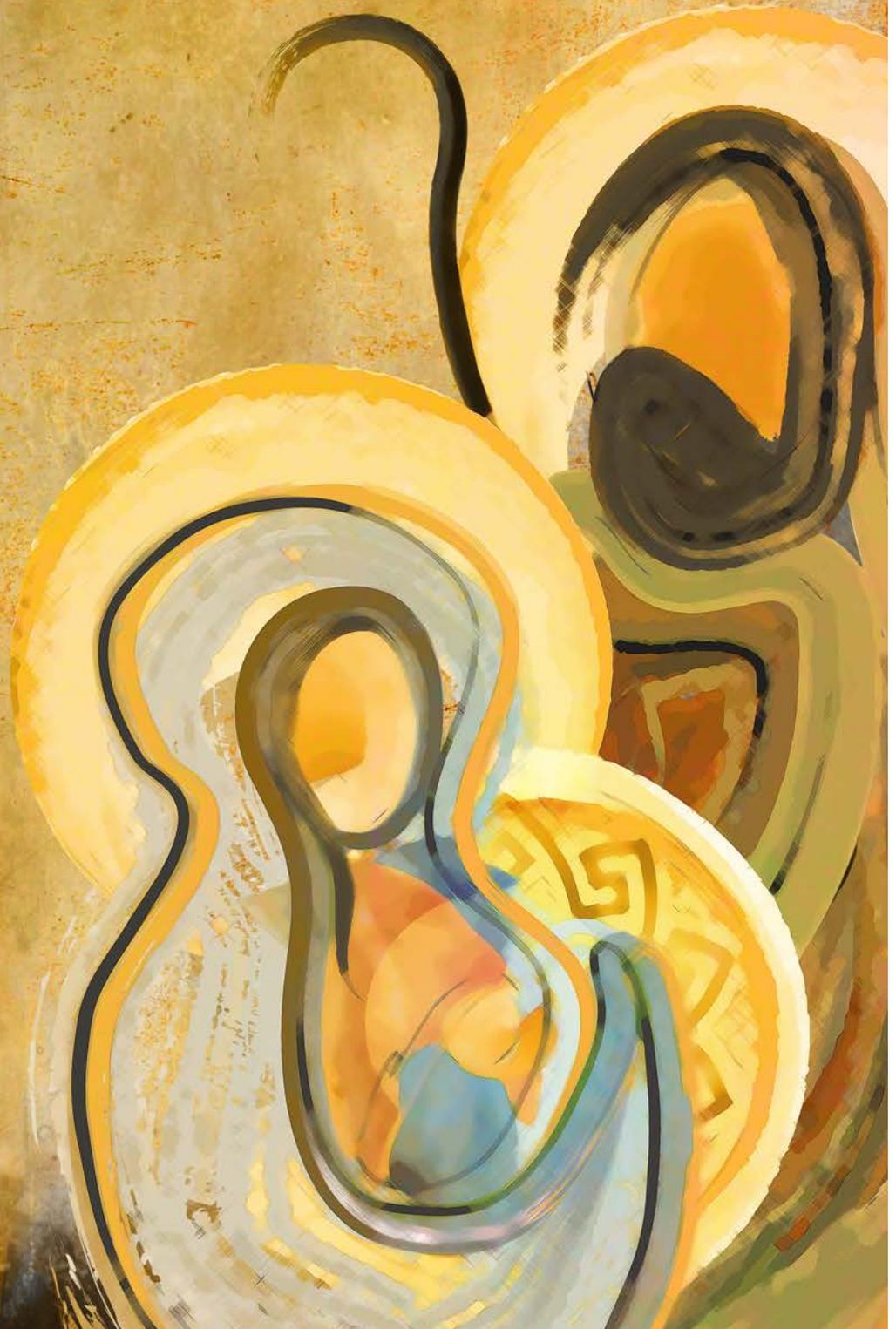


# the Record

Spring/  
Summer 2019



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





**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.

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

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# One Society

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

When I was installed as the National President earlier this year, I committed to a review of governance practices across the St Vincent de Paul Society nationally. Everything from training, formation and succession planning for our members in conferences, to looking at legal structures and reporting standards for councils.

Good stewardship of our precious resources – both people and money – demands nothing less as we seek to keep our mission at the heart of everything we do.

It's imperative that members across Australia feel that we are all part of the one Society; that all of us are well informed and feel we are supported and empowered to continue doing good works in new and creative ways.

The National Council is also looking at supporting the evolution of conference and program structures in order to best meet the needs of our companions and our community.

There is work to do yet, but the National Council has done a deep dive into its structures and lines of accountability. We have reviewed the terms of reference for standing committees, advisory committees and working groups, and we are in the process of establishing an advisory group of distinguished legal minds, who can provide legal and governance advice on a range of issues which the Society is addressing at various levels.

We know through the tough lessons of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that an



*Claire Victory*

organisation must be accountable to its members and the people it serves. It must be transparent, not only to its members and those it serves, but to the broader public. It must also be open to change to ensure it is fit for purpose in a contemporary world.

The National Council was approached recently by the Federal Government to help distribute the second round of the Drought Community Support Initiative. This in part was a reflection of the Society's successful participation in the first round of funding, but it was also an acknowledgement by the government that the Society is a united, national organisation, and on national matters, the Federal Government's agenda is often to preference working with one organisation, rather than a number of state and territory organisations.

The National Council can facilitate the distribution of drought funding at the local level through conferences in specified local government areas. We can establish the call centre and streamline the paperwork in order to simplify people's experience as they go through the often challenging process of seeking help.

In the meantime, state and territory councils through their local conferences can get on with the job of offering pastoral care to people on the ground who need access not only to funding, but to all sorts of support services.

The National Council does not aspire to deliver services directly, but we can facilitate the work of local conferences and reflect this in our engagement with the Federal Government.

Each council will work towards our shared mission, responding creatively to its local community, but in the current environment we must be seen to be working together.

Speaking with one voice means at a national level we listen and respond to the members serving locally, who share their wisdom gained through their person to contact with those they assist. This daily, human experience of the barriers faced by those doing it tough informs our collective efforts to bring about a more just and compassionate society.

Opening up new channels to communicate with members throughout Australia is being explored by our national secretariat. Relaying to government ministers and their advisors the stories and learnings we have from members' personal contact with companions is part of the advocacy work being undertaken in Canberra.

On broader governance issues, as a lay Catholic organisation, we can lead the way by pursuing best possible practices as we work towards a more just and compassionate society. ♦

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Claire Victory is National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

# We are a Catholic charity offering 'a hand up' to people in need

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

**A**t this time of the year the State and Territory Councils in Australia release their annual reports on activities performed over the past 12 months.

A review of these annual reports shows that across Australia, the good works performed by the Society have increased as the number of Vincentians has grown. There are now 14,556 members, 29,923 volunteers and 3,404 employees.

