

4th Estate, 480pp

Sub-titled Seeking refuge on the world's deadliest migration route, this "masterclass in contemporary reporting" focuses on the Mediterranean route taken mostly by sub-Saharan refugees seeking sanctuary in southern Europe.

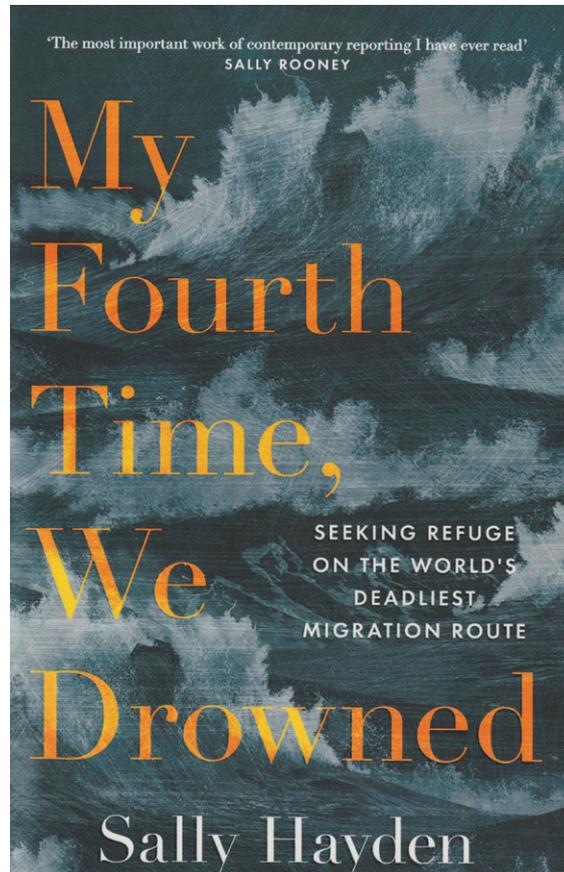
While the experiences she documents are taking place on distant shores they resonate here in Australia, a country made 'lucky' because the distance by sea from Indonesia is far greater than that from the north African nation of Libya to the Greek islands, and as a result the numbers are fewer.

Summarising the catastrophic situation, Ms Hayden, impeded by officialdom at almost every stage of her inquiry, writes, 'One of the greatest challenges to humanity in the twenty-first century will be how to deal with migration.'

She continues, 'Much of that is less about capacity and more about human greed. As it stands, developing countries shelter around 87 per cent of the world's refugees.'

Libya is the epicentre, the staging point for many embarkations to Europe and, despite a series of dysfunctional governments, the focus of European countries' attempts to impede the 'people smuggler' trade. While well informed about the state of the detention camps in Tripoli, the capital, the author is unable to visit the country because of online death threats and visa refusals.

What she does hear is nothing less than ghastly. A refugee in the Abu Salim centre writes, 'If the coastguard catches the boat they return people to refugee centres in Libya, and these centres are like



hell. Or hell is better than these centres.'

Some detainees were made to become war slaves, loading weapons at the frontlines for the Libyan military in the country's ongoing civil conflict.

The author visits African source countries, including Rwanda, theoretically a place of transit to where the UK wants to send its unwanted refugees, and examines a range of scenarios that contribute to the refugee exodus, often a lengthy journey that, for many, will end in long-term detention and in many cases death at sea.

Although a complex story, the book starts and ends with a focus on one individual, Essey, an Eritrean whose father had perished on an attempted desert trek to Israel. He recounts

spending ten hours in an overcrowded boat, limbs frozen, men shoeless to avoid puncturing the rubber, mothers clutching children and beseeching the Lord to save them. They were met not by a rescue ship and European volunteers, as hoped, but by the EU-supported Libyan coastguard, 'rough, uniformed men' who returned them to Libya, the country they were trying to escape from.

