

# The Record

SUMMER 2024/25



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



**MARKING**

**75-140 YEAR**

**MILESTONES**





**St Vincent de Paul Society**  
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.

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**Contributions welcome.** Perhaps you would like to write or suggest a story and share photos with our readers. We can't track everything happening across the Society, so your involvement would be appreciated. Please contact [media@svdp.org.au](mailto:media@svdp.org.au) to discuss your ideas.

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:**  
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This summer 2024/25 issue of *The Record* celebrates milestones in the Society's long history of service in Australia. These range from 75 years (in the Northern Territory) through three centenaries (Canberra's first conference in October 1924, the founding of Brighton Conference in Melbourne and St Francis Xavier Conference in Wollongong, NSW), 125 years of service in Tasmania and 140 years in South Australia.

Stories and photos on pages 8-15.

## On the cover...

Celebrating the centenary of the Society's Brighton Conference in Melbourne's Bayside area were Hampton Regional Council President Mark Shannon, Brighton Conference's new President Debbie De Souza and Central Council President, Susan Dornom. They are pictured in the suburb's beautiful St Joan of Arc Church, c. 1938.

Photo: Claudia Loeber-Raab



***God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If He gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it.***  
- Pope Francis

As we head into a traditionally very busy time for the Society, with our committed Members preparing the thousands of Christmas hampers for our companions across the country, I would like to share some personal experiences and celebrate the many achievements of 2024.

Among the highlights for me during the past year - and without ranking them in importance - our work on Congress 2023+ in Sydney last October continues to be the standout. This event was a wonderful opportunity to bring together Society leaders from across

Australia and overseas to reflect on our strategic vision and on critical issues relating to the Society's membership, mission and spirituality, with a focus on guiding the direction of the Society in an increasingly challenging and everchanging world.

We have just passed the first anniversary of the face-to-face element of our work, with further stakeholder engagement activities planned to occur well into 2025. I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the many Members and staff who continue to contribute greatly to the revitalisation and consolidation of the Society in Australia.

***'National Council's advocacy for the marginalised in our communities continues to be a major focus of our work.'***

As a direct result of the attendance of John Berry, the USA National President, at Congress 2023+, the Society USA invited me to attend their mid-2024 meeting and address the USA leadership team on the journey we commenced with Congress 2023+, noting how we are adapting to a changing world.

It was an honour to join this event and hear from fellow Vincentians the challenges, not greatly different to ours, that they and other English-speaking countries such as Canada, Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland are experiencing on their own journeys towards a revitalised Society presence.

National Council's advocacy for the marginalised in our communities continues to be a major focus of our work.



***Each week, St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania hosts a Dining with Friends event in George Town, north-east Tasmania, on the mouth of the Tamar River. All are welcome to attend, with preparation, cooking and service undertaken by local Vincentians.***

***Fresh produce is kindly donated by farmers to the Loaves and Fishes charity, with other food being received from the nearby Woolworths. The result is a regular three-course meal, which not only helps address food insecurity but addresses social isolation.***

***In late November, the service team was guided by Vincentian Mike Doherty and included the Society's National President Mark Gaetani (at right), just back from the Society SA's 140th anniversary celebrations, and CEO Heather Kent (third from left).***

***'The conversation was compelling', Mark said. 'This weekly event could never happen without food diversion and donations. The more this can be encouraged, including through tax reform to incentivise this, the more our community benefits, and this is so needed.'***

*continued over page ►*



During this last 12 months we have prioritised the five key policy areas outlined in our Let's Build a Fairer Australia statement. These are Poverty and Inequity, Housing and Homelessness, People Seeking Asylum, Secure Work, and First Nations people. Whilst there has been some relief in certain areas provided by the Government, much more needs to be done as our companions are faced with cost-of-living pressures and a housing crisis that is placing them under further financial stress.

A profound disappointment for many in our community was the failure of the 2023 referendum on enshrining an advisory First Nations voice in our Constitution. National Council resolved to adopt a 'Yes' position on this poll, consistent with the stance of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, and we advocated accordingly.

It is now incumbent on both sides of the Federal Parliament to work together in providing innovative policy, direction and support to ensure we are closing the disparities gap and prioritising much needed reforms.

Members would be aware of the Society's founding father in Australia - Fr. Gerald Ward, who was born in England and was very familiar with the Society and its workings. He established the first Conference in Australia in Melbourne on 5 March 1854 – 170 years ago.

### ***'I would like to welcome our newest members to National Council'***

As covered in *The Record* (winter 2024), I warmly welcomed the opportunity to join members of the Vincentian family from Victoria and across Australia in celebrating this milestone anniversary of our Good Works in Victoria, and hence Australia at large.

Since then, we have seen the 125th anniversary of the Society's founding in Tasmania, 130th anniversary of Queensland, 75th anniversary of the Northern Territory, Wollongong's centenary celebrations and finally the start of the centenary celebrations of the Society's establishment in the Canberra/Goulburn Archdiocese.

The commitment and dedication of our Members past and present are testament to the longevity of the Society in Australia.

In tune with celebrating milestones, Frank Brassil - International Territorial Vice President – Oceania and myself were invited by the National President of Tonga to attend and participate in a Mass of Celebration on 30 September 2023 to recognise the Golden Jubilee of the Society's work in this Pacific Kingdom.

As a first-time visitor to Tonga, I found it wonderful to experience the culture and the warmth and friendship of this Christian nation. Tonga is indeed blessed to have such

a wonderfully vibrant and energetic group of Vincentians attending to the needs of their community.

In May, National Council gathered in Brisbane for a retreat. Where the discussions included:

- exploring Vincentian spirituality – what does servant leadership mean and how do we demonstrate this leadership style within our organisation ?
- our Society as a lay Catholic organisation – what does this mean to our Members, with particular focus on those in stewardship positions and to our employees especially those in leadership roles?
- the place of Catholic Social Teaching in articulating the principles we can use to guide how the Society chooses to interact with the world around us.

Fast forward to today, and following much dialogue, consideration and consultation 'The Vincentian Way' document has been produced. A big thank you to all those who have contributed to this important piece of work.

Once again, I would like to welcome our newest members to National Council following their elections in their respective States and Territories. Brian Stacey, Danny Cloghan, Geraldine Hawkes, Peter Houweling and Damien Legg. I extend my congratulations to all on being recognized by your peers as worthy representatives of your jurisdictions. I acknowledge the contributions at National Council of your respective predecessors John Feint, David Kennedy, Brad Hocking, Paul Burton (decd) and Jocelyn Cull.

On a sad note, the Society was saddened to hear of the passing of our beloved Paul Burton, NSW State President, on 12 May 2024 following a prolonged illness. Paul dedicated most of his life to serving the St Vincent de Paul Society and even in his term as State President, struggling with health issues, he never forgot the vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged. Paul put the people we assist before his wellbeing and was selfless in his dedication to others.

The Society's many and varied Good Works across all our jurisdictions rely to a significant extent on the support of our donors. I am deeply appreciative of their confidence in our efforts to offer a hand-up to families and individuals in need as well as to ceaselessly advocate for social justice in the spirit of our founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere thanks to all Members, volunteers and staff for your dedication to ensuring the needs of those in our community who reach out to us are satisfied and nourished with warmth and affection.

May God grant you peace and serenity this holiday season. Good will, good health and good tidings for the New Year. **R**



## People of the Way

**BY PATRICK McGRATH**

Director, Community Engagement and Youth Programs,  
St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn

The early Christian community were not called Christians. They were called People of the Way. The Greek word Hodos means a way, journey, road or traveler. It is here we get the great Journey out of Egypt led by Moses the Ex-hodos (Exodus). These early followers of Jesus were known by their actions, the way they did things.

The Christian defenders, such as Justin Martyr in the second century, used the example of Christian practice to demonstrate how Jesus' way 'mended lives'. The People of The Way displayed hallmarks that challenged the norms of their society at the time.

- They were multi-racial and experienced unity across ethnic boundaries
- They were committed to forgiveness and reconciliation
- They were famous for hospitality to the poor and suffering
- They were committed to the dignity and sanctity of human life.

Does this sound familiar? It is reassuring that we as stewards of the Vincentian Way draw our inspiration and strength from the earlier People of The Way, whose lives were radically changed by Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus as described by Huston Smith was 'a little-known Jewish carpenter who ... was born in a stable, died at the age of thirty-three as a criminal rather than a hero, never traveled more than ninety miles from his birthplace, owned nothing, attended no college, marshaled no army, and instead of producing books did his only writing in the sand.'

This same Jesus who did not achieve what by human standards would be regarded as great, continues to this day to influence the world like no other.

As we come close to celebrating the birth of Jesus, we need to be careful we do not fall into the trap that reduces Jesus to a historical figure who left us a good way to do things. We know that for St Vincent and St Louise and for Bl. Frederic and Bl. Rosalie, God became human in the person of Jesus. It is this very act of God breaking into the world that we celebrate Christmas. In our life journey may we never forget the Vincentian Way has at its heart 'to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love.' (The Rule)

Christmas Blessings on you and your family. **R**





As 2024 draws to its conclusion, I am reminded of the strength that National Council brings to the Society in Australia through its roles of stewardship, governance and advocacy, and, most of all, facilitating the work of our Members in their Conferences and local communities.

The past year was a busy one for the National Council Secretariate. We continued to prioritise safeguarding across the Society in ways that demonstrate our commitment to looking after those we assist, those who are vulnerable and children, when they come into our presence in the Vinnies shops or through a range of the support services we offer in local communities.

We worked closely with Members who were engaged with implementing initiatives designed during Congress 2023+ aimed at revitalising the Society. These Member-driven 'Congress projects' brought some great new ways of working within the Society.

Congress outcomes required a bottom-up approach to be adopted. Like most large institutions, this brought challenges. The Secretariate has worked with Congress Project Leaders and a National Council Committee to facilitate communications and forward pathways that involve Congress delegates, members in leadership positions and employees.

At the time of writing, some Congress Projects have been successfully completed. We look forward to the fruits of these collaborations in the near future. Vice President Matt Nunan provides a Congress 2023+ update in this issue of *The Record*.

The Albanese Government continued to review aspects of various components of social service delivery across the portfolios where the Society has a policy interest. Over the past three years, the charitable sector was called upon to provide feedback to a plethora of inquiries and reviews. This came at a time when we were required to address increased demand across the board from communities and people doing it tough amidst the cost-of-living crisis.

We are grateful for the ongoing assistance we receive from our Members and Conferences. The feedback provides us with very real details of both the impacts on vulnerable people and need for the Society's advocacy work seeking a fairer go for Australians doing it tough.

In 2025, and in the lead-up to the next Federal Election, the charitable sector looks forward to announcements from the Government on the outcomes of the many reviews undertaken. Of particular importance to groups like the Society, which give a voice to the voiceless and the invisible,



is to enshrine legislative protection for organisations that promote advocacy work. We must not be threatened by the government of the day through the loss of grants or charitable status.

The Society was invited to contribute to the Government's call in 2023 for the development of a blueprint for the Not-for-profit Sector. The blueprint's aim was to set out a 10-year vision, framework and implementation plan to ensure the Sector would thrive and that Australia's citizens, our communities and our environments would remain strong into the future.

Representing the Society, I joined a number of expert reference people to draft the Not-for-profit Sector Development Blueprint. The process was long and exhaustive, as is shown in the document launched by the Government on 27 November 2024. A story in this issue covers the findings and recommendations of the Blueprint and discusses the way forward for a sector of the economy that employs one-in-ten working Australians and counts for 3.2 million volunteers.

The Blueprint highlights the appetite for reform within the Not-for-Profit Sector. We do not want to see the extensive consultation and development of strategies to strengthen the Sector sit on the shelf. Nor do we want to be seen as 'tin rattlers' or told to 'wait in line' by Parliamentarians. The time for reform is nigh!