Our people offer their talents, their enthusiasms and their personal commitment to walk beside our neighbours who, for whatever reason, need a hand up or just a friendly ear.

The continued growth of the Society across Australia represents both good and bad news. On the one hand, there is no question the increased numbers of people drawn to be part of the Vincentian family as a member, a volunteer or an employee reflects the goodness that is the very core of the Society. On the other hand, our growth is highly correlated to the growth in inequality and injustice that continues across all levels of our Australian community. Imagine the inclusive and fair community we might live in if the need for many of our supports was no longer essential for people to survive from day to day.

For many new members, the complexity of the challenges some of our companions are facing and the barriers they have to break through to take their rightful place as citizens in the life of their own community can be daunting. How might we be able to provide some guidance to members who look for some supportive suggestions to help



*Toby O'Connor*

them feel confident in their person-to-person contact with our companions?

For other members, commitment to working towards the transformation of the causes of poverty and challenging the societal causes that produce inequality is best done in solidarity with other members and people of goodwill. How might we help to connect members in different parts of Australia who have a commitment to promote the Raise the Rate campaign in their local community and at a national level?

When over 200 Vincentians joined together in Adelaide in October 2017, they radiated the inspiration that flows from the spirit of Blessed Frederic Ozanam's commitment to serve the poor.

During the congress, the members developed a number of potential initiatives they believed could support new and existing members in a variety of areas.

As an incoming CEO whose role is to facilitate and to support the vision of the National Council, delivering these initiatives is a top priority for the National Council's secretariat. After studying, consulting and reflecting, we have

identified the following four themes: national collaboration, national training, national communication and making the Society 'future ready'.

We have outlined a framework upon which to start delivering practical initiatives that respond to the above themes. Of particular importance to strengthen the Society for the future is the need to investigate how to better connect individuals and the many interest groups within the Society. At the present time, the Society has no capacity to ensure every member and volunteer has access to all the information they require to be fully engaged in the life of the Society at a local, state/territory and national level. The proposed framework will allow us to share material to nourish our members' thirst for information that grows their spirituality and gives them a deeper understanding of the mission that has been handed down from Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Blessed Rosalie Rendu.

Following the direction of the National Council, we are now consulting with the State and Territory Councils to deliver the outcomes the members identified during the National Congress.

The role of the National Council and its secretariat is to listen, to discern and then to respond in a way that strengthens the Society and equips it to continue as a beacon in a world that has many dark spaces where our companions can struggle to find hope. ♦

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Toby O'Connor is CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

# Adequate Newstart

BY ROSE BEYNON

The Society continues to advocate for an increase to Newstart, Youth Allowance and other related payments. While the Society's conferences and National Council have been actively engaging their local communities, members of Parliament and ministers on this issue, the call to increase payments and assist long-term unemployed people is not new.

## A Moral Accord

In 1993, the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission issued *A Moral Accord* with people who are long-term unemployed. This action was taken in recognition of the value of meaningful employment to the character of the individual and the adverse effects long-term unemployment has on the social and economic wellbeing of the individual, families and society.<sup>1</sup>

*A Moral Accord* affirms that each of us has 'an equal human dignity'. It calls on all Australians, including government, employers, trade unions and churches to take responsibility for addressing long-term unemployment. The principles are based on respect for the human dignity of every person and the interests of the common good of the community.

Since *A Moral Accord* was written, no progress has been made to help people who are long-term unemployed. In fact, the situation has worsened. During the 1990s, a quarter to a third of people unemployed had been so for 12 months or more.<sup>2</sup> Now, just over three-quarters (76 per cent) of Newstart recipients have been on the payment for more than 12 months.<sup>3</sup> *A Moral Accord* is as relevant today as it was when written 26 years ago.



### The seven moral commitments include:

1. giving a guarantee of support for all members of the Australian community in need;
2. promising justice and not charity;
3. persevering in responding to need;
4. sharing and allocating resources according to need;
5. changing any community attitudes and language that demean people;
6. not excluding unemployed people from any aspects of community life; and
7. acknowledging unemployment as impacting on family life.

## Parliamentary Inquiries, Reviews and the Priority Investment Approach

Most telling of the government's intransigence on this matter is the number of parliamentary inquiries and reviews that have been conducted, the similarity of their recommendations and the little progress that has been made to improve the lives of those looking for work. Instead, the government has pursued the streamlining and rationalisation of the income support system, through its Priority Investment Approach.<sup>4</sup> The end result is a trumpeting of the billions of dollars saved, equating to a 10.1 per cent reduction in the future life cost of welfare (from \$6.3 trillion to \$5.7 trillion).

*continued on page 6* ▶

◀ continued from page 5



The proportion of Australians receiving working-age income support payments has fallen to its lowest level in 30 years, at 14.3 per cent. Since 2013, there has been an overall decrease in welfare recipients, while the estimated resident population has grown 8.8 per cent. These reductions are evident in the number of people on the Disability Support Pension, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Single-Parent Payments and low-income cards.<sup>5</sup>

Savings in the future life cost of welfare could be lauded if there was confidence the data reflected better placement of people in jobs, not people dropping out of income support because mutual obligation requirements are too onerous or being moved from one payment type to another because eligibility criteria have been tightened. At senate estimates hearings in October 2109, government representatives indicated that more than 100,000 people had dropped out of the welfare system because of suspension issues and while it was assumed that they now have jobs, there was no evidence to support this position. The job-search rules involve searching for 20 jobs a month, 25 hours a week work for the dole (or 15

hours for over 30s), signing up to an individual job plan, attending appointments punctually and displaying 'appropriate behaviour' with job agencies and other placements. Of those who have dropped out of welfare, two-thirds are male (70,000) and most are under thirty (56,000). More than 10,000 were homeless and 15,000 ex-offenders.<sup>6</sup>

The claim that more people are now employed is also spurious given that the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines people as 'employed' if they work one hour or more in the reference week.<sup>7</sup> The Priority Investment Approach is largely driven by improving the financial bottom line, with limited reporting on outcomes of welfare recipients. The \$96 million Try, Test and Learn Fund, established to trial 'targeted help to those at risk of long-term welfare dependence, including older Australians, migrants and young mothers,'<sup>8</sup> represents only 0.05 per cent of the annual welfare expenditure of \$170 billion and, as such, is woefully inadequate.

The government should look to review previous Inquiries in their entirety rather than 'cherry-pick' recommendations that reduce the lifetime cost of welfare without

improving outcomes for the unemployed.