After subsequent attempts Essey makes it to Italy, and later Luxembourg where he tells the author his mind was still preoccupied with dead friends and their delusions: 'The horrors he had seen

would stay with him for life... he did not understand why European policy was contributing to this level of suffering, when Europe was supposed to stand for human rights. He did not know why the UN could not access detention centres at critical moments, when it is supposed to be protecting refugees.'

The author comments, 'Why is it that Europeans care so little when black children die in the Mediterranean Sea? How much suffering must a human go through to be seen as equal?'

Sadly, the answer seems to be a great deal until government policies and human attitudes change markedly. **R**

Robin Osborne is National Publications Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Rollout of Acknowledgement plaques continues

St Vincent de Paul Society in Parkes has taken steps to recognise its Aboriginal heritage and connections by unveiling a special plaque in its shop in Welcome Street. Vinnies, located in Wiradjuri country, unveiled the Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians plaque during a ceremony on July 13.

It's one of many projects in the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's new Reconciliation Action Plan that are happening in Vinnies buildings across the state. Similar events (have been run in Forbes, Barham, Cobar and Hay, with others in West region in the planning.

The plaque, that now hangs above the archway between the Parkes Centre and its conference rooms, reads "We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which you now walk, the Wiradjuri people, with deep respect. May the Elders past, present and emerging be blessed and honoured."

It features artwork from Darren Dunn, a Dubbo man who's creating the artwork for many Vinnies projects in the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Vinnies Holy Family Conference Parkes President Frances Scurfield said they were privileged to have a young Wiradjuri man in Charlie Oraha to offer a Welcome to Country before hearing about the new Reconciliation Action Plan.

"To paraphrase the purpose and goal in the guiding principles, Vinnies seeks to embed cultural perspectives throughout the Society, support and guide us to engage more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to create a culturally safe and friendly environment where First Nations Peoples are welcomed, respected and employed," she said.



Wiradjuri man Charlie Oraha offered a Welcome to Country at the plaque's unveiling.

Parkes St Vincent de Paul Society unveiled its Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians plaque on July 13, which hangs above the archway between the centre and conference rooms.

Attendees included Rob Cohen (far left) SVDP Aboriginal Engagement Officer, Charlie Oraha, Frances Scurfield, WCF Central Council President, Jim Rogers, Parkes Parish priest, Fr Barry Dwyer, Robyn Sheridan and front, in Vinnies shirts, Christine Cox (left), Retail Team Leader and Elizabeth Haynes, Operations Support Officer. Sr Flo Kinsella is seated in the centre.

"In the plan, it says 'Our vision for reconciliation is for a just and equitable society. A society characterised by strong and meaningful relationships between the First Peoples of Australia and non-Indigenous Australians.

"A society in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, histories, knowledges and connections to country are valued and celebrated.

"And the Implementation Strategy fleshes out how we can develop our relationships, respect, opportunities and governance to reflect this vision."

Vinnies was also privileged to welcome representatives from the Benevolent Society and Neighbourhood Central Family Support as well as Aboriginal youth and family worker Torin Hando, Holy Family Parish Priest Fr Barry Dwyer, Wilcannia Forbes Central Council President Jim Rogers, Elizabeth Haynes from the Wilcannia Forbes Central Council Office, SVDP NSW Aboriginal Engagement Officer Rob Cohen, Sr Flo Kinsella RSM and Vincentians from Parkes Centre and Parkes Conference.

Parkes Centre coordinator Christine Cox said the huge amount of work done by the centre supports the work of the conference. Holy Family Conference member Robyn Sheridan talked about the support and assistance given to people in need through the Conference. **R**

Supporting the Uluru Statement from the Heart

In July 2022 the SVdP-NSW State Council President, Paul Burton and CEO, Jack de Groot unveiled a copy of the Uluru Statement from the Heart they had co-signed with Mr Richard Stewart, Chair of the SVdP-NSW Board of at a staff morning tea to mark NAIDOC Week. This is part of the ongoing commitment to reconciliation within the NSW Society.