We urge a prompt and positive response to the Blueprint from the Australian Government, believing there is no time to waste for the Not-for-profit Sector, especially charities, which are facing unprecedented demand and ever greater pressure in attracting volunteers, and encouraging donations. **R**

# NEW STATE & TERRITORY PRESIDENTS



## NEW SOUTH WALES

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's new State Council President **Peter Houweling** has been an active member of St John the Evangelist Parish Conference Dapto since being posted to Wollongong as a primary teacher in the 1970s. He raised his family locally, and later served as a school principal.

Over many years of service to the St Vincent de Paul Society, Mr Houweling has served as NSW Vice-President - Membership, President's Vice-President, Wollongong Central Council President, and Central Illawarra Regional Council President.

He believes the Society's future lies in increasing our work in the community to help more people, building on the strength of collaboration that exists for all our people – Members, volunteers and employee – in supporting Conference Presidents and having an increased focus on local parishes and youth engagement.

Peter Houweling succeeds Paul Burton, who passed away earlier in 2024, and he will lead the State Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW for a four-year term. **R**



## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The involvement of **Geraldine Hawkes'** family in Glasgow with St Vincent de Paul Society nurtured her attentiveness to the value of all people.

Since arriving in South Australia in 1988 with her husband Paul and their two children, she has visited Conferences, been welcomed by Companions in their homes, and led formation and leadership sessions for the Society in SA.

Joining Salisbury Conference in early 2020, she was elected as Regional President for Central District and in 2023 was appointed as a Vice President for SA. In August 2024, Geraldine was elected State President.

She has served on SA State Council for four years, and is a member of the National Mission, Membership and Spirituality Standing Committee. Geraldine has extensive practice of ministry, leadership and governance in various church, community and public service arenas, across Australia and in the UK.

Geraldine is motivated by a long-held commitment to see each person, particularly those experiencing deprivation, marginalisation or rejection, not as a problem to be resolved, but as a gift to be received. **R**



## NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Damian Legg's** initial involvement with the Society was in Roma, Queensland in the 1980s after Year 12. He visited residents of an aged care facility with another youth member. His brother Mark is a member of the Roma Conference.

Damian became involved in the Society in the Northern Territory in the early 2000s, for about five years as part of the Sunset Outreach Service, a mobile food service that visited three locations in Darwin.

He joined St Paul's Conference, Nightcliff in 2013 and was elected President in 2016.

He has been a member of the NT Council since 2015, roles including Vice President – Centres of Charity, St Paul's Conference President, currently Vice President – Service, and Chair of the Membership Advisory Committee. He feels very fortunate to spend time with inspiring Vincentians.

Damian was awarded for his facilitation of the Society's NT Christmas hampers, ensuring companions receive this hand-up in the spirit of Christmas. He guides and collaborates with Members, volunteers and staff, making the process clear and achievable.

With an eye on the future, Damian has developed an easily followed procedure to ensure a smooth handover for successors taking on the role. **R**



# Society celebrates 125 years in Tasmania

On 26 September, the St Vincent de Paul Society celebrated 125 years of good works in Tasmania with a service at the Church of the Apostles in Launceston where, in 1899, the Society held its first Tasmanian Conference.

Members and friends of the Society came together today to celebrate Mass and begin 12-months of celebrations and reflection. Tasmania State President Corey McGrath said the Society and its network of members and volunteers continue to provide practical frontline support, advocacy and friendship for the most vulnerable members of the Tasmanian community.

'After all this time, the Society has seen many changes, but one thing has stayed the same, we continue to help those in need,' Mr McGrath said.

'We still help people with groceries, clothes, shelter and supply things like assistance with accommodation where it is needed, just as we did 125-years-ago. But what has changed is how many people we are able to help. Every single day people across our state are supported by Vinnies and the current cost of living crisis sees these numbers continue to climb'

The Society is embarking on a reflective celebration of its contribution to the people of the state.

In 1899, gathering money to help the needy was the Society's main task. Conference members contributed directly out of their own pockets and raised more than £12 (the equivalent of more than \$3,700 AUD today) through personal donations.

A similar amount was made through 'poor boxes' installed in churches by the Society. Fundraising and other donations also helped the Society raise funds, eventually earning £37, 13 shillings, and 71/2 pence in its first year of operation (the equivalent of more than \$11,000 AUD today).

The money was used to directly help Launceston locals in need, with conference members attending around 30 requests for assistance that year.



**St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania's Southern Regional President Louise Wilson, CEO Heather Kent, National President Mark Gaetani, State President Corey McGrath, North West Regional President Karen Maynard and the Catholic Archbishop of Hobart, Julian Porteous.**

In a time before government benefits, poverty in the colonial towns was widespread, and the number of people seeking assistance from the Society quickly increased from dozens to hundreds.

After observing the success of the Society in the north, another Conference was established in Hobart in March 1905, with 70 men taking membership. Besides food and clothing, the Hobart Conference was also able to distribute packets of tea to bring a little cheer to those enduring hardship.

During the first decade of the 20th Century the Society's work in Tasmania was increasingly recognised as beneficial, despite its activities remaining shrouded in under-documented humility.

At one public meeting in Launceston, the then future Prime Minister Joseph Lyons spoke of how 'There could be no greater work than the uplifting of a fellow creature,' adding that he had seen letters of thanks sent to the Society which had brought tears to his eyes and made his heart thankful that they had such an organisation in the city.

The Society is now a major support provider across the community, with op shops, emergency relief centres and social enterprises providing supported employment across Tasmania. Conferences now total 28 across three Regional Councils. **R**



# Canberra becomes the Society's latest centenarian

The start of the Society's celebration of 100 years of service to the Canberra/Goulburn community was held at the Annual Regional Festival Mass at Holy Trinity Church, Curtin on 2 November, All Souls Day. National President Mark Gaetani commissioned the new Territory President, Brian Stacey, two ACT Regional Presidents and seven new Conference Presidents.

Following the service, Mr Gaetani addressed the gathering, saying, 'The Society began its life here in Canberra some three years before the ceremonial opening of the Federal Parliament, the completion of the Lodge or of Government House.

'On 16 October 1924, a group of 20 Members established the first Conference in Acton, then the administrative centre of the Territory and now the site of the Australian National University and the National Museum of Australia.

'Four years later came St Christopher's Conference in Manuka, located at the then-new Archdiocesan cathedral. The conferences were part of then-Goulburn Diocese, and their Central Council met for the first time on 19 December 1929. Conferences at the time were frontline responders to the needs of destitute families and those travelling the roads looking for casual work.'

Mr Gaetani said that as Canberra grew, so did the need for the Society's work and it took on more challenging projects, including establishing in the 1960s and 70s shelters for men and women and for the aged. 1964 saw the first Centre of Charity opened in Canberra at Narrabundah, with another following in 1968 in Dickson, a year which also saw the first women's conference Our Lady of Mercy open in Braddon.

'Our Centres of Charity, our shops, are the engine room of fundraising for the Society, and they are thriving and growing,' he said.

'The establishment of the ACT Government in 1983 provided an opportunity for the Society to seek funding for Special Works to complement the expanding number of conferences. In 2008, the Society in Goulburn-Canberra decided to split from New South Wales and establish itself as a separate entity.'

While the Society is celebrating 100 years in the ACT, its regional footprint goes back 130 years to the formation of



**At the Annual Regional Festival Mass in Canberra (l-r) Lawrence Faitiki, new President Inner South Canberra Conference, Paula Bounds, new President Gowrie, Warwick Fulton, National Deputy President, Trish McMahon, Queensland State President, John Feint, new Regional President Tuggeranong Monaro, Brian Stacey, new Territory President Canberra/Goulburn, Monsignor John Woods, Vicar Social Services and Welfare, and Mark Gaetani, the Society's National President.**

SVdP in Goulburn, Queanbeyan, Braidwood, Crookwell and Yass. Its current regional boundary is that of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

On a broader note, Mr Gaetani said, 'Through most of these years, Paris, the place of our founding, was truly a world away. Yet the spirit of the Society, named after Saint Vincent de Paul, the patron Saint of Charity, had found its place firmly in the hearts of the early Vincentians and motivated them into collective action.

'Today's world may seem very different to the Parisian slums of the 19th century, when the Society was founded by Frederic Ozanam and his friends. However, the causes of poverty and injustice are remarkably similar, and the act of providing a hand-up to people in need still goes to the very heart of our work.

'Blessed Frédéric Ozanam said, "The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning, with an inalienable right to respect.'

The Society Canberra/Goulburn plans to hold a range of special events, fundraising activities and community engagements over the next 12 months. Members, Volunteers, and Employees are invited to join the Centenary Facebook group where they can exchange information and memories about Good Works in local Conferences, centres, programs, and teams, including stories and images from the past. **R**

# Society celebrates 75 years in the Northern Territory



***Celebrating the Society's 75-year presence in the NT were (l-r) Brian LaPorte, Most Rev Bishop Charles Gauci, Bishop of Darwin, Balina Shrestha and Eddie Peters.***

On 27 September, the St Vincent de Paul Society Northern Territory celebrated 75 years of service to vulnerable Territorians, commemorating a remarkable journey of compassion, service, and deep community impact since its foundation in 1949.

Throughout its 75 years, the Society NT has helped literally hundreds of thousands of individuals and families, providing essential support to those most in need. From emergency relief and housing to food, clothing, and financial assistance, the Society's Members in the Territory have long been beacons of hope in a part of Australia that continues to experience the nation's highest level of homelessness as well as great socio-economic disadvantage.

From humble beginnings, with the first Conference founded at St Mary Star of the Sea in Darwin in 1949, the Society NT has grown to become one of the Territory's most trusted and longstanding support networks. Over the decades, the Society has expanded its services and reach, establishing Centres of Charity across the Northern Territory and creating housing solutions for individuals and families facing hardship.

The Society's impact is woven into the fabric of the Northern Territory. In 1967, the first Centre of Charity

opened in Stuart Park, followed by the opening of the first regional Centre in Alice Springs in 1968.

From these early milestones, the Society grew to serve communities across the Territory, with Centres of Charity established in Tennant Creek (1975), Katherine (1983), and Palmerston (1987). These centres became pillars of support, offering essential items, assistance, and hope to countless individuals and families.

In 1974, the Society further cemented its role in the community by opening Ozanam House in Darwin, a day centre that has been a lifeline for many in need. Over the years, initiatives such as Ted Collins Village (established in 2011 for families) and Bakhita Centre housing (opened in 1984 and expanded in 2020 to support single women) have responded to the growing and evolving needs of the community.

Gerry McCormack, a Member for over 60 years, reflected on joining a conference in Darwin after moving from Queensland where he had been a member of four different conferences.

'I was truly moved by how even the smallest gesture of kindness had such a big impact on someone's life. Over the years, I've had the honour of serving on the NT Council, even taking on the role of President. I've seen





people from all walks of life turn to Vinnies for help and it makes me proud to be part of an organisation that offers dignity and hope, asking for nothing in return.

'It's not just about what we do for people, but the bonds we create with the community. The Northern Territory has changed a lot over the years, but the warmth, compassion, and spirit of Vinnies have stayed as strong as ever.'

The Society's outgoing-Northern Territory President Jocelyn Cull reflected on the Society's long history of service and thanked the many Territorians who have given back to the community over the years.

'Seventy-five years of service is an extraordinary achievement, and it is a testament to the strength and resilience of the people of the Northern Territory. Every day, we see the incredible impact that the Society has in transforming lives and as we celebrate this milestone, we remain committed to addressing the challenges facing our communities and standing alongside those most in need.'