In 2004, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee made 95 recommendations to fight poverty. These included the development of a national jobs strategy, a training guarantee for the long term unemployed, increased base funding for public housing, development of a national housing strategy and review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, a review of rules relating to parents receiving income support payments so that children are not placed at risk of hardship, development of a national anti-poverty strategy and establishment of a statutory authority to report progress against the strategy.<sup>9</sup>

In 2008, the Henry Tax Review recommended that income support arrangements for parents should support and encourage participation in work while maintaining adequate levels of assistance to families. Commonwealth Rent Assistance should also be increased to assist renters to afford an adequate standard of dwelling.<sup>10</sup>

In 2019, the House of Representatives Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare

made 16 recommendations to address disadvantage. These included immediate increases in funding for emergency relief and low cost housing, measuring the effectiveness of the Priority Investment Approach not just by reductions in welfare expenditure, but also by improved outcomes for welfare recipients, a review of the adequacy of payments including for young people and single parent families, and changing the point at which single parents move to Newstart Allowance (from when their youngest child turns eight to when their youngest child turns twelve).<sup>11</sup>

The fact is there are no national strategies for jobs, housing or anti-poverty. No independent bodies have been established to develop, implement and report on progress in these areas. Single parents on income support remain significantly disadvantaged. Changes in social security since the Global Financial Crisis have increased child poverty instead of reducing it, especially in sole parent families. The rate

of poverty among unemployed sole parents rose from 35 per cent in 2013 to 59 per cent in 2015 (compared to 35 per cent to 38 per cent for all unemployed people).<sup>12</sup> There has been no significant injection of Commonwealth additional funds to public housing or specialist homelessness services. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement with states and territories commits \$1.56 billion each year over 10 years to June 2029. This represents a small percentage increase (1.88 per cent) from the 2018–19 annual allocation of \$1.53 billion.

Finally, the base rate of Newstart has not increased in real terms since 1994! In fact, the value of Newstart has gone backwards in real terms because of the way it is calculated. Payments are adjusted each year according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). However, the cost of essentials such as housing, utilities, healthcare, transport, education and food have increased much more rapidly than the CPI. Low

income households spend the bulk of their income on these essentials. And because the CPI is lower than the growth in average wages, the gap between what an unemployed person receives and what the average worker earns has grown, as has the gap between Newstart and pensions.<sup>13</sup>

The Society will continue to advocate for the rights of people on income support to be treated with humanity and able to live a lifestyle that meets community expectations of what is fair and reasonable.

The Society thanks its members for their generosity, compassion and commitment towards helping people in need to recover their dignity and personal integrity, so that they can forge ahead and change their own destiny and the future of their local community. ♦

Rose Beynon is National Director of Policy and Research of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

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# Raising Newstart Both Right and Smart

BY TONI WREN

It is not right that in a country as rich as Australia, more than three million people are living in poverty including on average, more than five students in a classroom of 30 Australian school children. That can mean going to school or to bed hungry. More than nine in 10 of us agree, that *"In Australia, no one should go without basic essentials like food, healthcare, transport and power."*

The single most effective solution to reducing poverty in Australia would be a \$75 a week increase in Newstart. That's why this year during Anti-Poverty Week we encouraged our network to support the Raise the Rate campaign. Increasing Newstart and linked payments would help reduce poverty for around one million Australians, including about 160,000 children whose parents depend on these payments. Increasingly, Newstart has become a dilapidated waiting room for the age pension with close to one in four recipients aged 55 years or more. It is also a de facto disability payment with up to two in five people assessed as having some type of disability and one in four with only a partial capacity to work. Sole parents are forced to claim this lower payment when their youngest child turns eight and often skip meals to ensure their children don't.

Newstart traps people in poverty and many employers say it acts as a brake on job search. That's why the Business Council of Australia called for an increase as long ago as 2012. No-one thinks the pension is generous, but Newstart at around \$40 a day is now \$20 a day lower than the age pension. KPMG's submission to the Senate inquiry says that

Newstart should be increased by nearly \$100 a week, arguing the low rate of the payment "tears at our inclusive social contract". They state *"Where the objective for Newstart is that it should be sufficient to meet the basic needs of a person who is required to spend time and money actively seeking work, it is hard to see how it can achieve this objective at less than two-thirds of the amount deemed to be reasonable for an Age Pension recipient who would have no such obligations."*

While all those receiving Newstart would love to get a job and do pick up work from time to time, a job is not the only solution to escaping poverty. According to the ACOSS/UNSW Sydney, Poverty in Australia 2018 report, in 2015-16 nearly 970,000 people who had wages as their main source of income were still living in poverty. That is due to a combination of slower wage growth and the rise of part-time, insecure or precarious work, where there just isn't enough work available. The latest ABS unemployment numbers for August 2019 tell us more than 1.1 million Australians, or around the same number of people who live in Adelaide, are under-employed, meaning they cannot get as much work as they would like. This is in addition to over 700,000 people who are officially unemployed.

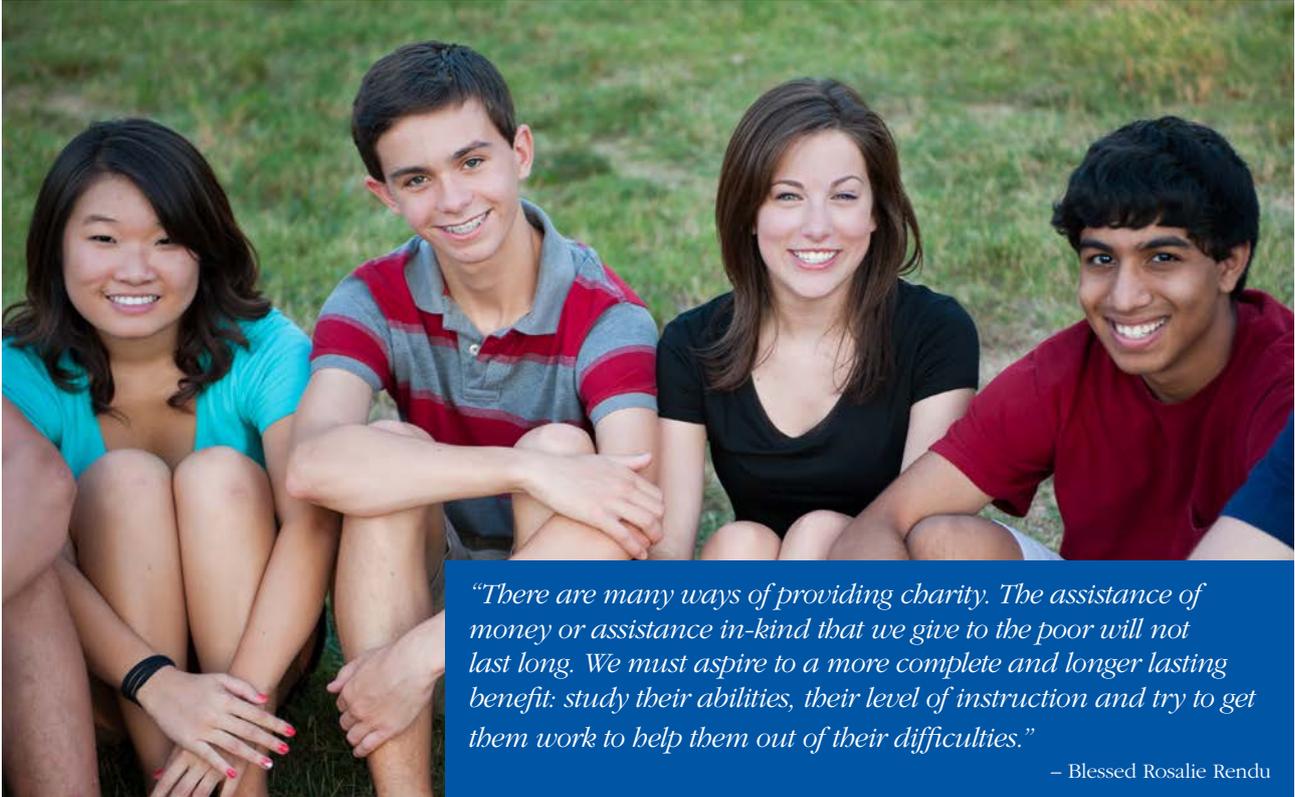
This Anti-Poverty Week, the Society continued their campaign to increase Newstart and encouraged their supporters to meet with their local MPs or senators. In Canberra, they hosted a Raise the Rate breakfast with CEOs who participated in their CEO Sleepout in June at the Canberra airport. At that event, employers heard from 'David', a 49-year-old former public servant who had been living on