Mr Burton encouraged everyone to read the Statement and take its message to heart and you can do so here: ulurustatement.org

The Statement is an invitation from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to non-Indigenous Australians to walk together for a better future. It calls for the establishment of a First Nations Voice to be enshrined in the Australian Constitution. It also calls for the establishment of a Makarrata Commission, to undertake processes of treaty-making and truth-telling.

The Statement describes this as follows: 'It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.' **R**

Social Justice Network
socialjustice.vinnies.org.au/join/



Jack de Groot and Paul Burton at the Uluru Statement signing



Passing a torch for the homeless

Gandel Foundation CEO Vedran Drakulic OAM has passed a metaphorical torch to Australians Investing in Women CEO Julie Reilly OAM to represent philanthropy in the annual Vinnies CEO sleepout.

BY WENDY WILLIAMS

For eight years Gandel Foundation CEO Vedran Drakulic OAM has taken part in the annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout, becoming one of the Sleepout's long-term participants and biggest fundraisers.

The one-night event, which takes place over one of the longest and coldest nights of the year, sees hundreds of CEOs, business owners and community and government leaders sleep outdoors to support the many Australians who are experiencing homelessness and people at risk of homelessness.

Each participant commits to raising a minimum amount of funds to help Vinnies provide essential services to the people who need them.

Since rugging up for the first time, Drakulic has raised over \$1.1 million, thanks in large part to a commitment from John and Pauline Gandel to match all funds raised for the past seven years. This year he exceeded all his previous results to reach a record \$349,000.

But this year will be his last – his “old bones can’t do it anymore”, and he feels he has “earned his stripes”.

Instead he is passing the torch on to Australians Investing in Women CEO Julie Reilly OAM, who wants to bring some attention to the need for a gender lens on the issue.

Vedran Drakulic is one of the Sleepout's biggest fundraisers.

Drakulic told Pro Bono News he



Vedran Drakulic OAM

Vedran with Julie Reilly OAM

feels he has made a significant contribution, not only in fundraising terms, since he began taking part.

“In a way it always felt that this was another way for me to walk the talk if you will and try and get an even closer sense of what it means to support organisations like Vinnies to do the work they do,” he said.

“For us it is just one night and you might feel a bit stiff and what-not but you get over it, but imagine if you had to try and find a place like that night after night. It just brings it home to me.”

He said the event was as much about raising awareness about the challenges and complexities of homelessness as it was about raising funds.

“On the night they always have people with lived experience there who talk about their journey to homelessness and from homelessness,” he said.

“It is a target audience that doesn’t necessarily engage with homelessness on a daily basis and so for them to hear these stories

and to understand that it really is a complex issue [is really important].

“It is not just about housing. There are many other things that need to be provided for a person to break that vicious cycle of homelessness. So it is really great to see these people who come together, CEOs and managers, that they actually get to understand and realise how complex the matter is.”

Drakulic said he was pleased to “pass the torch” to Reilly, who will do her first CEO sleepover in 2023.

For her part, Reilly said she had long admired and provided modest support for Drakulic’s fundraising for the CEO Sleepout.

“When I read that Vedran was stepping down I suggested he pass the ‘philanthropy baton’ on to me as I was keen to highlight the growing number of women facing homelessness – and to bring some attention to the need for a gender lens on the issue and to consider the drivers of women’s homelessness given philanthropy’s interest in addressing root causes,” Reilly told Pro Bono News.



“It’s fundamental to the work I lead at Australians Investing In Women.”

She said there are three things that she hopes to achieve.

“To continue Vedran’s legacy by fundraising within the philanthropic community to support the work of Vinnies.

“To put the spotlight on the growing number of women experiencing homelessness who are less visible on the street but every bit as prevalent when we look at the fastest growing cohort in homelessness being older single women.

“To sharpen the focus on root causes – being the cumulative effects of gendered economic disadvantage over a lifetime, and family violence which accounts for half of the women seeking help from homelessness services, many with children. This is part of my very early lived experience and an issue very close to my heart.” **R**

Wendy Williams is editor of Pro Bono Australia. This article appeared in the 30 June 2022 issue of [Pro Bono Australia](#).