'From our beginnings in 1949 to today, Vinnies NT has grown because of the dedication and passion of our members, volunteers, and supporters. Together, we have built something truly special, and our work will continue for the next 75 years and beyond.' **R**





## Wollongong Conference celebrates its centenary

Members of St Francis Xavier Conference in Wollongong recently celebrated the historical milestone of 100 years of continuous service in the community.

A commemorative Mass at St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Wollongong was attended by more than 100 Members, past Members, donors, and employees. The Centenary coincided with the annual Festival Mass for 2024, recognising the ongoing and far-reaching work of the Society across the Wollongong Diocese. The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Brian Mascord and the congregation had the pleasure of listening to the magnificent Tongan choir.

In 1913, the first Conferences in the Wollongong region were established at Bulli, Corimal, Jamberoo and Kiama but they all lapsed until August 1924 when the Conference of St Francis Xavier was founded.

Through the early 1930's, additional conferences were formed and in July 1935, the Wollongong Central Council, covering all conferences in the Diocese, was established.

Since then, the Wollongong Central Council has established more than 30 Conferences present in communities across the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Southern Highlands, Campbelltown and Camden regions.

Together these Conferences assisted more than 12,000 people with over \$1.5m in support in the past financial year. In Wollongong's St Francis Xavier Conference alone, they have 11 members working in the local community who provided support to over 300 people. This assistance includes help with food, bills, clothing and household items, accommodation, transport.

A recent joint report with The McKell Institute found that the emergency relief program administered by Society Members, such as those in Wollongong's St Francis Xavier Conference, provides crucial assistance during crises, is effective in preventing specific crises, including eviction and severe hunger, and significantly enhances the wellbeing of clients.

Larry Jennett, President of the Wollongong Conference, became involved with Vinnies over 25 years ago.

'It is satisfying to be able to provide help to people when they need it most,' he said.

'I had a phone call from a lady recently who had escaped domestic violence. We got her accommodation, we bought her a washing machine, got her some clothes. She was so happy.'

The Conference is extremely thankful for the generosity of the local community to ensure the work of the Conference can continue. This includes ongoing support from local major sponsors; a bequest set up to fund Education and Rental Stress within the community; and generous parishioners donating regularly to the Annual Winter and Christmas Appeals.



**Top:** Freda Hui carrying the candle, Mark Hundy with Charles O'Neill's manual and NSW CEO Yolanda Saiz carrying the Society's logo.

**Above:** Elisabeth Objartel, 30-years a Member, cutting the cake, with (l-r) Peter Doris, Central Council President; Larry Jennett, Conference President, and NSW Council President Peter Houweling.

Another member of St Francis Xavier's Conference is Elisabeth Objartel, who has been volunteering her time for an incredible 30 years.

'I was called to do more in the community, donating wasn't enough for me anymore. I was working full time, but I would rearrange my day so that I could visit people in need. I immediately felt very welcome and part of the community when I got involved with Vinnies,' she said.

We thank all members past and present who have contributed to the work of the St Francis Xavier Conference over the last 100 years.

### Local stats

- Central Council has over 30 conferences
- 18,000 people assisted in the last financial year
- More than 700 members across the region giving 13,000 hours of support
- 33% of people seeking support for the first time
- 37% of people experiencing housing stress. **R**



# 140 years of service in South Australia

In 2024, Vinnies SA proudly marks 140 years of service to South Australians, a milestone celebrated through a series of special events that honour the Society's legacy of compassion and commitment.

Members and volunteers from across the organisation, together with the executive team and key supporters, gathered at Government House to recognise the Society's significant contribution to the South Australian community over nearly a century and a half.

The event, graciously hosted by Her Excellency Frances Adamson AC and her husband, Mr. Bunten, featured a heartfelt speech from Her Excellency and a response from our newly elected State President Geraldine Hawkes.

Guests enjoyed the chance to explore the public rooms of Government House, with a highlight being the stained-glass windows in the Ballroom, crafted by EF Troy, one of The Society's founders in South Australia.

The celebrations continued with a Thanksgiving Celebration that brought together volunteers, members, and staff to share stories, reflect on our journey, and look toward the future.

We were especially pleased to welcome former St Vincent de Paul Society SA CEO Louise Miller-Frost MP, now a Federal Member of Parliament, to the event. It was also an opportunity to express our gratitude to outgoing State President Brad Hocking for his inspiring leadership and to warmly welcome our new State President, Geraldine Hawkes, who will guide us into an exciting new chapter.

As the year concludes, we will reflect on 140 years of service at various regional celebrations and a reception at the Adelaide Town Hall, which also features stained glass by EF Troy.

Here's cheers to continued compassionate service in South Australia, inspired by our rich history and dedication to the work ahead. **R**



**Top: Government House - Governor Frances Adamson AC, Denise Grantham, Julie Andriessen, Dorren Heslop (at rear), Bernadette Leach, Frances Power.**

**Above: Thanksgiving celebration - CEO Evelyn O'Loughlin, new State President Geraldine Hawkes, outgoing State President Brad Hocking**



## ANNIVERSARY MILESTONES



# Victoria's Brighton Conference clocks up a century of service

**STORY & PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA LOEBER-RAAB**

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

In 1924, as the world was still recovering from the aftermath of World War I and on the brink of the Great Depression, a small group of dedicated individuals came together, driven by a shared commitment to support community members in need, and founded the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's Brighton Conference. From 1944 to 1996, they extended their care to refugees, offering a safe haven and support to new arrivals in Australia.

The conference quickly became a beacon of hope, providing assistance to people in need throughout Melbourne's bayside area. Conference members worked tirelessly, as their local community and the rest of the country was challenged by economic hardship. They provided food parcels, bedding, clothing and medical assistance to struggling families and workers who laboured

to build the iconic bluestone wall and parapet from Elwood to Hampton - many of the labourers sleeping rough on the beach.

Fast forward one century and this spirit of service and compassion remains strong. To mark the milestone, over 140 attendees filled the pews of Brighton's beautiful St Joan of Arc Church to celebrate this special occasion during a moving and uplifting Festival Mass. It included the commissioning and re-commissioning of several conference presidents.

Fittingly, the service was led by Father Greg, himself a Vincentian with deep personal ties to the mission. His father was a Vinnies shop manager in an inner Sydney suburb, instilling in him the Vincentian spirit of being a voice for the voiceless.





***Father Greg's words echoed through the church, reminding all present that 'no one chooses to be poor'***

***Members of the Society's Brighton Conference in Melbourne convened to celebrate the centenary with a Mass presided over by St Joan of Arc Church's Father Greg, a fellow Vincentian. The service included the recommissioning of Conference Presidents Robert Marigliani, Brighton East Conference, John Taylor, Gardenvale Conference, and Elena Little, St Kilda East, and the commissioning of Debbie De Sousa as Brighton Conference President.***

He urged continued compassion and understanding toward companions less fortunate, which resonated with many during a service beautifully planned and accompanied by Rohan Smith, Mission & Spirituality Lead.

Following the mass, Hampton Regional Council President, Mark Shannon, and Southern Central Council President, Susan Dormon, led an award ceremony celebrating the milestones of members who have been part of the local conference's journey for up to 45 years and new members and volunteers.

They included dedicated individuals like Carmel and Maurice who have joined to give back to their local communities in their retirement. Or Earl, a younger member, who will have to balance his work commitments with a demanding roster of conference work.

'It's a challenge that I am willing to take on so I can help people in my community,' he said.

The history of the Brighton Conference is rich with stories of support and dedication. During the Great Depression, members were there for families, providing the essentials for survival.

Over the years, the conference has given great service to many people in need, including supported local housing and assisting with food vouchers and clothing, through to assistance for conferences in Myanmar and India through the Society's Twinning Program.

Today, the sixteen-member Brighton Conference continues to make a significant impact, providing essential assistance to over 220 public housing residents in Brighton, Highett and Hampton. Regular home visits are conducted every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, offering support through food vouchers, clothing, furniture, and help with medical and utility bills. Beyond the material support, conference members have always been there to lend a listening ear, a warm heart and a hand-up to people in need.

Debbie De Sousa, Brighton's new Conference president who took over from John Eagan, joined Mark Shannon in thanking everyone for their services past and present: 'The Society has been able to stay relevant even in changing times and the timeless work of its volunteers and supporters will always be recognised.'

She would like to see the level of resources the conference offers to the socially vulnerable to be enhanced and to increase the number of Members and supporters so that the conference can provide improved and meaningful benefits to their companions.

The Brighton Conference's 100th anniversary celebration was more than just a look back at its history. It was a day of reflection, gratitude and renewal of its commitment to serving the community and making a difference for the coming century. **R**

# The good work continues

**BY MATT NUNAN**

Vice President, St Vincent de Paul Society  
National Council of Australia

Congress 2023+ was a milestone event for St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. It was a joyous and hopeful event that encapsulated all the of the good things that the Society has to offer. That is, a group of members, volunteers and employees who are concerned, committed and capable in delivering change to better help the people we serve.

One year after the October 2023 event, Congress participants and other leaders from around Australia have continued to think about the way we do our work and are progressing ideas that will benefit Members, volunteers and employees in Australia.

The 2023 Congress aimed to explore the future of the Society in Australia with a key focus on:

- Our shared purpose
- Best practice and success stories that are occurring across the country
- New ways to engage and support new Members and volunteers
- Developing a culture of community and collaboration that can foster continuous improvement.

The 200 Congress participants identified 16 workstreams that centred around three core pillars:

- Growth and Revitalisation
- Diverse, flexible conference for impact
- Being ready for change.

You can see the leaders and participants working on each of the workstreams in the table. Some of the workstreams have delivered a plan or document for review by the National Mission, Membership and Spirituality Committee (NMMSC), a standing committee of National Council with oversight of the work of the Congress delivery team and workstreams.



Other workstreams are still progressing their plans, meeting regularly to discuss their activities and working with the National Secretariate to gather information. One of the fantastic things to come out of the post-2023 Congress workstreams has been the sharing of information across Australia and I thank all involved, including State and Territory employees, for the collaborative way that the teams are working together.

## 2025 Activities

In 2025, many of the workstreams will move from a planning and data gathering stage to a prioritising and implementing stage. In April 2025, there are plans to communicate to a wider audience to explain the workstreams' activities and to receive feedback. It is envisioned that a hybrid on-line and in-person event will gather the Congress 2023+ participants and other emerging and existing leaders for a day of review, discussion and discernment. More details on this event will be made available in the new year.