Newstart for 12 months. He had resigned from his job to care for his elderly mother after she fell badly while living at home alone. After she passed away, he needed to sell the family home and ended up trying to make ends meet while job searching. For three months in the middle of a cold 2017 winter, he slept in his car. More recently, he described the experience of applying for jobs and finding out he was one of 25, 35 or even 48 being interviewed. Unfortunately, we expect to hear yet more harrowing stories of hardships endured by people trying to get by on Newstart as the Senate Inquiry continues public hearings.

While interest rates and tax cuts don't seem to be boosting our flagging economy, raising Newstart by \$75 a week would provide a much-needed stimulus with every dollar spent, especially in regional areas which are doing it tough in the worsening drought. At the end of Anti-Poverty Week, the NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro spoke at the NCOSS Putting Regional Needs on the Map Anti-Poverty Week event. He became the first Coalition senior State MP to call for his Federal colleagues to reconsider their opposition to a Newstart increase. The WA, NT and ACT Governments have already called for an increase. We hope that the Federal Government will soon recognise that raising Newstart isn't only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. ♦

Toni Wren is the Executive Director of Anti-Poverty Week which ran from 13-19 October 2019. This article expands on an Opinion piece she wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, published on 15/10/19. St Vincent de Paul National Council has been a major sponsor of Anti-Poverty Week since 2014.

# Being A Young Vincentian



*“There are many ways of providing charity. The assistance of money or assistance in-kind that we give to the poor will not last long. We must aspire to a more complete and longer lasting benefit: study their abilities, their level of instruction and try to get them work to help them out of their difficulties.”*

– Blessed Rosalie Rendu

BY PATRICK WALLIS

The initial question I am often asked when people find out about my role with the National Council is, ‘why do you do it?’. When I turn the question and explore why this is their first reaction, the common response is that they don’t understand what I would get out of volunteering by being so far removed from ground-level work and working directly with people who are vulnerable and suffering.

Starting my Vincentian journey in high school, I became president of the conference and then moved to youth programs and a university conference. From here, I began to be exposed to the larger network of charity that we are so fortunate to be a part of and moved into the role of state youth representative in WA. In June, I accepted the role of National Vice President to the

National Council. So, when I am asked the question of why I do the work I do, instead of purely volunteering at the ground level, I think of the words stated above by Rosalie Rendu.

I am rewarded by being able to serve those in need in different ways and aspire, as Sister Rendu suggested, to a more complete and longer lasting benefit of our companions. Long-term change comes from all areas and I believe that all Vincentians make an impact no matter the work.

The next reaction after establishing why I do what many of us do as Vincentians is, ‘you’re so young’. But youth is not a burden. I have seen first-hand capable Vincentians of all ages and backgrounds who make an impact on every area of the organisation. In fact, the most successful areas of the organisation run when we do operate as One Society. Where our companions

are our priority and all members, volunteers, and staff, work in unity to achieve our mission.

The National Council in its current form is driven to make a transparent One Society. One that does not differentiate age, race, gender, or any other silo. A Society that truly engulfs both Australia and the world in a network of charity. We are in such a fortunate position as an organisation to make real systemic change on every level. Our members are on the ground serving those who are suffering, yet, are also able to advocate on behalf of and with our companions on a federal level. We are the drivers of change in Australia and through the support of all Vincentians, continue to make a difference in the lives of thousands of people every day. ♦

Patrick Wallis is a Vice President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

# Seeing with New Eyes: Reimagining Youth Leadership in The Society

BY CATHRYN MOORE

I have been a ‘Youth Representative’ in the St Vincent de Paul Society somewhere between five and seven times, depending on who you ask and how they count. Quite a bit has changed about the Society in the time between my first youth representative gig and my most recent one. (And I still love and respect the 12 elderly, Anglo-Saxon men who were my peers on the Toowoomba Regional Council as much I do the more ‘balanced’ National Council from which I recently departed!)

It’s not just the Society that’s changed – I have too. Not only did I manage to finish secondary school, I’m on my third career and I’ve managed to live all over Australia since I left Toowoomba. I’ve grown up a bit. Some of the people who have taught me the most about what I believe in, and the kind of person I want to be, are the resilient, impressive people that I’ve met during home visits; others are the leaders I’ve met at Society boardroom tables.

The values at the heart of our movement have provided me with a sense of constancy in a world of change. Being Vincentian has made me who I am, someone I am proud to be.

But that’s not the whole story. For all of the youth representative roles I have held and all of the extra projects I have taken on outside of the ‘youth’ area, at the tables of those councils on which I have served, I regularly felt that I was a guest rather than a member of the family. Why? The uncomfortable truth is that these roles – and the individuals who occupy them – can be treated as tokenistic.

Don’t get me wrong. I believe that youth representatives play



an important role on our councils. It’s just that I don’t think the role for younger people – and let’s be honest, in the Society, ‘younger’ covers a fair range – should be limited to those representative roles. If we are serious about embracing young people, and the future of this organisation, we must move beyond platitudes and get serious about diversity.

## Assessing the need for change

To find what that would look like, a couple of years ago the National Youth Team started studying this in more detail. We asked young Vincentians what might hold them back from putting their hand up for a council role other than a

youth representative gig. One of the most common reservations was young Vincentians feeling they weren’t qualified in governance and the types of decision making that happen at a council. They also assumed that older Vincentians had those skills and would therefore do a better job than they would. At the same time, we asked all the members of state and territory councils around the country, and the National Council, to complete a survey on their prior training and experience, and what they thought was essential training ahead of council role. It turned out that two thirds of the councillors who answered our survey had not undertaken any prior training in governance (though they all considered it a vital component for future councillors to have).