Photos courtesy of Casamento Photography.



Vinnies CEO Sleepout reaches \$9.25m milestone

It sees that each year the total funds raised in the nationwide CEO Sleepout set a new record, and this year's combined event was no different, with a total of \$9.25 million (and counting) raised across all states and territories. This fantastic result was achieved amidst a climate of mounting economic challenges, fewer registrations, illness experienced by staff and volunteers, and the lingering threat of COVID-19 which had forced most of last year's sleepouts to be held virtually.

Following the CEO Sleepout in June a series of community sleepouts were held in NSW in mid-August, with a combined total of \$262,474 raised. The top fundraiser was Fred's Place, the Society's homeless drop-in centre in Tweed Heads, which attracted a total of \$86,609 in donations, followed by Western Sydney (\$34,903) and Albury (\$29,371).

SVDP Canberra/Goulburn was again supported by its local high-rollers, with leading fundraisers of the night being Neville Tomkins – chief commissioner, Scouts Australia (NSW Branch) (\$44,474), Mirko Milic – dealer principal, Canberra Toyota (\$38,873), and Nick Georgalis – managing director at Geocon Group (\$27,557). The Synergy Group topped the teams table, raising more than \$42,000.

For Canberra, the overnight temperature of 7.4 degrees was deemed to be “positively balmy”, although the cold concrete of the National Portrait Gallery forecourt was hardly conducive to a comfortable night's sleep. One of the 130 Participants was Graham Lancaster from Wollongong law firm Lancaster Law and Mediation who was in Canberra for a conference and didn't want to miss completing his 10th sleepout. This gave him every right to don a Superman costume for event.



Down in Victoria a gathering of inspiring business and community leaders braved one of the coldest nights of the year, with a third of funds raised from this year's CEO Sleepout targeted to fund housing and bedding at Melbourne's Ozanam House, which provides flexible accommodation options and health and wellbeing services in North Melbourne to people experiencing homelessness.

In Darwin the Speaker of the Assembly Mark Monaghan was joined by a dedicated team that included Federal MP Luke Gosling who did a redeye dash back from Canberra, arriving to join the sleepers at 1.30am.

In WA more than 100 West Australian business and community leaders gathered at Optus Stadium to raise a total of \$850,603 for Vinnies homelessness services. Throughout the night participants learned about homelessness in Western Australia, the work Vinnies does, and the important role that business

and the community can play in reducing homelessness.

The funds will go to Vinnies homelessness services, which include Tom Fisher House, providing temporary accommodation for adults, and two Passages Youth Engagement Hubs – one in Perth, the other in Mandurah – which provide services to young people. The Passages Hubs are delivered as a joint venture between Vinnies WA and the Rotary Club of Perth and Mandurah.

Vinnies CEO Susan Rooney, who joined participants in sleeping out, said, “The advocacy business and community leaders can do beyond this event, by speaking about the issue in their professional and personal lives, can have a lasting impact on the way we respond to the homelessness as a society.”

Every year, Vinnies assists more than 55,000 Western Australians by providing emergency relief such as food, furniture, clothing as well as help with bills and rent. **R**

Footscray's big housing build set to deliver 92 community homes

BY DEE RUDEBECK

Construction is now under way at one of the first major community housing builds that St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is undertaking in partnership with the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build and construction company LU Simon Builders.

An official ground-breaking ceremony was held at the site in early August with Vinnies Victoria CEO Julia Cambage, state president Michael Quinn and Homes Victoria CEO Ben Rimmer, along with more than 30 guests and stakeholders.

The project is set to deliver 92 new safe, secure and affordable homes in Footscray, west Melbourne, within approximately 18 months.

Work on the 18-storey residential building in Wightman Street is being carried out under the auspices of Vinnies Victoria's designated housing provider VincentCare Community Housing (VCCH). The project will comprise 28 one-bedroom, 58 two-bedroom and six three-bedroom homes and ground floor office space, along with parking for around 60 vehicles.

