



REFLECT BEETECI

Reconciliation Action Plan

2020 - 2021



"EMUS", MELBOURNE ARTIST, TEACHER AND PROUD GUNDITJMARA WOMAN KAREN LOVETT.



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge that we are meeting today on the lands of the [insert Traditional Owner's name] people and we wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Custodians.

We acknowledge the richness, diversity, and sophistication of the cultures of First Nations peoples.

We acknowledge with sorrow the wrongs of the past that have taken place and continue into today.

We pay deep respects to Elders past and present and honour the strong leadership that is evident in the emerging Elders of tomorrow.

We hope to partner together and work to build a more just and compassionate society for the Traditional Owners of this land.



Prayer for Reconciliation

Holy Spirit,

we pray that the St Vincent de Paul Society
be a place in which the First Peoples of Australia
are welcomed and deeply respected.

May the Elders be blessed and honoured.
May this sacred land of ours truly inspire us to come
together as one. Renew our hearts as we heal one
another and build a future based on mercy,
justice, faith, hope, and love.

May we listen and learn from each other as we walk
together in a profound spirit of reconciliation.

Our CEO

As CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria it is my privilege to be present at the beginning of our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Our subsidiary, VincentCare Victoria has already begun their reconciliation processes and, as we combine their work with that of the wider Society, we are beginning a very important journey together.

The St Vincent de Paul Society's *The Rule* – our set of founding principles – calls us to fight against suffering, take responsibility for poverty and inequality and promote human dignity. We know that the European settlement, which was based – wrongly – on the declaration of terra nullius (no one's land), would go on to systematically strip the traditional owners of their proud, sophisticated and ancient culture. To accept, and sit with, this uncomfortable truth is the first step towards reconciliation.

We have a responsibility to work towards building a more just and fairer life for traditional owners. We can't do it alone. It is only by partnering with First Nations peoples, and learning about the wrongs of the past that we can find meaningful solutions in the present.

This is what our Reflect RAP is about. It is about reflecting on the ways we can unintentionally contribute to exclusion. It is about being deliberate with our procurement and employment practices. It is about seeking out advice and partnering with people who are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds to ensure that the actions we are taking are just, measured and help elevate the conversation about how to build a fairer Australia.

I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to this process so far and I look forward to every step that brings us closer to reconciliation.

Sue Cattermole
CEO St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria





Our State President

On behalf of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, I am pleased to announce the start of our journey of implementing our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). As President of this charity, I am committed to developing diversity among our members, volunteers and employees. Of course, a key part of this growth is inclusion of our First Nations people.

Over 60,000 years ago the traditional owners of this land established their way of life. We have benefited from this, particularly in learning from their respect for the land. However, we have a fair way to go in addressing the past, recognising and acknowledging the wrongs and taking positive steps to address the future together.

At every one of our meetings, our members share the following Prayer for Reconciliation:

“Holy Spirit, we pray that the St Vincent de Paul Society be a place in which the First Peoples of Australia are welcomed and deeply respected. May the Elders be blessed and honoured. May this sacred land of ours truly inspire us to come together as one. Renew our hearts as we heal one another and build a future based on mercy, justice, faith, hope and love. May we listen and learn from each other as we walk together in a profound spirit of reconciliation.”

I look forward to the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria and the First Nations Peoples working closely together.

Kevin McMahon
State President St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

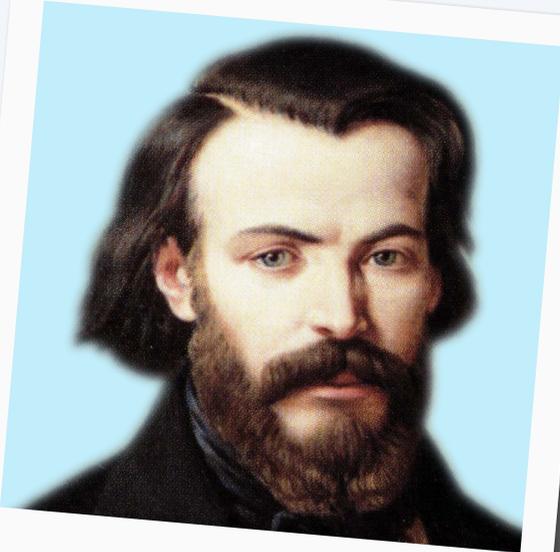


Our Good Works

In Paris 1833 Frederic Ozanam, a 20-year-old student, was challenged to 'show us your works' and do something to assist the poor who were struggling to survive day to day. Frederic and his colleagues took up the challenge and provided practical assistance to people who were struggling and, as a result, the St Vincent de Paul Society was born on 23 April 1833. His vision became a worldwide movement and, 21 years later on 5 March 1854, the St Vincent de Paul Society was established in Melbourne, Australia, by Fr Gerald Ward who, like Frederic, also witnessed a changing community following the discovery of gold in central Victoria.