Whenever I talk about governance in the Society, I experience some resistance, so I want to be clear that 'governance' is not just about financial management. In fact, governance is about every decision that we make, including ensuring that our mission is at the centre of those decisions. Recognising that we need greater governance capability across our councils is not akin to becoming corporatised or losing our organisational identity. It is fundamental to our role as a contemporary organisation with our own unique mission-orientation at the heart of our decision-making.

In case you need further persuasion, in the last couple of years two Royal Commissions in Australia have told us that some of the most important indicators of an organisation's health (or otherwise) are its governance, its culture and its leadership. The health of our Society isn't just a concern for the survival of our movement, but for being worthy of the trust that our companions and the broader community place in us.

### **What's so special about the young ones?**

I mentioned platitudes earlier. For as long as I can remember, older Vincentians have said things like 'We have to listen to the young people, or the Society will die' as though it is a radical notion. For decades I've heard it said that young Vincentians are not only the Society's future leaders, but the leaders of the Society right now. Well, while I have met many a remarkable young Vincentian leader, I have not met many of them as peers on our councils and boards in positions other than often tokenistic 'youth representative' roles.

That matters. It matters because research tells us that 'there's a causal

relationship between diversity and groups that are more innovative, creative, problem solving and better performing overall'. It matters because we know that when it comes to listening to different voices and getting real about making change, good intentions and tokenism are not enough.<sup>2</sup>

If we are to move beyond platitudes to meaningful action in the Society, the first step is naming the problem that we are trying to fix. While it might be inconvenient and uncomfortable to contemplate, the future of this movement depends not just on an uplift in governance capability, but on having more genuinely diverse groups of leaders equipped to honour the Society's mission and history as we adapt to become a contemporary, innovative and sustainable movement.

Of course, real diversity requires more than the representation of difference in age brackets and life stages on our Councils. But this is an important first step.

### **Now what?**

Enter the Emerging Young Vincentian Leaders Program – EYL for short.

In 2017, a dedicated group of young leaders from across the country, supported by some equally dedicated project sponsors, took the research we'd done within the Society and combined it with literature and case studies about programs in peer organisations to develop the EYL program. The design and development took over a year and involved multiple consultations with the National Council. We realised that while governance training needed to be a key component of the program to reduce one of the barriers young

*continued on page 12 ►*

In short, our findings meant that younger Vincentians assumed that older Vincentians had skills that they did not, and on that basis self-selected out of putting their hands up for council roles. Our findings also revealed that the majority of directors on our Society's boards had not undertaken key governance training prior to or as part of their roles.

### **So what?**

Our survey results reflected research from the United States at the time which found that 56 per cent of nonprofits considered that they struggled with board governance.<sup>1</sup> (There were no comparable Australian datasets available at the time.)

◀ continued from page 11



people had identified, we needed to take a holistic approach to leadership development. So, the design of the program included experience in reflective leadership practice, change management, program design and business case development, as well as some elements particular to the Society, including Vincentian values-based leadership, mentoring and a grounding in the challenges facing the Society in our region and around the world.

The program was promoted throughout the first half of 2018, with applications open to Vincentians aged 25 to 40 years and looking to take their next steps in Society leadership. Ten young Vincentians from around the country were accepted to participate in the pilot of the EYL program, which commenced in July 2018 and will run until December 2019.

So far, the participants have:

- undertaken extensive pre-work and participated in training from the Australian Institute of Company Directors in Governance for Not-for-profits and Reporting to the Board. That training was then grounded in the context of the Society in Australia through an open forum with the then National President;
- reflected on their individual objectives for their Vincentian journeys, as well as the goals to set, and networks to cultivate, to achieve them;
- been matched with Vincentian mentors, based on their objectives throughout the EYL program;
- learned about the weird and wonderful world of SSVP and the Oceania region from the International Territorial Vice President for Oceania;
- engaged in elements of project design and development;
- actively contributed to a social media page, which has developed into an interactive learning forum;
- engaged in a range of teleconferences to set expectations about the program and include the group in dynamic feedback, so that real time adjustments can be made to the pilot to better meet participants' needs.

During the program, participants will complete training in practical approaches to change management in the Society's context and engage in workshops on Vincentian values-based leadership.

### **What does it take to make the EYL idea a reality?**

The existence of the EYL program and its day-to-day operations are the result of major investment. One element of that is the strategic financial investment by the National Council to fund the costs of the program, including expert trainers and essential travel. Without this support, the program simply could not run. However,

the most significant investment in this program is that of volunteer time. Here's a snapshot:

- four project sponsors guided the design of the program;
- ten highly experienced Vincentian mentors have generously contributed their insights to our participants;
- ten impressive participants have demonstrated their commitment across the course of almost 18 months, in a mix of face-to-face, teleconference and online engagements; and
- finally, a core group of inspiring young leaders in the Society have invested a huge amount in this program. The design phase alone involved 250 hours, volunteered across one year and a team of six passionate people. The day-to-day operation has been even more significant: by the end of the pilot four talented, driven women will have committed upwards of 500 hours. These hours are on top of their day jobs and day-to-day volunteering commitments.

That much investment from so many people is a big deal and even a bit overwhelming. Like me, those generous souls all think of their contributions as just that: an investment. Not just an investment in ten worthy pilot participants, or in young Vincentians in general, or even in our councils. This is an investment in the future of our movement, and the capacity of the Society to do good works and bring about change for the better for years to come.

### **What difference does the EYL make?**

As the EYL pilot draws to a close I am looking forward to some rich discussions about the experience of our participants and mentors, as

well as those who have come into contact with the program along the way. Those discussions will form the basis of an evaluation for the National Council and no doubt inform decisions about whether the EYL will be run into the future.

While there will be many observations around aspects of the program that worked well and things that we might want to adjust, it is too soon to measure the extent to which the EYL model is successful. Its success has only a little to do with how bright and passionate and outstanding our participants are – and believe me, they are. Rather, it has everything to do with how councils and Vincentian leaders at every level seize the opportunity to work with young people who are completing or have completed the EYL program.

Building the governance capability of our leaders, and particularly our young leaders, is something to be proud of. I am certainly proud to have been a part of this initiative. But, having been involved from the start, I realise that I'm a little biased. So, when it came time for questions on the last of day of a three-day course that our EYL participants undertook in governance, strategy, risk and finance from the Australian Institute of Company Directors, I asked the facilitator to share his impressions of the Society. He answered honestly that he had not known much about it prior to facilitating our sessions but ventured that we had a great culture. When I asked him to unpack that comment, without hesitation he said that the quality of the conversation, the questions, the diversity in the room, and the fact that we had sought out governance training with such interest, spoke volumes; that based on what he had witnessed in that room, the Society must have a culture to be proud of.