Thank you to Julie, Cass, and the members of the NMMSC, Congress 2023+ workstreams and the supporting State and Territory teams for your dedicated support of this important work. **R**



## Timeline of Congress projects



## Progress of Congress Projects

Finished projects	Nearing completion	To be completed in 2025	Longer term projects
<b>1.2 Our compelling, shared story</b> Completed at Congress 2023+	<b>1.6 Belong, believe, become</b> Leo Tucker, Mary Ryan (NSW); Michael Scanlan (CG); Rohan Smith, Susan Dornom (Vic.); Melissa White (Tas.); Jenny Papps (SA); Sr Therese Haywood (NC)	<b>1.3 New Vincentian experience</b> Greg Ryan, Marissa Papaspiros (NSW); Clare Martin, Susan Dornom, Maureen Mohr (Vic.)	<b>1.1 A diverse base for recruitment</b> John O'Gorman, Peter Cavanagh, Peter Dougherty (Qld); Louis Hearnden (NSW); Grace Pulis, Jo Gaskin (Vic.)
	<b>2.2 Simplified Conference 'starter pack'</b> John Hollamby, Dennis Innes (Qld); Cathie Pigott, Margaret Gearon (Vic.)	<b>1.4 &amp; 1.5 Leadership development</b> Maree Harmon (Qld); Paul Edgar, Peta Leseberg, Mary Ryan (NSW); Catherine McMahon, Arthur Donovan, Brendan Podbury, Grace Pulis, Anne Kotsiakos, Maureen Mohr (Vic.); Tony Roach (SA); Tom Everett, David Kennedy, Keenan Klassen (WA)	<b>2.4 Sharing info &amp; resources between Conferences</b> Veronica Innes, Trish McMahon (Qld), John Feint (CG); Marian Power, Bernadette Fitchet, Tony Proctor, Jo Gaskin (Vic.); Pat Patience (SA); Cathy Gawen (WA)
	<b>2.3 Support systems for new Conferences (mentoring)</b> Susan Dann, Dennis Innes (Qld); Peta Leseberg (NSW); Dan Kirkwood (WA)	<b>2.1 Vision for future Conference experiences</b> Lachlan Dent, Loma Tonnochy, Dennis Innes, Alex Verdanega (Qld); Margaret Gearon, Nadia Litsos, Cathie Pigott (Vic.)	<b>2.5 Whole-of-Society communication</b> Trish McMahon (Qld); John Feint (CG); Marian Power, Michael Ryan, Tony Proctor (Vic.); Heather Kent (Tas.); Kylan Beech, Des Quirk (SA), Rose Beynon, Robin Osborne (National Council Secretariate)
	<b>3.1 Clarity on the pressures to adapt</b> National Council Secretariate	<b>3.2 The human interactions that support change</b> Chantelle Bongers (Qld); Brian Stacey (CG); Keenan Klassen (WA)	
	<b>3.4 Accountability and following through</b> Susan Dann (Qld); Barb Anglin, Clare Martin (Vic.); Kasia Hoffer, Rosie Caelli, Melodee-Ruth Estcourt (Tas.); Neil Dwiar, Evelyn O'Loughlin (SA); Tom Everett, Fabian Jacobs, Keenan Klassen (WA); Ryan Erlandsen (National Council)	<b>3.3 Promoting &amp; sustaining experimentation</b> Shane Blakely, Ben Knight, Peter Cavanagh (Qld)	



**Not-for-profit members of the Blueprint Expert Reference Group at the Australian Parliament House launch included (l-r) Beth Hall, Director of Social Policy, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Toby oConnor, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Secretariate, Mark Pearce, CEO Volunteering Australia, (centre - Dr Andrew Leigh MP, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury), Robert Sturrock, Program Director, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), Dr Cassandra Goldie AO, CEO ACOSS, Matt Gardiner, CEO 54 reasons, and Kasy Chambers, Executive Director, Anglicare Australia.**

## Sector Blueprint could herald a 10-year not-for-profit renaissance

The names may not be catchy – the [Not-for-profit Sector Development Blueprint](#) was produced by the Blueprint Expert Reference Group, a.k.a. the BERG, but there's no doubting the importance of this 'ten-year roadmap of essential and overdue reform' for Australia's Not-for-profit (NFP) Sector.

The Sector, said to be 'thriving despite the apparent need to somewhat revive it, is closely analysed in the report that has now been delivered to the Australian Government, which established the investigative group.

Launching the Blueprint in the final week of the parliamentary year, Andrew Leigh, the Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, and Assistant Minister for Employment, said the 'broad and ambitious report'

contained proposals that go across one-quarter to one-third of Cabinet portfolio areas, and would be considered by the Government alongside those of the [Productivity Commission's philanthropy inquiry](#). He did not offer a timeframe for responding.

The process began its life before the 2022 Federal Election when Dr Leigh promised that a NFP Sector Expert Reference Panel would be established to guide development of a Blueprint to ensure a strong future for Australian charities.

The 2022–23 October budget provided funding for a roadmap for government reforms and Sector-led initiatives to boost the Sector's capacity to support and reconnect Australian communities.



# Not for Profit Sector Development Blueprint



The NFPs, of which there are 300,000-plus in the country, are seen as agents for positive change that enhance national wellbeing, and the Blueprint makes high claims for the value of Sector: “It brings people and communities closer together to support each other and devise responses to local and collective problems. Australia’s NFP Sector enriches social cohesion, contributes substantially to our economy, and protects our democratic system.”

Marking the start of a 10-year journey to consolidate the Sector, the BERG’s 101-page document, ‘identifies the necessary principles, priorities and initiatives needed to ensure advances commensurate with the Sector’s role as a “critical national contributor’.

## ***‘The Blueprint is an invitation to develop a flourishing and sustainable not-for-profit sector.***

The Blueprint emerges in the context of what it calls ‘intersecting challenges confronting Australia’.

These are daunting when viewed together – take a deep breath – and include the unfolding climate emergency, uneven distribution of wealth, precarious employment for sizeable sections of the workforce, housing shortages and costs, the pandemic, declining willingness for Australians to trust and help each other, digital technologies and AI changing the landscapes in which we live, work and participate, and democracies under increasing pressure to demonstrate they are effective forms of governance.

Given all this, the BERG organisational representatives – one-in-ten working Australians is employed by a charity – had a mammoth consultative task. They held online roundtables and received submissions from diverse sources, including NFPs, governments and regulatory bodies. Initial drafting took another five months of work for a 13-member team that included St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Secretariate CEO Toby oConnor.

‘It’s under-recognised that one-in-ten working Australians is employed by a charity, with the charity workforce being comparable in size to that of the mining, manufacturing and agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors combined,’ said the Society’s National President, Mark Gaetani.

‘The Blueprint is an invitation for us to lead in the development of a flourishing and sustainable not-for-profit sector. The Australian Government set this ball rolling, and the BERG has done a great job in getting the broadest possible input, studying the issues and delivering recommendations about how not-for-profit organisations can work more productively with and for the Australian community.

## ***‘The BERG wants to see swift action on the Blueprint...***

‘Thanks should go to Ministers Amanda Rishworth and Dr Andrew Leigh and the Departments of Social Services and Finance for supporting the work of the BERG, and the two expert advisors, Professor Jo Barraket AM and Professor David Gilchrist. ‘

Mr Gaetani said the Blueprint, which contains 18 key initiatives organised across three strategic pillars, is ‘the most comprehensive forward plan of the Not-for-profit Sector ever developed.

‘This is a true codesign roadmap for sector-led initiatives as well as Government reforms to boost the Sector’s capacity to support and reconnect Australian communities. Uplifting the not-for-profit sector’s digital and data capabilities, building its diversity and protecting its right to advocate will strengthen and future-proof the sector.

‘However, considerable work is needed to harmonise regulatory and legislative frameworks, reform funding and procurement processes, and invest in the wellbeing of the sector’s paid workforce and volunteers,’ he added.

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Nine pressing needs were identified, the first three being -

- the need to strengthen relationships between governments and the Sector
- making the Sector's work, including its value, impact and activities more visible to the public and to governments
- the importance of active Sector commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and community control

Implementing these goals will be guided by three organisational pillars -

- An enabling operational and regulatory environment for the Sector to thrive
- A people-led and purpose-driven Sector
- An adaptive and dynamic forward-focused Sector.

## ***'The challenge now is for everyone to help make this sector stronger...'***

It is noted that a governance body will need to be established to support the 'endurance and success of the Blueprint', which is now in the hands of the Government that commissioned the work, pending consideration and funding approval that the future resilience of the NFP Sector is likely to depend on.

One key initiative is to support the priorities of the co-designed [National Strategy for Volunteering](#) (see story in *The Record* Winter 2024 p27) developed by Volunteering Australia. This is also a 10-year plan, aimed at achieving better outcomes for volunteers and volunteering involved organisations.

'While not all volunteering occurs within the NFP Sector', the Blueprint notes, "the National Strategy for Volunteering's objectives are consistent with the priorities of the Blueprint. The development of the Strategy was underpinned by extensive research and co-design processes providing a robust contemporary source of

evidence and actions to support the revitalisation of volunteering in Australia.'

Were the Blueprint actions to achieve only the identified goals of this criterion it would deserve acclaim, given the slide of volunteering numbers in Australia. The CEO of Volunteering Australia, Mark Pearce, calls the Blueprint 'very implementable and highly pragmatic, yet transformational'.

The success of strategies to 'Support greater and better targeted philanthropy' would certainly help, too, although the onus for effective Blueprint implementation appears to lie more with the Sector than with the Government: 'The NFP Blueprint is an invitation by government for the sector to lead in the development of a flourishing and sustainable NFP sector.'

For its part, the BERG 'wants to see swift action on the Blueprint. Firstly, we call on the Federal Government to issue a detailed, written response to the Blueprint and each of its initiatives, by 31 March 2025. We expect this response to include a proposed timeframe for implementation, including funding for ongoing activities.

'Secondly, we call on all sitting members in the Federal Parliament to review and support the Blueprint, commit to its goals, and assist in its implementation.

'Thirdly, we encourage charities and NFP organisations across our communities to examine the initiatives set out in the Blueprint, and to support our calls for full implementation.'

Mark Gaetani said, 'The challenge now is for everyone from parliamentarians to people working in the sector, both paid and voluntary, and the community more widely, to help make this sector stronger and Australia a more caring and supportive society.

'The report sees this as a 10-year journey, but I think we could achieve significant progress in less time if we all set our minds to it. I will certainly be bringing the Blueprint to the attention of my state and territory colleagues.' **R**





## Preparing for Election 2025

**BY ROSE BEYNON**

St Vincent de Paul Society's National Director  
of Policy and Advocacy

In 2024, advocacy activities have been front of mind for the many Members who participate in state and territory social justice committees and for those involved with the two advisory committees at the national level – National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network.

Elections in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have helped focus our calls for change needed to address the root causes of poverty and hardship in our respective jurisdictions.

Congratulations to Queensland and the [Australian Capital Territory \(Canberra-Goulburn\)](#) who issued election statements and met with candidates and incumbent politicians in the lead up to their elections. These actions raise the profile of the Society and remind governments of our important role in the community and of the valuable contributions we can make at the policy level. These documents are accessible on our website.

As we approach an upcoming federal election, our advocacy efforts are in full swing.

The Society's federal advocacy position is now well established and builds on the work developed for the 2022 federal election, under the banner of A Fairer Australia. The latest iteration, *Let's Build a Fairer Australia!*, has been updated, and contains seven policy priority areas and is also accessible on our website.

National Council recently approved our 2025 federal election statement, *Justice and Compassion*, with a focus on four key areas, namely:

- Supporting a Safety Net for all Australia
- Housing Security Across the Country
- Meeting the Needs of First Nations peoples, and
- Rising to the Refugee Challenge.

Similar to 2022, a leaflet that lists our key asks will be developed, along with a booklet that outlines the issues, our history of advocacy in the area, the change that is needed and why.

Advocacy is a core Value of the Society and, as always, our position is informed by the experiences of those we assist and by our Members. We are also led by the words and actions of our founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and of the principles contained in Catholic Social Teaching and what it means to be a lay Catholic organisation.

We have commissioned a specialised unit within the Australian National University to develop papers on the key issues of welfare and taxation reform, the Goods and Services Tax and poverty. We hope to launch these papers at Parliament House in early February 2025.

We plan to mail out hard copies of our 2025 Federal Election statement, *Justice and Compassion*, to all incumbent parliamentarians, major departments and party secretaries. Resources will also be emailed to all candidates in up to 20 targeted electorates, seeking feedback. Media releases and opinion pieces will be drafted, and much greater use will be made of social media to increase our reach and engage and inform the public of our positions.

We know that one of the most effective means of advocating for change is through the actions of our members and volunteers. Candidates are very keen to hear from people who are active in their electorate, and who can speak from the heart about what they are seeing and hearing.