Today, through a wide network of members and volunteers the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's (or Vinnies Victoria's) work continues to provide practical frontline support, advocacy and friendship to the most vulnerable members of our community. For 167 years, the St Vincent de Paul Society has focused on serving people in need by meeting them and personally working through their issues to provide the best possible assistance.

In Victoria we have more than 13,000 members and volunteers providing assistance to people whose daily struggles can include putting food on the table, paying essential utilities and ensuring their children remain at school to obtain an education. Each person needing assistance is provided with care and compassion. We are extremely grateful to the network of members and volunteers who are the backbone of our organisation.



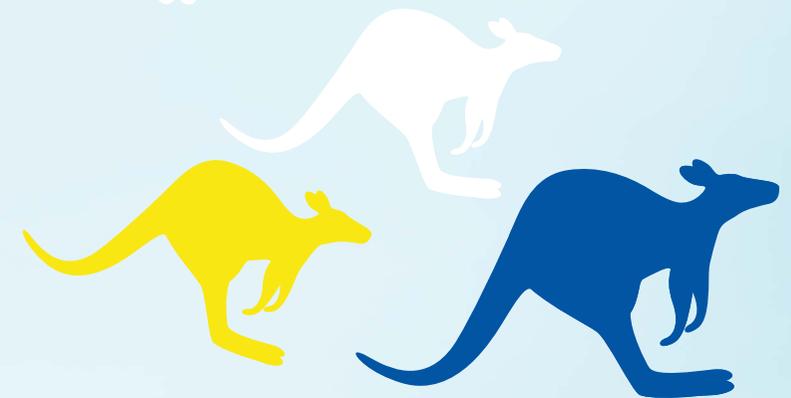
Our Principles

The principles of inclusion and non-judgment are at the very heart of the St Vincent de Paul Society's mission and origins. We are committed to ensuring anyone seeking our assistance is treated consistently and equitably irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, political, religious or philosophical allegiance, physical ability, family status, age, or sexual orientation.

Across Victoria, we have a workforce of thousands doing our 'Good Works', and whether they come as conference members, volunteers, or employees we want them to know how valued they are. The qualities that make each of our people unique aren't just embraced – they're valued. We value diversity and believe it is essential to our success. That's why we're committed to building a workplace that's as diverse as it is caring.

With the principles of social justice firmly in our sights, this Reflect RAP 'reflects' our commitment to beginning the journey towards reconciliation and to learning more about the diverse needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Committing to this 12-month plan predominately means scoping and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and being guided on how we can contribute to reconciliation and exploring our sphere of influence.

We understand that this process will help us produce future RAPs that are meaningful, mutually beneficial and sustainable.





Our Mission

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

Our Vision

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

Our Values

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

Compassion – Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement

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

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

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

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

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

Our Why, about our RAP

The governing document – or guidelines – of the St Vincent de Paul Society, *The Rule* calls us to seek out people who are marginalised. The Gospel, which is at the centre of our Mission, guides us to build peace where there is division.

Today, it is a devastating reality that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain among the nation's most disadvantaged groups. The 'Closing the Gap'^{*} reports refer to the vast health and life-expectation inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This inequality includes:

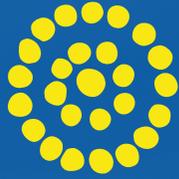
- shorter life expectancy
- higher rates of infant mortality
- poorer health and
- lower levels of education and employment

The wrongs of the past have left a legacy of trauma and loss that continues to affect Indigenous communities, families and individuals to the present day. You will read about the impact of government policy to remove children from their families in our Reflect RAP artist Karen Lovett's story.

Therefore, as a charity with significant reach across metropolitan and regional Victoria, the St Vincent de Paul Society has a responsibility in helping to close the considerable gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and all other Australians.