I can't tell you how refreshing, and heartening it was to hear that. Having been validated in my pride, I offer some closing thoughts on what I know to be true of young Vincentians in Australia.

*Our young people cherish our charism and The Rule. They can reconcile the tensions – and the beauty – of belonging to an organisation that at once upholds the principle of subsidiarity and the concept of One Society.*

*Our young people are learning. And fast. They crave the wisdom their fellow Vincentians have to offer, and the knowledge that our connected world places at their fingertips.*

*Our young people are diverse. Not just in age; in cultural backgrounds, personal circumstances, perspectives.*

*Our young people are visionaries and they are makers. Empower them to share their gifts with you. You will not regret it. ♦*

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Cathryn has been a Vincentian for 15 years. She currently plays a leading role in the international commission to review and reform Part 2 of The Rule. Her day job is in the Victorian Public Service, where she works on strategic reforms to improve the responsiveness and accessibility of the justice system for victims of crime and other vulnerable Victorians.

1. This research was undertaken by William Meehan and Kim Jonker. If you'd like to read more, a summary of the research was published by the researchers on 8 November 2017 in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (SSIR), in an article titled 'Filling essential gaps in non-profit leadership'.
2. The SSIR has some great literature on the context of for-purpose organisations, but there is plenty more from the public and private sector in other publications. If you would like to read more from the SSIR, check out Sampriti Ganguli and Graham Murphy's 'Building inclusion from the inside-out: A brief case study' (published 27 July 2016), or Kate Hayes's 'A roadmap to better boards' (published 11 August 2017).

# Plenary Council Update



## Plenary Council 2020

Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

*A Plenary Council is underway to review the state of the Church in Australia.*

The 2020 Plenary Council was called in response to Pope Francis's general invitation for local churches to dialogue and to be active in church affairs.

It also acknowledges the general decline in participation in the church – particularly in relation to mass attendance, vocations and the sacraments.

The revelations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which exposed a closed, hierarchical institution, dominated by a culture of clericalism and self-interest and self-protection also influenced the decision.

While many Catholics are wary

about the processes of the Plenary Council and have articulated the drawbacks as they see them, some argue it's the only game in town.

As the largest lay-led organisation in Australia, the St Vincent de Paul Society is watching closely.

Speaking on church reform at a public forum in Canberra earlier this year, former Royal Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald said<sup>1</sup>:

*Our response to what has been revealed rests as much in the Gospel as it does in the recommendations of the Royal Commission. For in the Gospel it was the voice of the oppressed and marginalised that Christ used to declare a new order. It was through his engagement with the poor, Christ proclaimed the truth and the light. He admonished those who sought to maintain the status quo and those who fought to maintain the privileges of power, abuse and influence.*

*For me, my guiding principles remain those which the prophet Micah called on each of us to embrace. To live with justice, to love with tenderness and mercy, and to walk faithfully and humbly with our God.*

*We can be a Church that acts justly, loves tenderly and is faithful to our God.*

A Plenary Council is the highest formal gathering of the church in a country. It must have the Pope's consent in order to proceed and the outcomes have the potential for significant change.

The 2020 Plenary Council will be Australia's fifth, but perhaps paradoxically, it is the first since the Second Vatican Council – the last plenary was held in Australia in 1937.

It will be held in two parts: the first in Adelaide in October next year; and the second in mid-2021, most probably in Sydney.

Six emerging themes have been identified during the listening and discernment phase of preparation. These were drawn from over 17,000 submissions received following dialogue sessions which were held nationally.

We are now in the second phase of the Plenary Council's preparations. Writing and discernment groups have been established under each of the six identified themes.

- A missionary and evangelising church
- An inclusive, participatory and synodal church
- A prayerful and eucharistic church
- A humble, healing and merciful church
- A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
- Open to conversion, renewal and reform

Membership of each group has been published on the Plenary Council's website. Bishops and priests are well represented as are employees of church organisations, particularly from NSW and Vic.

Each group will produce a position paper which will shape the formal proceedings in Adelaide next year.

At the same time listening and discernment sessions on the six themes are continuing in parishes and dioceses around the country. Submissions of 150 words have been called for.

The St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council provided an initial submission to the Plenary Council last year expressing the hope that the Council will lead to a church that has a more inclusive, deliberate and intentional focus on its fundamental mission of following Christ by serving people living in poverty and that this would be achieved through a



focus on spirituality, inclusiveness, leadership and governance.

National Council member and Northern Territory President, Fay Gurr, is a member of the Joyful, Hope-filled and Servant Community Writing Group.

The Society is considering a number of questions as it considers the next steps in the process of engaging with the 2020 Plenary Council. What does this mean for us: to be a lay Catholic organisation? Where do we want to sit? How do we want to respond?

At its November meeting the National Council agreed to engage with the topics.

One advocate for reform said recently<sup>2</sup>:

*To achieve a church-saving outcome from the Plenary Council will mean there must be robust debate. There will be*

*struggle. Catholics have watched and witnessed as the church has lost virtually three generations – largely all its own work. All this means those urging reform will persist. They are determined to call out hypocrisy, manipulative behaviour, dishonesty, inertia, fudging, dissembling and delay. They will insist on accountability from leaders and a church that always manifests gospel values.*

As Australia's largest lay-led organisation, the Society can help build the inclusive and humble church Pope Francis says we are called to. ♦

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Claire Victory is National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

1. Robert Fitzgerald AM: Governing out of hope, not fear – A personal address: Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn Public Forum: 16 April 2019
2. Terry Fewtrell: Plenary Council – Faith and Hope in Abundance: *Pearls and Irritations*: 31 October 2019

## Dressed by Vinnies Day

For a second year running, the Society held its annual Dressed by Vinnies Day on Friday, 1 November. The national event encouraged new and existing Vinnies shops' customers to visit their local Vinnies and explore the unique treasure to be found.

Shoppers chose something they loved, wore it on the day and shared it on social media using #DressedbyVinnies. There are now more than 3,900 posts on Instagram using the hashtag. Workplaces and schools around the country also held Dressed by Vinnies Day morning and afternoon teas to show off their fabulous finds to fellow colleagues.

This year's goal was to highlight the incredible environmental impact of shopping at Vinnies rather than in mainstream stores.

With 501,000 tonnes of leather and textiles sent to landfill each year and 95% of that identified as reusable, Vinnies is trying to change Australian consumers' shopping habits to focus on making more ethical choices. By shopping at Vinnies, consumers are reducing their carbon footprint and reducing the amount of clothing going to landfill. They are repurposing with purpose. ♦

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To know more about Dressed by Vinnies Day, visit [www.vinnies.org.au/dressedbyvinnies](http://www.vinnies.org.au/dressedbyvinnies)



# #DressedbyVinnies



@intransitstyling



@nevereverpayretail



@paularovingstyle



@riptorrr



@senatorsiewert

## HOW YOUR SHOPPING HELPS

Australians buy an average of 27 kilograms of new textiles (clothing, sheets etc) each year and discard 23 kilograms into landfill. By shopping at Vinnies you help reduce your carbon footprint and the amount of clothing going to landfill.