We will develop a kit to help Members approach their local candidates. We encourage Members to speak to those issues they are most familiar and comfortable with. You do not need to cover everything. The leaflet is a double-sided one pager that is easy to read and print and is ideal to leave with candidates.

We also aim to conduct a Members' webinar in March 2025 to provide an overview of our main policy asks. We would appreciate your liking and sharing our reels and posts on the social media platform that you feel comfortable with.

As always, we look forward to your commitment and support in the lead up to Federal Election 2025. **R**

## Tackling poverty got the capital's polities thinking



On 14 October, during [Anti-Poverty Week](#) and shortly before the ACT four-yearly election, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn and [ACTCOSS](#) co-hosted a community forum with representatives from the major parties, a subsequently successful independent candidate, and Assoc Prof Ben Phillips from the Australian National University whose unit has produced analyses of the economy for the Society's National Council.

Attendees outlined how, if elected, they would plan to tackle poverty in the ACT amidst the impacts of the leading crises facing the country - costs-of-living, housing affordability and climate.

Over fifty people from the broader community and sector organisations asked challenging questions on themes such as how health, education, housing and welfare systems could work together to address poverty in the ACT. They sought commitments to expanding income-based rental properties, as well as how appropriate funding for community sector organisations might address the needs for food relief and other essentials.

The event featured a keynote address by Assoc Prof Ben Phillips, from the ANU's Centre for Social Research and Methods, who explained how poverty and financial stress manifests in Canberra and what can be done to alleviate it.

'Australia doesn't have an official measure of poverty and there are issues with various measures used,' Assoc Prof Ben Phillips, said.

'I sometimes prefer direct financial stress measures to poverty due to the narrow focus of poverty measures on income (and sometimes housing costs). We often find those defined as 'in poverty' aren't in any financial stress (often older Australians), whereas many low-income working age families are not in poverty but are in financial stress.'

The ACT's rate of financial stress (2022) was 21 per cent (100,000 persons), and deep financial stress per cent was four per cent (19,000), he said.

The broader policy implications are that the JobSeeker



**Top:** At the Anti-Poverty Week forum were (l-r) Lucy Hohnen, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn CEO, Thomas Emerson (Independents for Canberra, now MLA), Emma Davidson (ACT Greens, then MLA), Mark Parton (Canberra Liberals, now Speaker), Yvette Berry (ALP, now Deputy Chief Minister), Dr Devin Bowles (ACTCOSS) and ANU Assoc Professor Ben Phillips.

**Above:** The Anti-Poverty Week demonstration at Australian Parliament House was attended by SVdP National Council Secretariat CEO Toby O'Connor and National Director Policy and Research, Rose Beynon (both at right).

single rate (currently \$55.70 a day) needs to increase, as does the Commonwealth Rent Assistance payment, despite a 25 per cent rise to a maximum rate for a single renter of \$211 per fortnight.

Importantly, Assoc Prof Phillips highlighted the need for 'a better culture around social security – [it] should be held in the same esteem as our health or education system rather than the current punitive approach'.

He added, Governments focus too much on 'cost of living' issues/crisis across most of the population, but if they were serious they would focus on those most in need (now and always)...the focus should be on those genuinely struggling, which is probably around 10% of the population – this is a group government can do something for – it can't permanently make a whole population richer.' **R**



## It's going to happen again!

***The Black Summer bushfires of 2019/20 devastated a wide range of communities in eastern Australia, with the mental health impacts on young people being significantly under-recognised.***

In a recent meeting with government agencies, NGOs and St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council Secretariate, ANU Professor Ben Edwards predicted that, one day, all participants would – as he had, during the 2019/20 Black Summer fires – experience a natural disaster, warning that the psychological impacts, especially on children, could be profound and unpredictable.

'It's going to happen,' he said, so it's wise to be aware of the possible implications.

Two days later, the release of the [State of the Climate Report 2024](#), prepared biannually by CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, seemed to confirm his prediction. The report said Australia would face more heatwaves and fewer cool days, a longer fire season and more dangerous fire weather, heavy rainfall to become more intense, sea level rise to continue and coastal floods to become more frequent.

Prof Edwards has been investing considerable effort on analysing the impacts of past bushfires and other disasters on the mental health of children and adolescents, noting that 'In recent decades, natural disasters have become more frequent and more severe, and this is set to continue as the effects of climate change intensify'.

His findings, presented in two briefs to the forum, included a study of the links between disasters and the likelihood of young people self-harming or contemplating, or even committing, suicide.

This first national study to examine the subject was informed by the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children that surveyed 2,908 adolescents aged 14 to 15 years and 18-19 years. It found that fire or floods increased the risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation, and that 'cascading disasters', where drought was followed by fire or flood, led to an increased likelihood of self-harm by 2.5 times.

Significantly, 'Young people who were exposed to bushfires and were advised to evacuate had even worse levels of psychological distress', while 'Exposures to a cyclone or severe storm was also associated with higher levels of psychological distress'.

The study warned that, 'Climate change will lead to increased risk in number and the rapidity of fires and other natural disasters in future decades and while Australian adolescents show considerable resilience, our findings suggest that there will be increases in risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation due to disasters in Australian youth without further action to identify protective factors'.

The second brief identified factors making children and adolescents either more vulnerable or more resilient to bushfires in order to inform future preparedness, response and recovery.

This study found that the key factor making young people more vulnerable to the mental health impacts of bushfires was a prior history of anxiety, suggesting additional targeted support for those with a prior history of mental health problems would be worthwhile, as would expanding the Disaster Response Network to families and communities affected by bushfires and other disasters.

Sudden onset disasters affect economic resources which, in turn, increase parental stress and adversely affect parenting ability. This has lasting impacts. The need for adequate and rapid financial assistance was a recommendation of the study.

However, none of the main 'protective factors', such as family economic resources or community wellbeing, were found to have had the effect of protecting young people from the psychological impacts of disasters.

'All youth' were affected by the Black Summer bushfires, it found, regardless of 'privilege or social address'.

St Vincent de Paul Society was, and to an extent continues to be, engaged in assisting families and individuals affected by the Black Summer bushfires in Victoria, NSW and SE Queensland. **R**





**Rohan Smith at the Society's stall at the Alpha National Catholic Conference in Melbourne in early November.**

## Living out Faith through practical service

**BY CASS BULL**

National Manager – Membership, Mission & Youth,  
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia

At the recent [Alpha National Catholic Conference](#) in Melbourne, the Society had the privilege of sharing how we live out our faith through practical service to those in need. Our stall, supported by materials from the National Membership Network and manned by Brendan Podbury and Rohan Smith from Victoria focused on how the Society operates within parish communities across Australia to provide a “hand up” to individuals and families facing hardship.

Alpha is a tool for evangelisation that many parishes are beginning to explore. Organisers create a space, online or in person, where people are invited to bring their friends and family for a conversation about faith. One of Alpha’s goals is to engage lay people in the life and mission of the Church.

As Alpha groups work to revitalise the Church and engage parishioners in deeper faith discussions, we believe there is a unique opportunity for members of these groups to benefit from partnering with the Society. Through practical acts of service, such as providing food, shelter, and emotional support, the Society helps bring the Gospel to life in tangible ways, offering a witness of love and compassion to those who need it most.

As part of our presence at the event, our representatives

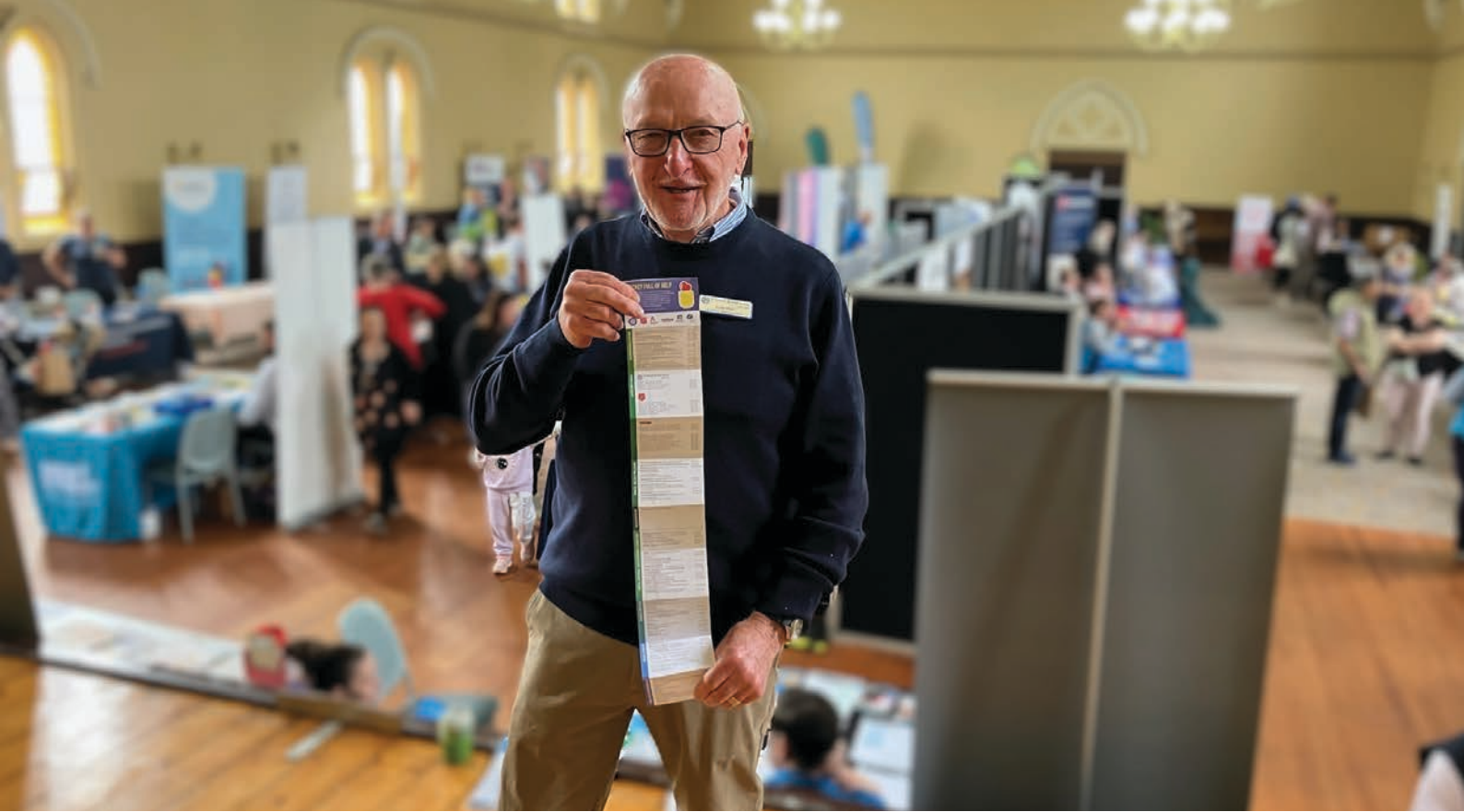
spoke with organisers of parish Alpha groups, highlighting that connecting with the Society can offer a powerful, hands-on opportunity to serve the wider community. By joining forces, these groups can make a meaningful impact, not only renewing the faith of those involved but also contributing to the wider church’s presence and mission in the local community.

The Society’s work, grounded in faith and inspired by the teachings of Christ, shows that faith is not only something to be spoken but something to be lived. As Vincentians, we know the importance of acts of service where we reflect the heart of the Gospel, offering a helping hand to those struggling, while deepening our own relationship with God.

The National Membership Network was excited to connect with Alpha leaders and participants at the conference, sharing how our mission can complement their efforts to revitalise the Church. Thanks to the support of Brendan and Rohan for their time at the Conference, and the wider National Membership Network.