Ms Cambage said, 'Hitting the first milestone in our three-year commitment to provide 164 much-needed new homes for hundreds of people waiting on Victoria's social housing register is a deeply satisfying and exciting occasion.

'We know this project will go some way to easing the housing stress across the state and we are delighted to be working with the Victorian Government and LU Simon on this project that is not only creating jobs but will deliver high-quality sustainable social housing for generations to come.

'We've seen first-hand the transformation that happens in



Turning a large sod for a big housing build... (l-r) St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria State President Michael Quinn, St Vincent de Paul Society Group CEO Julia Cambage and Homes Victoria CEO Ben Rimmer. Image courtesy CHT Architects.

people's lives when their housing situation is resolved. With support, they are often soon on the road to education, employment and improved health – which benefits everyone in society. A big thank you to everyone who made this possible...'

Footscray is the first of three projects that VCCH is partnering with the Victorian Government and construction firms to provide 164 new homes in total. The others are in Bendigo and Epping. VCCH currently manages a range of properties and tenancies across Victoria, and in 2021 secured \$78 million worth of funding via the Social Housing Growth Fund for these new homes, of which VCCH has contributed \$20 million.

VCCH is well-placed to successfully deliver this project and provide ongoing support and benefit to the community as part of its broader organisation, whose members and volunteers deliver welfare assistance to the most marginal, vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in need.

The development will meet all contemporary design requirements and aim to achieve 7-star energy

ratings. These homes will be available to eligible people on the Victorian Housing Register and currently living in unaffordable private rental or in inadequate accommodation – and for those currently experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. All apartments will be owned by VCCH and leased to tenants at an affordable rent.

Designated properties in the Footscray build will be allocated to singles, couples and families reliant on Aged, Disability, Jobseeker or parenting payments or those earning low wages. Of this, 10% of designated properties will be allocated to First Nations Victorians.

VCCH board chair Alyssa Caplan said, 'VCCH's collaboration with the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build project is a commitment to responding to the needs of vulnerable Victorians. VincentCare Victoria was successful, in part, due to our highly regarded track record of supporting people on pathways to sustainable housing.' **R**

Dee Rudebeck is PR & Communications Co-ordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

Congratulations to Guilford Young Medal recipients

In November 2020 the Archbishop of Hobart announced the establishment of a diocesan honour, the Guilford Young Medal, to acknowledge those who have made substantial contributions to the life and evangelising mission of the Church in Tasmania.

Named in honour of Archbishop Sir Guilford Young DD, the medal was awarded by the Archbishop of Hobart on 10 November 2021, the anniversary of Archbishop Young's birth. In establishing the diocesan honour, Archbishop Julian Porteous said that the decision to name the diocesan medal for Archbishop Guilford Young was in his view a very simple one:

"Guilford Young was a shepherd to the Catholic community in Tasmania for 33 years and his influence reached far beyond the state. He was a prominent contributor to the Second Vatican Council and its implementation, as well as an international leader in liturgical renewal and ecumenism. Guilford Young's work at a national and state level helped change the landscape for Catholic Education in Australia. He had a deep faith and a great love for and loyalty to the Church."

The inaugural winners of the Guilford Young Medal were announced in November 2021 at a Mass celebrated by Archbishop Julian at St Mary's Cathedral. Twelve people were recipients of the award, representing all regions of Tasmania. Four Vincentians numbered among the inaugural 12 recipients.

Saying he felt privileged to be one of the four recipients, alongside Robert McManus, Don Mills and Father Gerald Quinn, SVdP-Tas State Council President Mark Gaetani said, 'On behalf of the Society, I would like to congratulate Robert, Don and Father Gerald on their award and thank them for their contributions to the life of the Church in Tasmania and the Society.' **R**

[Guilford Young Medal recipients announced - Archdiocese of Hobart \(catholic.org.au\)](#)