A critical part of helping close the gap is promoting trust and building rapport through respectful and mutually beneficial relationships, and championing diversity and inclusion in our organisation, reflective of our communities. Our organisation is founded on principles of inclusion. Already we have connections with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities; however, we want to do more. As the St Vincent de Paul Society we are committed to finding positive and constructive ways to support communities and emerging Elders of tomorrow to build a better future for First Nations Peoples.





Our approach to developing the RAP

Last year, our State Council and senior executive group (SEG) met to discuss what reconciliation might mean to us and what the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's contribution to reconciliation could look like. We welcomed Indigenous consultant Johnny Briggs on board to formally guide us as we take our next steps.

In order for the RAP working group to have a true and honest representation – and to further foster our commitment to continuous improvement – it was vital that we welcomed representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to provide valuable guidance and be part of this important process via an expression of interest process. We were delighted when Marion Olen – Vinnies Soup Van volunteer and proud Torres Strait Islander woman – joined our working group.

The RAP commitment lays the foundations for our charity to establish more meaningful and long-term relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and determine how we can contribute to reconciliation in a structured, relevant and respectful way. This process will provide the solid foundations to ensure our future RAPs are meaningful, mutually beneficial and sustainable.



Our RAP Working Group

The RAP working group is a passionate group of leaders from across the Society that play a significant role in leading and implementing the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The working group meets monthly to track progress against commitments, discuss the organisational and social context of the reconciliation space, and identify opportunities to further build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and businesses.

The purpose of a RAP working group is to:

- build and encourage relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, organisations and the broader Australian community;
- foster and embed respect for the world's longest surviving cultures and communities;
- develop opportunities within the Society and through our services to improve socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.



Our Team

Chair Indigenous External Consultant: Johnny Briggs

RAP Working Group Sponsor: Cassandra Hatton, Executive GM Strategy & Support Services

Working Group Project Manager: Jen Vuk, Communications Manager

Membership Representative: Barb Anglin, North Eastern Central Council President

Special Works Representative: Sarah Cromie, Special Works Manager

Volunteer Representative and Torres Strait Island Woman: Marion Olen, Soup Van volunteer

HR Representative: Brad Stephensen, Manager Mission & Spirituality

Project Coordinator: Jenny Barton

Retail Representative: Gail Wilkins, Loss Prevention Manager

Volunteer Representative: Charlotte Georgiou, Soup Van administrator

Design: Connie Powys



'THE KEY IS, EDUCATION'



Our Reflect RAP Artist

Melbourne artist and Gunditjmara woman Karen Lovett's colourful piece "Helpful Hands" hangs proudly in the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's Box Hill office.

The painting is the story of Karen and her family, her discovery of the First Nations Peoples' journeys and finding her own way back to Country. The painting graces the cover of our subsidiary VincentCare's Reflect RAP (where Karen's story also features) and we were delighted to connect with Karen for our own Reflect RAP.

Karen's bold, blue painting "Emus" was just right for our Reflect RAP report. The painting, too, is about family, but the three emus are also clearly on the move, representing the long journey towards reconciliation.

Karen knows all about long journeys. Taken from her family when she was only four months old (along with her identical twin sister) and placed into state care,



Karen felt completely cut off from her indigenous heritage.

"The truth is I was racist. It was that simple. Against my own culture," she says. "Strangely, my sister seemed to be born with Koori pride. I had a lot of work to do – and a lot of soul searching, I guess – to get back there."

For many years Karen lived with the guilt of having rejected her Aboriginality – for her, as for many who had similarly and completely been cut off from their Aboriginality, coming back to Culture and Country was anything but straightforward. As she explains, there were years of memories to sift through first.

"Then soon after I had my fourth child I started painting," she says. "I just started doing paintings and putting them in the shed because I believed that if I didn't acknowledge my culture then I shouldn't sell the artwork. I felt it was my dad talking to me."

Karen's father died when she was 27. One of her greatest regrets was that he didn't get to see his daughter come back to the community.

"My dad had passed away before I ever acknowledged culture. So he missed the whole lot, but my sister's proud. My dad never got to hear me say I was a proud Aboriginal person."



A few years later, Karen and her family moved to Westmeadows just around the corner from her mother-in-law Cheryl.