Let’s hope this is the beginning of a stronger partnerships with Alpha and RCIA groups in your local parish, bringing faith to life in the most practical and impactful ways. **R**





**Vincentian Alan West with the Pocket Full of Help directory launched at the Hall Full of Help expo in Ballarat's St Patrick's Cathedral.**  
**Photo: Traycie Walker, North Western Central Council conference support officer.**

## All the help in one place

What if you could find all the help you need, right in one place, just when you are looking for it? That's exactly what happened recently during the first 'Hall Full of Help' expo in Ballarat's St Patrick's Cathedral.

Spearheaded by St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's Ballarat conferences and their member Alan West, the event brought together around 45 organisations offering a wide range of support – from meal programs to mental health assistance. Each organisation had a stall, ready to engage with attendees and provide valuable information about their services.

In just a few hours, nearly 500 visited the expo, taking advantage of the opportunity to find help all under one roof.

This overwhelming response highlighted the urgent need for support in the Ballarat community and demonstrated that the event was far more than just an expo – it served as a lifeline for many.

'The Pocket full of Help' information is an authentic demonstration of the Society's mission, vision and aspiration. It is a living, practical way to shape a more just and compassionate society in Ballarat and beyond.

'Well done to all involved in the Hall full of Help,' says Michael Ryan, the Society's Ballarat Regional President.

True to the Vincentian spirit, one of the most powerful aspects of the Hall Full of Help was the opportunity for attendees to have real conversations with the people behind the services.

Unlike navigating websites, filling in online-forms or calling helplines, these face-to-face interactions provided clarity and compassion, particularly for people who might struggle with language barriers or complex issues that can be hard to explain over the phone.

The Hall Full of Help expo evolved from a simple yet highly impactful idea: the Pocket Full of Help, created by Ballarat St Patrick's member Alan West. This compact, foldable directory – small enough to fit in a wallet – lists all essential services in the Ballarat region.

With contributions from a variety of local organisations, the Pocket Full of Help has become an indispensable resource for everyone needing support, offering clear guidance on where to find meals, crisis accommodation, Family Violence Support, financial advice, support with utilities payments and No Interest Loans (NILS), legal help, migrant and refugee support, and more.

Driven by the success of this directory, the idea for the Hall Full of Help was born, bringing written information to life. The Conference, always at the forefront of providing assistance to the community, embraced the initiative, and partnered with other conferences and local organisations to help drive the event forward.

More than just an expo, the Hall Full of Help was a celebration of community spirit, with the chance of winning door prizes, a sausage sizzle, coffee and bags of free fruits and vegetables for attendees. These thoughtful touches created a warm and welcoming atmosphere, making everyone feel supported and the day a huge success. **R**

# 'Jailing is failing' young offenders, government must address child poverty

**BY ROBIN OSBORNE**

National Director, Communications & Media

***Charities and Justice Reform Initiative are pushing for legislation to end child poverty and get rational and compassionate approaches to youth justice and the incarceration of children.***

Two well-attended events at Australian Parliament House (APH) in October, one a breakfast symposium, the other a rally on the lawn, intensified the spotlight now shining on the issue of incarcerating children, some as young as ten years, and the negative impacts of early life deprivation and poverty.

The opening event was sponsored by the Justice Reform Initiative, a high-powered collective of leading Australian lawyers and other experts whose view may be summarised by the opening sentences of the [position paper](#) launched at the breakfast: 'Youth justice systems across Australia are failing [to act] in the best interests of the children who are in contact with them, and they are failing to address the drivers of crime and criminal justice system contact'.

Putting an experiential and human face to this claim were four young people - Tyson (see *interview below*), Jake, Maya and Willow - who had gone through the prison system on multiple occasions and courageously shared their stories with the audience.

All were seen to have come from disadvantaged backgrounds characterised by low household incomes and minimal parental support, factors which gave further weight to the lawn gathering to promote Anti Poverty Week (13-19 October) whose focus was on ending child poverty.

St Vincent de Paul Society Australia is one of the many organisations supporting the call for government action. As National President Mark Gaetani noted in a statement, 774,000 children – one-in-six of all Aussie kids – are living below the poverty line.

'Eliminating poverty is a complex challenge but the Australian Government is responsible for providing support to those most in its grip,' he said.

'Households living in poverty have limited access to proper housing, healthy food and educational opportunities for their children. This causes social and developmental problems in the short term and limitations as the children grow up.'



**National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds.**

He added, 'Around 3,240,000 Australians, more than 13 per cent of our total population, are now living below the poverty line. The great majority rely on the Government as their sole source of income and at present this is grossly inadequate.'

***"Australia's poverty rate has steadily increased over the past two decades, with survey data suggesting the rate of poverty is at its highest since 2001."***

'Poverty is also intergenerational. Children who experience poverty are at increased risk of facing poverty as adults.'

Mr Gaetani stressed that the rate of JobSeeker and other support payments is below the poverty line and the result is that young children are failing to thrive because their needs cannot be met. Further, they are unlikely to go on to escape the poverty trap and to pursue their life goals.

'It is unimaginable that this situation continues in a well-off country like Australia. But that's the reality our members see every day when they are in touch with people seeking





**St Vincent de Paul Society National Secretariate CEO, Toby O'Connor and National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds.**

help. Households must decide between buying essential medicine or paying a power bill, putting food on the table or paying the rent, with the ever-present threat of homelessness.'

Prominent at the rally was the [End Child Poverty](#) campaign, backed by the Valuing Children Initiative and Centrecare, which says the nation's highest poverty rates are found in the SW suburbs of Sydney, the far south and western suburbs of Melbourne, some areas in Hobart and Perth as well as in many regional locations.

The APH breakfast marked the official launch of the National Children's Commissioner's report, [Help Way Easier! How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing](#). Commissioner Anne Hollonds' report was covered in the winter issue of *The Record*.

Summarising her findings, Ms Hollonds said, "Tragically, by not addressing their human rights early on, and instead taking a punitive approach to their offending, we are essentially criminalising some of the most vulnerable children in Australia."

Sadly, this often starts young people on a lifetime of criminal offending, or at least facing long term socio-economic disadvantage.

In a reference to the recent NT election and the Queensland poll that was soon to start, the Commissioner called election time 'a race to the bottom', saying the public doesn't know 'the truth' about the impacts of imprisoning minors.

Concerns about the NT Government's decision to lower the age of criminal responsibility, passed by the legislature on 18 October, have been raised by the chair of the UN

Committee on the Rights of the Child who called the 10-year-old threshold 'very low in world terms'.

Darwin's Bishop, Charles Gauci, said the NTG 'must strive to find the best possible solutions' to youth crime without resorting to incarceration.

In a statement to Darwin Catholics, Bishop Gauci said, 'Many experts caution us that incarcerating children and burdening them with criminal records does little to prevent crime in the long term', adding the practice can 'have the opposite effect, hindering their future potential and deepening cycles of disadvantage'.

Bishop Gauci also raised his concerns directly with the Chief Minister. He believes, 'We must strive to find the best possible solutions – ones that address the behaviour appropriately without leaving children with a lifelong criminal record or resorting to imprisonment.

'This seems to be the path of wisdom and the greater good, one that upholds both justice and compassion in our society.'

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) has called for a nationally coordinated reform of the youth justice system in its submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system.

'The current youth justice approach in Australia flies in the face of child rights and is not the solution to reducing and/or preventing crime, it said.

CRA expressed grave concerns that the current youth justice system is punitive in its approach, sidelining the dignity of the child while also failing to create safer communities.

'The detaining of children as young as 10 has long-term detrimental impacts on their health and wellbeing, and can cause the breakdown of their social systems, frequently contributing to a vicious cycle of criminal activity,' said CRA President, Br. Gerard Brady CFC.

CRA made particular reference to First Nations children who are overrepresented throughout the youth justice system – being 23 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be under some type of supervisory order – as well as being especially overrepresented among younger cohorts. For young people aged 10-13 in detention, nearly three quarters are of First Nations backgrounds.

CRA believes the youth justice system urgently requires the development of a nationally consistent approach that prioritises prevention and holistic rehabilitation to restore and uphold the dignity of the child.

CRA's submission can be read [here](#).

*continued over page ►*

## How it can start...

On 10 October 2025, *The Sydney Morning Herald* interviewed breakfast attendee Tyson Kliendienst (panel member pictured at left), now 25, who was aged 11 when first locked up for low-level crimes like shoplifting and assault. Then it escalated - from stealing cars and burning them out, to break-ins, home invasions and high-speed police chases.

'It got worse and worse to the point where, at 16, 17, it was holding up pubs: robberies at 4am, while the cleaners were there,' he said.

By the time of his 18th birthday, which he spent in a juvenile detention cell, Tyson had been incarcerated about nine times.

'It's like high school: when you come to year seven you want to be the year 12 student. That's what the boys' home does to us: you come in as a young kid, at 12, and an old mate who's been in there for five years for a stabbing, you want to be at his level, because he gets the respect. The attitude is: this is for the hard boys. There is no place for the weak there.'

According to Robert Tickner, federal minister for Aboriginal affairs in the Hawke and Keating governments who now chairs the Justice Reform Initiative, 66 per cent of children in detention between 10 and 16 received another sentence within six months of leaving. About 85 per cent were back within a year.

'If you had told me 33 years ago that I would be standing here in this building with these record rates of incarceration, particularly youth incarceration ... that the system would not have improved over those 33 years, and we hadn't followed the world's best practice, I would never have believed it,' he says.

'This country has failed.'

There has long been a push to lift the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, supported by St Vincent de Paul Society, but there is still no uniformity across the country. The NT, after its recent election, is going in the opposite direction, and post-election Queensland is likely to as well.



## ...but not necessarily end

Some stories do have a happy ending, although seldom by accident. Tyson Kliendienst started a program with BackTrack Youth Works, in Armidale, NSW and found the support he had so long needed. He's now a plumber and is a father to two children in Brisbane.

'You need the right support, a place of belonging where you can feel love, and that's where we're struggling with a lot of these kids,' he said.

'Every time I came out, these guys [BackTrack] kept reminding me of my worth. Who do you want to be? Have you got a dream? You don't get asked that in there. They ask you when your next court date is.'

*The Justice Reform Initiative has welcomed the announcement that the Senate is now holding an inquiry into [Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System](#), calling it a 'welcome milestone in efforts to make child justice, safety and well-being a national priority', a call also issued by Commissioner Hollonds.*

*A key focus will be on the over-incarceration of First Nations children who are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system.*

*The deadline for the tabling of the Senate Inquiry's report has been extended to 28 February, 2025. **R***



## VINNIES VAN



*NSW Premier Chris Minns, SVdP NSW CEO Yolanda Saiz and Terry Lamb and Josh Reynolds from the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs NRL club.*

## Premier service added to Sydney support

On R U OK? Day in early September, NSW Premier Chris Minns launched a new Vinnies Van to address the growing need for food assistance and community connection across the state.

'The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has a well-established presence in communities all across the state and provides important relief to people through its members and services every day,' Mr Minns said.

'Vinnies Vans provide people with more than just a meal by acting as a space for social connection and referrals to other support services. I've seen first-hand the impact Vinnies NSW has been able to make for people in crisis and with early intervention support.

'The NSW Government is proud to support the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW as part of our commitment to address hardship and loneliness,' Premier Minns added.

The latest Vinnies Van, a purpose-built Isuzu Tradepack truck proudly funded by the NSW Government, will allow St Vincent de Paul Society NSW to service inner-Sydney each night by providing food and support to a growing number of people.

Vinnies Vans supported over 102,000 people in the past financial year with over 95,000 meals provided, along with 85,000 snack and toiletries packs. The Society NSW operates 13 Vinnies Vans throughout NSW, servicing

Greater Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Orange.