501,000 TONNES  
of leather and textiles  
is sent to landfill each year



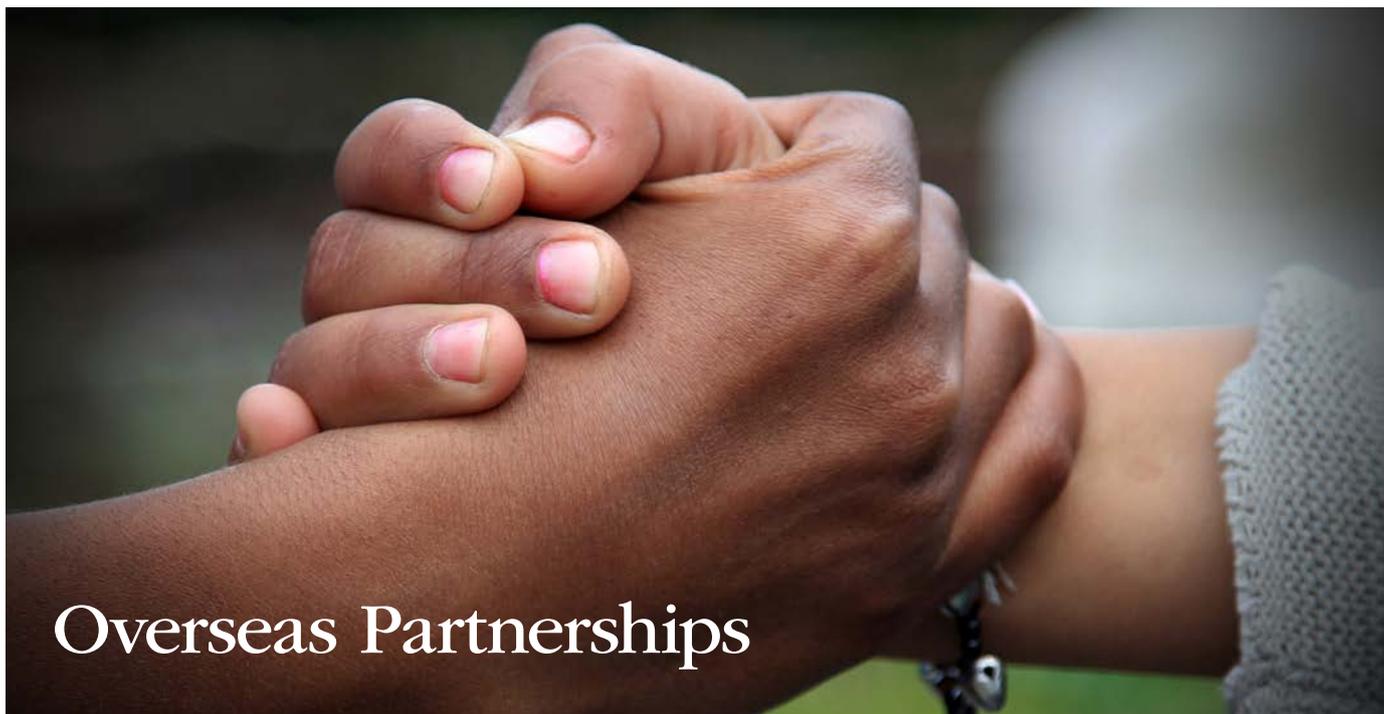
Australians buy an average of 27 KILOGRAMS  
of new textiles (clothing, sheets etc) each year  
and discards 23 KILOGRAMS into landfill.



Globally, the **FASHION INDUSTRY IS THE SECOND LARGEST** polluting industry after the oil and gas industry and contributes **1.2 BILLION TONNES OF CARBON** toward greenhouse gas emissions every year.

## Why shop at Vinnies?





## Overseas Partnerships

*The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia supports fellow Vincentians to undertake their good works in our partnered countries in the Asia Pacific region through twinning, project support, the Assist-a-Student Program and emergency responses.*

### **Twinning**

The direct link between two conferences or councils is called twinning. Twinning promotes spirituality, friendship and understanding between cultures and consists of prayer, regular communication and financial support. Twinning at the council level builds the capacity of the Society in overseas countries with funds provided to support councils in managing the Society's affairs in their region.

Australian Conferences currently have twins with over 2,000 conferences in the south-east Asian countries of India, Sri Lanka, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and the

Philippines, and Pacific Island nations of Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati.

There are 1,121 conferences and councils in Australia that support overseas conferences in the twinning program. Of that, 554 conferences support more than one twin.

### **Project Support**

Conferences in the Asia Pacific region can request support from their Australian twin, through their national council, for a small project to address a specific need in their area. Examples of projects supported are providing training and seedlings for farmers to produce coffee, wet-grinders for making food pastes for sale in a small business, a school lunch program and a grass broom making project. It is important to note that projects are initiated by overseas twins with their national council, and are designed to help people in the community, that the overseas conference supports, become self-sufficient.

### **Assist-a-Student**

Unique to Australia, the Assist-a-Student Program recognises the importance of education as one of the key planks to help break the cycle of poverty. The positive flow-on effects are often felt by family members and the community when a person is given the opportunity to gain an education, as well as by the individual themselves. Funding is provided on an annual basis to countries supported, who identify and select students to be supported through conference members.

### **Emergency Response**

From time to time, in response to a natural disaster, the National Council of Australia provides funds to the national council of the affected country, where it has been identified that there are Vincentians within the community affected who have the capacity and skills to manage and distribute funds to people in affected areas. ♦

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For more information about the Society's work overseas, or to sign up for a bi-monthly email update, please contact the Overseas Development Program Facilitator at [overseasadmin@sudp.org.au](mailto:overseasadmin@sudp.org.au).



## Case Study

### **Small Project in Myanmar - Ozanam Natural and Organic Cosmetics**

Seeing a need and market for more affordable and safe physical hygiene and beauty products in Myanmar, St Peter's Conference in Mandalay submitted a project proposal through their National Council last year. The project application requested funds to set up a workshop and provide training for young people to manufacture handmade organic soaps and cosmetics. Small business training was also included to build the capacity of young people trained to seek employment or commence self-employment.

An active member of the conference volunteered to provide the training required from her own skills and small business experience. While providing income for the youth involved, the project also provides some profits to the conference for its continued good works, and in bringing Christ to local 'Friends in Need'.

This project is unique in that it has been initiated, developed and driven by young people, as well as benefitting young members of the local community. The project workshop has been completed and three training sessions undertaken, with 57 young men and women being trained.