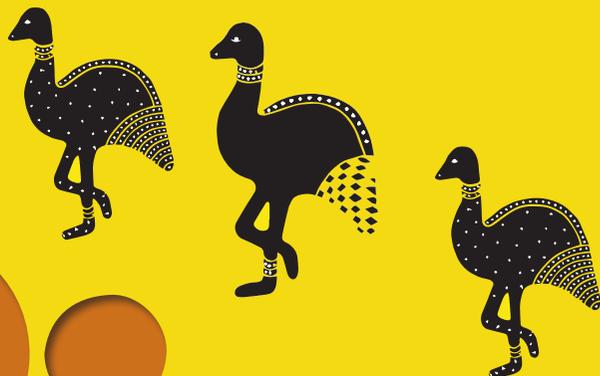
It was Cheryl who introduced Karen to the Kangan Institute Indigenous Education Centre in Broadmeadows and encouraged her to take the next step to learn more about the significance of what she was painting.

Through Kangan, Karen was then offered a teaching role and to help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students come back to Culture. It came at a perfect time in her life.

“I knew what my job was and it was to educate young people to unravel the confusion of their Aboriginal identity and belonging.

“I’d watch the kids come in, they’d have no Culture whatsoever. And within a year, we’d have some knowing where they came from, starting our dancing. It was just amazing to see them go from the confusion of identity to knowing who they were. So it was a good place for me to feel safe enough to explore.”

While Karen has gone from strength to strength (several years ago she was named resident of the month for the City of Hume and was in the top three of indigenous teachers in Victoria the first three years of teaching), unfortunately the same cannot be said about her health.



Suffering the long-term effects of anorexia and chronic lung problems, Karen is currently on the waiting list for a double lung transplant. She says the support she receives through VincentCare’s Community Connections Program has been fundamental in helping her manage her health.

When asked where she sees Australia currently as a nation and where she would like to see us be in the next 5 –10 years, Karen says “a lot closer [to reconciliation] than what we are now... The reason why I initially came on board [VincentCare’s Reflect RAP] was to close the gap between Aboriginal people and the history that the church has with them.

“I think education is the key. You have to educate people. It’s great to see that a lot of the cultural awareness training now is being done by Aboriginal people who do have the connections or who are from Stolen Generations because you get to hear two sides of the story and the culture disconnection and intergenerational poverty and trauma that it brings.

“The journey back to Country is complicated, messy and different for every person. I feel my purpose is not to sugar coat that.”



OUR ACTION PLAN

	Action Area	Deliverables	Date
Relationships	1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence. Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations. Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement. Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations. 	September 2021
	2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to staff. RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event. Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW Organise at least one NRW event each year. Register all our NRW events on Reconciliation Australia's NRW website. 	May 2021
	3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff. Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey. Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey. 	June 2021
	4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination. Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs. 	September 2021



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	Action Area	Deliverables	Date
Respect	5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation. • Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation. • Consult local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors on the development and implementation of a cultural learning strategy. • Develop, implement and communicate a cultural learning strategy for all employees. • Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR managers and other key leadership employees to participate in formal and structured cultural learning. 	September 2021
	6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area. • Increase employees understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols. • Develop, implement and communicate a cultural protocol document, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country. • Invite a local Traditional Owner or Custodian to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year. • Include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of important meetings. 	September 2021
	7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and share information amongst staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week. • Introduce staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area. • RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. 	July 2021

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	Action Area	Deliverables	Date
Opportunities	8. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation. Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities. 	September 2021
	9. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with internal stakeholders to develop a scope for building a procurement process that engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses to meet Society needs. Investigate Supply Nation membership. 	September 2021
Governance	10. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Form a RWG to govern RAP implementation. ✓ Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG. ✓ Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG. ✓ RWG meet at least four times per year to drive and monitor RAP implementation. 	Completed
	11. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define resource needs for RAP implementation. Engage senior leaders and other employees in the delivery of RAP commitments. Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments ✓ Appoint and maintain an internal RAP Champion from senior management. 	March 2021
	12. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia. Report RAP progress to all employees and senior leaders quarterly. Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings, annually. 	June 2021 September 2021
	13. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP. 	July 2021

ANY QUESTIONS?

We welcome them.

We look forward to sharing more with you about our progress on developing the action plan in the coming months. If you have any questions about RAP, the RAP working group or anything else regarding St Vincent de Paul Victoria's reconciliation efforts please contact Reflect RAP project manager Jen Vuk at: **jen.vuk@svdp-vic.org.au**



St Vincent de Paul Society
VICTORIA
good works