'We've seen a dramatic increase in the number of people seeking assistance from our van services, including people in secure employment who are reaching out due to cost-of-living pressures,' said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

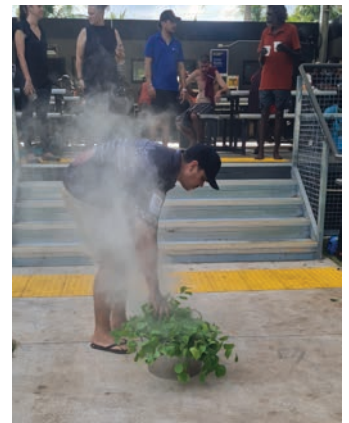
'Four in five people seeking assistance from our members over the past year have requested assistance with food and this has meant we've needed to expand our services to meet the need that exists in the community,' said Ms Saiz.

'We're grateful for the support of the NSW Government in funding a new Vinnies Van which will allow us to reach more people and provide much-needed certainty in their time of hardship,' said Peter Houweling, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.

In addition to Vinnies Vans services that operated across NSW, the Society supported close to 100,000 people facing hardship through its network of members over the last year.

[Recent research conducted by The McKell Institute](#) examining the effectiveness of the Society's relief programs found that 89% of people reported that the assistance positively impacted their stress levels and improved their wellbeing. **R**





## Shelter for people experiencing homelessness in Darwin

Named after St Vincent de Paul Society's founder, the Ozanam House homeless day centre, operated by the Society in the suburb of Stuart Park, relocated to Dick Ward Drive in nearby Coconut Grove on Monday, 7 October.

[The Development Consent Authority approved the temporary relocation](#) earlier this year, with the Society receiving two years to find a new, permanent centre to replace the facility.

It was well publicised that the move to relocate the 50-year-old centre to land owned by Gwalwa Daraniki Association had angered residents and businesses in Coconut Grove, worried at the impact an influx of itinerants would have on amenity within the residential and commercial precinct.

However, there are many itinerant people around Darwin, the great majority being Indigenous, and the issue is crying out for both temporary and long-term solutions.

The Ozanam House relocation became conflated with the highly inflamed law-and-order issue during the recent NT election campaign. The then-opposition CLP party,

which later won the poll) promised it would lower the age of criminal responsibility down to ten years (see story pp 26-7 *The Record* Spring 2024), a move that would impact largely on children of First Nations backgrounds.

The new centre, purpose built, is located behind cyclone-wire fencing and offers meals, bathroom and laundry facilities, and if needed, referral to other services for those needing further assistance.

The Society's NT CEO Rob Lutter told the NT News that the new facility would 'continue providing dignity and support services to the most vulnerable members of the community', adding it may take more than two years to find a permanent location.

In its previous location, Ozanam House had assisted on average of 100 people a day and in 2023 provided 68,000 meals, more than 11,500 showers and almost 4800 loads of washing.

The building it formerly occupied will be refurbished and rooms leased on a low-cost basis, with a focus on essential services workers on limited incomes. **R**



### Christmas Appeal focuses on costs of living



St Vincent de Paul's annual Christmas Appeal, one of the year's major fundraisers, has a focus on the struggle of many Australians to afford food for their families, to cover the cost of rising rents and to pay for a range of other household essentials, not least energy bills which continue to rise.

As the copy for the campaign says, 'For many in our community, there'll be no lights on the tree this Christmas because their electricity has been disconnected.

'There'll be no special meals because there's rarely enough on the table. And no presents because the rent is overdue.

'The cost-of-living crisis is unrelenting. There's no end in sight. Every day, people in our community are facing impossible choices. As Christmas approaches, those choices are even starker for families like Tania's.'

To mark [Anti Poverty Week](#) in October, the Society noted that while eliminating poverty is a complex challenge, the Australian Government is responsible for providing support to those most in its grip, not least the 774,000 children – one-in-six of all Aussie kids – who are living below the poverty line.

'Households living in poverty have limited access to proper housing, healthy food and educational opportunities for their children. This causes social and developmental problems in the short term and limitations as the children grow up,' said National President Mark Gaetani

'Around 3,240,000 Australians, more than 13 per cent of our total population, are now living below the poverty line. The great majority rely on the Government as their sole source of income and at present this is grossly inadequate.

'Australia's poverty rate has steadily increased over the past two decades, with survey data suggesting the rate of poverty is at its highest since 2001.

'Poverty is also intergenerational. Children who experience poverty are at increased risk of facing poverty as adults', Mr Gaetani added, stressing that the rate of JobSeeker and other support payments is below the poverty line and the result is that young children are failing to thrive because their needs cannot be met.

'Further, they are unlikely to go on to escape the poverty trap and to pursue their life goals.' **R**

## IGA again supports Vinnies over Christmas

The independent supermarket group IGA again supported St Vincent de Paul Society over the Christmas season with a partnership focused on donating the proceeds of customers' purchases of \$2 Vinnies Baubles or any products with a blue Community Chest ticket.

Now in its 13th consecutive year, the partnership has raised a total of more than \$5.3 million to assist Australians during the festive season, including those facing the impacts of natural disasters.

Funds raised from the sale of Vinnies Baubles and products with a Community Chest ticket will be used to provide urgent relief for families who are struggling to survive the increasing cost-of-living pressures, IGA said.

IGA is a network of over 1,300 independent family-owned businesses that sit at the heart of communities across Australia. **R**



## RECYCLE AND RE-USE



*Drop it in the box... reality TV stars Jules Robinson and Brittany Hockley passed on some quality items to Vinnies.*

## Size can count... massive donation box in Sydney CBD

On a spring morning in Sydney's CBD, office workers making their daily commute to the city discovered a massive Vinnies donation box had popped up in George Street.

Towering over passers-by at an impressive four metres tall, the giant box asked people to 'Bring Your Best' quality clothing and fashion accessories to donate during the retail campaign activation. A circular hole on each wall allowed those walking by to peek inside, watching as the donations slowly filled up the empty space.

Adorned with the new Vinnies retail branding, the box was designed to raise awareness of the positive impacts that come with donating to Vinnies. Messages on each side explained how each donation contributes to a greater impact through Vinnies' good works.

The clothing collection effort also extended into corporate offices within the CBD. Representatives from local businesses were invited to take one of 50 smaller donation boxes then encourage their employees to bring in items to donate before the campaign wrapped up.

Vinnies also enlisted the help of Australian reality TV stars Jules Robinson, Brittany Hockley and Lachlan McLean, plus ex-NRL footballer Josh Reynolds and a host of other 'micro influencers', to launch the campaign and spread the word about the tangible impact that donating clothes can have on people who are doing it tough.

One man working in the nearby 259 George Street building was so inspired when he saw the giant donation box that he immediately fetched a freshly dry-cleaned business shirt from his office, then carried it back down to street level to donate to the campaign. Other inspired workers revisited the activation over the following days with bags of clothing that they brought along on their commute to the office.

By the end of the 72-hour activation period, over 360 kgs of clothing had been placed inside the big box. These donations were transported to the distribution centre where they get sent to the network of more than 220 Vinnies shops around NSW.

Vinnies shops are a pivotal stream of revenue for the Society NSW, raising funds to operate over 130 programs and services for people who are experiencing disadvantage/dealing with a range of issues including homelessness, domestic and family violence, disability, mental health, youth wellbeing, refugee and migrant inclusion, rehabilitation and addiction.

Close to 100,000 people have been supported by NSW members over the last year, an increase of 14 per cent over the past 12 months. A further 11,800 people were supported by Vinnies NSW Services across Homelessness and Housing, Health, and Disability and Inclusion, while Vinnies Vans assisted over 100,000 people across the state. **R**



# GIANT LEGO FUNDRAISER

## Canberra/Goulburn helps local kids, one brick at a time

The Goodies Junction recycling shops run by St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn again teamed up with the Roundabout Canberra charity to raise funds through the ever-popular LEGO and Duplo sale.

All bricks donated to either of the two Goodies Junction facilities in the capital were passed on to Roundabout Canberra for their annual fundraising sale. Roundabout partners with social services to ensure the safety, wellbeing and dignity of children and their families.

'We hope this will contribute to the ongoing success of their major annual fundraiser, so they can continue the important work of providing essential baby and children's items to local families experiencing hardship,' said the Society's Canberra/Goulburn CEO Lucy Hohnen.

'As part of our commitment to support the community by repurposing goods and supporting local charities and community organisations in the ACT, we are delighted to have Roundabout on board as one of our major charity partners at Goodies Junction.'

Hannah Andreovski, CEO of Roundabout Canberra, said, 'Roundabout Canberra is thrilled to partner with Goodies Junction and the St Vincent de Paul Society. Every donation of Lego and Duplo will go directly to helping us raise funds and to support families in need across Canberra.'

'This partnership is a testament to our shared vision of repurposing quality items for a greater purpose. Together, we're transforming donations into vital support for our community, and we're grateful to everyone who contributes. It's a wonderful example of the power of the circular economy.'

Ms Andreovski said the LEGO sale had become an important part of Roundabout's fundraising efforts, with almost \$200,000 raised through the initiative over the past three years. She added that the charity had supported 4,175 children in 2023 and expected the number to increase for this year.

'The event has become something that local LEGO lovers really look forward to, as well as attracting out of towners... one man travelled from Melbourne to be the first in line both years.'

Lucy Hohnen said, 'When people donate or buy things from Goodies Junction, they're helping others. Our goal is to make sure old items go to good use. So, if locals have things, including Lego and Duplo, they don't need anymore, they can trust us to do some good with them'. **R**



**St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn CEO Lucy Hohnen at a Goodies Junction recycling shop with the CEO of Roundabout Canberra, Hannah Andreovski.**  
*Photo: Jordan Mirchevski, Canberra Weekly*







*Members of the Caritas Christi Conference in Canberra/Goulburn were among the thousands of volunteers who prepared Christmas hampers for delivery to the Society's companions. Pictured (l-r) are Patricia McLachlan, Conference President Tim McKenna, Canberra/Goulburn Territory Council President, Brian Stacey, Julia Carter, Julie Vance and Ann Webb.*

## Hampers rolled out across the country

St Vincent de Paul Society conferences across Australia, along with a host of Mini Vinnies groups and other helpers, collated, wrapped and packed thousands of Christmas hampers for delivery to companion households in the lead up to Christmas 2024.

Many gifts were donated by community members, others were purchased with available funds, the focus being on children's toys of every imaginable kind as well as non-perishable food items. Along with hamper delivery, Conference work continued as usual until almost the last minute, with the wellbeing of companions and their families in the festive season, often a testing period for people on low incomes, remaining uppermost in Members' minds. **R**





## Remembering Cyclone Tracy – the 50th anniversary

*Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin in the small hours of Christmas Day 1974, killing 66 people and devastating 80 per cent of the city. In its aftermath, most residents, 36,000 in total, left the city, receiving assisted travel south to establish new lives or wait until they could return and start afresh in the Northern Territory capital.*

*In February 1975, the Whitlam government established the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, which effectively rebuilt the city within three years. Darwin's near complete destruction led to the introduction of improved building codes across Australia.*



**Rover Joolama Thomas, Kukatja/Wangkajunga peoples, Cyclone Tracy, 1991, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 1991 © Rover Thomas/Copyright Agency**

### **Surviving nature's onslaught**

BY A DARWIN RESIDENT\*

With preparations for Christmas day upon us, and a rainy afternoon making it cooler, at least to work in the house, I was getting our rented house in Tiwi organised for Christmas day.

As the evening was upon us everything was going to plan: husband was home from work, two children off to sleep (one boy just turned four and the other a six-month-old baby).

I was slicing up the ham and other food so the next day would be easy with lunch as we were expecting my in-laws to join us. They lived in Winnellie in a unit at the back of the Rentokil Pest Control business where Ron, my father-in-law, worked.

News was coming in that Darwin would probably be in the path of Cyclone Tracy in the next few hours, and to prepare to take shelter in the strongest part of our homes. For us that would be in the smallest room, probably the bathroom, with more secure walls for protection.

The sound of wind was getting stronger, the screeching of iron being wrenched off roofs, crashing into anything in its way, the rain coming

in horizontally though the louvres before they gave way and smashed into the inside rooms.

As this commotion was building up and some walls and sections of roof were breaking up we started to huddle in our little bathroom: my husband, the two boys and myself, bracing for what was to come.

As it turned out the ground floor ex-commission house was stronger than the elevated homes throughout Darwin.

The tremendous noise during all this and then the screaming of some of the people in our neighbourhood during the lull (the eye) was shocking, and the uneasiness of what was coming next, made us wait out the final onslaught.

Morning came and as we emerged from our dwelling to see the utter upheaval of houses and contents, landscape totally changed with not many trees standing but all leafless... totally amazing, but we were safe and during the afternoon our in-laws showed up.

In the late afternoon we managed to gather some wet belongings and headed to a still standing commercial work shed in Winnellie where several families gathered for a few days, then the women and children were evacuated to southern states.

*continued over page ►*

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About the fourth day the boys and I were evacuated by a Hercules transport plane to Adelaide where volunteers at the airport helped with provisions for the children - food and changes of diapers etc, then late in the evening we arrived at Sydney airport and had a voucher for a taxi to Penrith to Mum and Dad's place.

I stayed there for about three months, then rejoined my husband in Darwin where he had stayed, helping with repairs to homes for people returning.

I was really surprised to have a visit from some St Vincent de Paul members within a few days of my arrival in Penrith, to see what they could help me with. I assumed that they heard of my arrival at Mum and Dad's, by word of mouth, maybe through Dad's workplace. I was so grateful for the unexpected donation of a cot and some clothing and some vouchers.

On my return to Darwin my family lived in some make-do places for a few months, then we started to build a garage on our house block in Tiwi, followed by a home in the following year.

After 50 years we are still in Darwin and loving it except for the humidity in the buildup season, but now we have air conditioning... Hooray!

As a new arrival in Darwin in 1969 and in the talk of possible Cyclones hitting our town, we all wondered what



PHOTO: BILL BRADLEY

**Damaged houses after the passage of Cyclone Tracy on Christmas day 1974.**

it would be like. I can tell you it is extremely frightening, especially if you do not have a secure shelter. Thanks to God and the better building code we have a greater chance of safety these days.

I will be forever grateful for the generosity of people in times of disasters and the organisations helping out those in need. **R**

\*The author prefers not to be named.

## **Letter from the Australian Red Cross Society to St Vincent de Paul Society in Darwin on 14 April 1975, four months after Cyclone Tracy.**

The Red Cross had just helped Mr John XXX, aged 63, with mattresses and linen.

They had moved into some flats that they were building but were not finished at the time of Tracy. There were four children under 16. It seemed as if they were in fairly uncomfortable circumstances. The flats were insured but no money had yet come through.

John had lived in Darwin for 25 years, and his wife 16 years. They returned from down south the previous Tuesday. Joan asked if Vinnies could visit the flat and assess what they needed. Red Cross could give them assistance from the following Thursday but Joan thought they needed help before then.

This morning, I spoke to Michael, one of the sons. He was about 12 at the time.

He remembered his older family members rescuing other people, some with serious injuries, with one girl having her stomach cut open. His Dad vomited when he saw this girl.

His Dad went up and down rescuing people. He and others stayed in Jingili Primary school before being evacuated. His married sister had only one room left of her house.

He recalls that many people suffered seriously from shock, even when they were leaving Darwin for unknown places.

He spoke mostly about the assistance the family received on their way south and while they were down south from the Red Cross and from Vinnies. It seems they drove their old vehicle down, but Michael did not know who paid for the fuel, accommodation, etc on the way down.

When they were in Adelaide and Melbourne they were assisted with food, clothing, etc which came from Vinnies and the Red Cross. Some of them must have been there for some time as Michael attended school in Melbourne.

Again, he did not know where the uniforms came from but said it must have been from either the Red Cross or Vinnies. He was very thankful to both groups. No one had a bad word for either group. They enabled people to survive. **R**



## ***How I (just) missed Tracy***

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

I'd been in Dili, the capital of then-Portuguese East Timor, today's Timor-Leste, after months in Indonesia reporting on the simmering opposition to the rule of dictatorial President Soeharto. In Java, those opposing the regime – writers, artists, Muslim activists, human rights lawyers – would meet secretly to discuss tactics. Killings, abductions and intimidation were meted out by the military.

By comparison, Timor was a sleepy backwater that history had seemingly passed by. Not for long, however.

In late December 1974, with Christmas looming, I decided to pay a surprise visit to my parents in Australia, buying a ticket to Darwin for Christmas day, with a connecting flight to Sydney.

The plan was to walk through the door in time for the traditional late afternoon lunch. The trip would begin by flying on the Indonesian-owned airline Merpati Nusantara ('Dove of the archipelago) from the town of Baucau, which hosted Timor's 'international' airport, located hours away from Dili over dreadful roads.

After a pleasing dinner and a couple of glasses of Portuguese wine, a beverage unobtainable back in Indonesia, the land of Bintang beer, I bedded down on Christmas eve, setting the alarm for an early rise.

Unnecessarily, as it happened.

'Everybody wake up!', came a cry from the corridor, as staff and then guests rushed around knocking on doors and yelling... 'Wake up, Darwin's been destroyed by a cyclone... the news has just come in... Darwin's destroyed.'

For some reason, I looked out the window, perhaps expecting to see the cyclone here, too – we didn't seem that far away, in cyclone terms. But in the pre-dawn light the weather seemed fine and fair, no wind or heavy rain, and this was confirmed when I stepped outside into the warm, dry air.

The news was slow to come in and details were sketchy, but somehow the word spread. Darwin had indeed been hit by a devastating cyclone. If not totally destroyed, which seemed alarmist, then how badly was it damaged, how widespread was the loss of life and people's injury?

I still thought flying there might be possible, and if so, I could even chance across a big, if tragic, news story, arriving via the back door. I soon found this was not to be.

'All flights to Australia are cancelled,' said the hotel manager who had phoned Merpati for an update. 'If you're planning to go to Australia, you'll have to go back to Indonesia, Bali would be your best bet, it'll take you a few days to organise though.'

And so ended my Christmas 1974 travel plans. I stayed



***Traditional Timorese hand weaving.***

in East Timor through the start of the new year, one that would be a tumultuous milestone in its history, starting with Portugal's withdrawal and culminating in the Indonesian invasion when parachute commandoes descended on Dili 'like angels and then behaved like devils', to use the words of Catholic Bishop Belo.

The destruction of Darwin had been due to natural causes, while the onslaught on Dili, and on Timor more widely, was the result of human, or, more accurately inhumane, behaviour. **R**

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Robin Osborne is editor of *The Record* and worked as a journalist in Southeast Asia for many years.

SVdP National Council operates a Timor-Leste Working Group, made up of Members from across the Society, that is assisting the formation and development of St Vincent de Paul Society in that country.

# OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM



***Saint Vincent goes to Kiribati – the National President of St Vincent de Paul Society Kiribati, Kaumai Taneua receiving a statue of the Society's namesake, Saint Vincent de Paul from International Territorial Vice President – Oceania, Frank Brassil. Also pictured are the Society's Kiribati National Treasurer, Tiribo Tawita and Keith Norton from Aotearoa/New Zealand who is the ITVP Oceania – Zone 2 Coordinator.***

## Strengthening partnerships with Oceania

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Members from Oceania came to Canberra in late November to Strengthen their countries' partnerships with the Society in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

SSVP [Society of St Vincent de Paul, as we are known internationally] National Council members from Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Kiribati spent three days on partnership strengthening and collaborating on shared goals. The meeting was a significant step in ongoing efforts to enhance the support network of the SSVP Overseas Partnership Program in Oceania, ensuring combined efforts continue to impact good works in local communities.

A key outcome of the meeting was the rebranding of the program as the 'SSVP Oceania Partners Forum', reflecting a renewed commitment to collaboration and growth across the region.

Established under the structure of the Society's central body, the Council General International (CGI), the SSVP Oceania Partnerships Program supports National Councils in Oceania and consists of Oceania National Presidents and Treasurers, members of the SSVP Oceania Partnership Implementation and Standing Committees, National Twinning Coordinators from Australia and the ITVP (International Territorial Vice President), ITVP-Zone Coordinators and Secretariate support.

One primary purpose of the meeting in Canberra was to provide a platform for networking and strategic discussions among National Council Presidents and Treasurers. There was a focus on addressing the social needs of local communities and sharing governance strategies, while further strengthening the relationships with Australia and New Zealand.

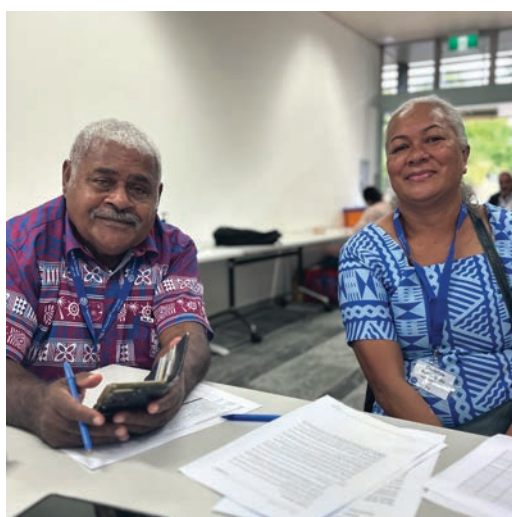
Key discussions centred on equipping National Councils with the tools and resources needed to tackle regional challenges while advancing the Society's mission in Oceania.

The meeting reaffirmed the critical role of teamwork in achieving meaningful change.

Several initiatives were highlighted during the meetings, with speakers providing insights on safeguarding, risks, and strategic planning. A shared goal emerged in fostering self-sustaining practices within Oceania National Councils. There was a strong focus in the SSVP Oceania Partners Forum on clear roles, responsibilities, and effective communication.

One of the most impactful parts of the gathering was the Canberra/Goulburn Good Works Tour where members of the SSVP Oceania Partners Forum visited the Roadhouse, Phillip and Braddon Vinnies stores and met with local Members and office bearers. This tour was an eye-opening experience, demonstrating the hard work and dedication of all local SVdP staff, volunteers and those who contribute to the mission on the ground every day.





As the visit concluded, a sense of solidarity and commitment was evident across the various cultures. By sharing resources, cultural insights and strategies, National Council members are equipped to address the pressing challenges they face across their communities and the partnership itself. Faith, solidarity, and dedication to good works will continue to drive the efforts of all involved.

The newly formed SSVP Oceania Partners Forum is committed to continued collaboration, growth, and service to the most vulnerable in their communities. This

strengthened partnership positions the National Councils of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania to face future challenges and to continue the important work.

The meeting in Canberra reaffirmed the critical role of teamwork in achieving meaningful change. As the SSVP National Council members of Oceania returned to their respective countries, they did so with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to their mission, with continued collaboration to strengthen the impact for years to come. **R**



## St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

*good works*

Responsibility for this document rests with the  
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### PRIVACY STATEMENT

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia respects the privacy of the people it assists, our Members, Volunteers and employees. As a result, the names of clients, members, volunteers or employees featured in this report may have been changed and pictorial models used.

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