The Ozanam Natural and Organic Cosmetic business is licenced and registered to operate in Myanmar. ♦

# Be Open to Change, And Don't Fear It

BY AMY SHIPWAY

*My life was changed in April this year, after spending 10 days in a remote indigenous community as part of the St Vincent De Paul society's annual Immersion program to Nganmarriyanga, about 400km west of Darwin.*

We took a light aircraft to the small air strip, which serves as the community's airport. During the wet season, the roads are too flooded for cars to pass. As the school principal picked us up from the air strip and transported through the community for the first time in the red dusty school bus, we could see and hear children waving and shouting out "Vinnies!". It was a strange but wholesome feeling that these people were so excited to see us, even though they haven't met us yet. That is a testament to how the community accepted us into their lives for the duration of our immersion. This experience alone helped me understand the true meaning of "community". Where I come from in Canberra, you're lucky if someone looks up at you on the street, let alone smiles at you. In Nganmarriyanga, you're greeted with such excitement by people you don't know.

I've gained so much that I cannot begin to explain. I learned how to live simply, and without the negative impacts and pressures of today's western society.

I have changed so much, become much happier. Lived without my phone, television and the internet. My nightly routine involved dodging cane toads on the way back to my accommodation, instead of scrolling through Facebook. My eight Vinnies friends



and I were welcomed into the community by the elders and children of the community with big smiles and open arms. For 10 days, my life was completely different.

We often talk about how we can help and change people through our good works, although we often neglect to talk about how our work changes us. We are impacted by the people we meet, the places we visit and the experiences we have. There is a lesson to be learned about letting our experiences change us, and to be open to change. We often resist change but being adaptable and open minded allows us to learn, grow, and share the new experience with those we work with.

My views and opinions of indigenous Australians have changed. I no longer stand by as

someone makes an insensitive remark. Instead I will stand up and use my experience to educate people about the complexities of the indigenous culture in remote communities.

People often throw around the phrase "life changing experience". For me, it truly was. I think about the community and the people every day and reflect on how to share what I've learned and use the skills of simplicity in my busy day to day life. I am already counting down the days until the applications open for next year. I highly recommend this program to everyone and anyone. ♦

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Amy has been a volunteer with the Youth Programs since 2016, attending camps and weekend activities to support young people who are in a caring role, and/or from vulnerable backgrounds.

# Vinnies Youth Program: Changing the World One Smile at a Time

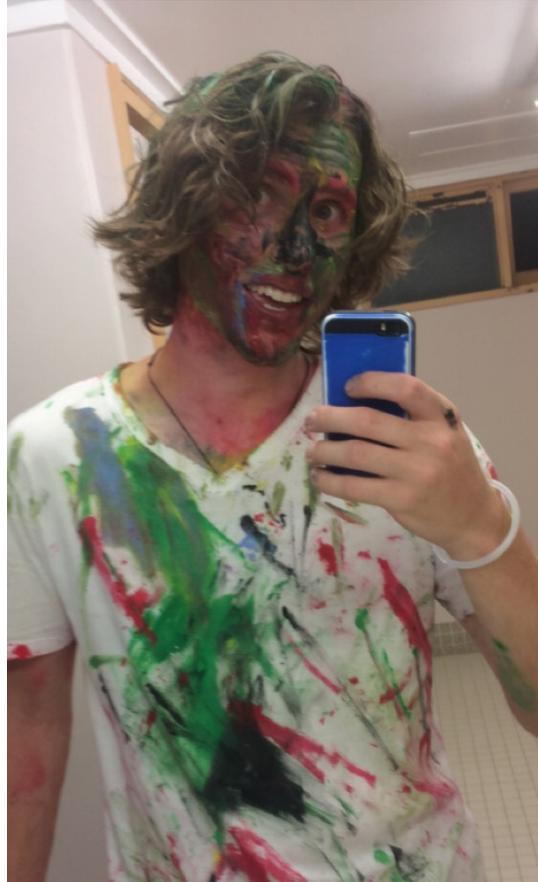
BY MATTHEW WILSON

*One early morning, 3,000 km from home, swimming into the sunrise over the Indian Ocean, surrounded by the most inspiring people, I couldn't help but reflect on being part of something so much bigger than myself; the Vinnies Youth Program.*

In late January, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the Vinnies Youth Camp Exchange Program. This was an amazing chance to travel interstate and experience the juxtaposition between two different camps; Perth and Canberra. Through doing so, sharing and employing any newly learnt techniques or ideas that could benefit our youth programs which provide respite and recreation for vulnerable children.

I was lucky enough to be flown over to Perth to spend four days with the most inspiring and fun volunteers and kids at Ern Halliday Recreation Camp (30 minutes north of the Perth CBD). Here, I took on the most difficult and arduous work: having water-balloon fights with kids, dance battles, playing basketball, water polo, dressing up in ridiculous costumes and getting make up all over my face. There is nothing better in this world than watching these kids burst out in complete laughter.

As a 16-year-old, upon learning of the St Vincent de Paul Youth Programs, I eagerly signed up and awaited my 17th birthday to start volunteering with the St Joe's Camps in Canberra. I can proudly say that from my first Harry Potter themed camp to now, I would not have changed a second. I have had the pleasure to lead camps for some of the most courageous,



funny, talented, compassionate and diligent kids, who have had such a big impact on my life.

And of course, our youth programs would not run without the pure passion and dedication of some of the most inspiring, compassionate and empathetic volunteers. All of whom embody the Vincentian values and provide a fun, encouraging and supportive environment for the kids. Not only do the volunteers serve as incredible role models for the kids, but to me too. To the point where I frequently describe the team of youth program volunteers as family, and the amazing volunteers in Perth live up to that feat.

From my experience in Perth, we were able to integrate some brilliant new ideas into our camps in Canberra. I definitely believe

that continuing these connections made between interstate programs will further develop and help strengthen our camps nationwide, to foster the most effective supportive and fun environment for these kids.

In addition to this being a very eye-opening and humbling experience, being part of these camps definitely generates an aura of excitement and hope for the future. In my biased opinion, these camps are the most fun and engaging volunteer

experiences available to young people, and welcomes a whole wave of new faces into the Society. With that, come new ideas and an opportunity to grow these programs to provide more kids with positive opportunities and truly work toward fostering a more just and compassionate society.

Once again, I cannot thank Vinnies enough for this wonderful experience for which I could not be more grateful. I look forward to seeing new people engage in this experience and observe the positive change into our youth programs. ♦

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Matt has been a volunteer in the St Joe's Youth Program since 2016 and is actively involved in organising the school holiday camps and weekend activities. Matt was recently appointed as the Vinnies ACT Youth Representative and is passionate about social justice advocacy for young people.

# A home away from home.



*Maybe the children are facing mental health issues, psychiatric or learning disorders, ongoing health issues or disabilities, or maybe their carers are fighting their own battles. There could be so much going on in their lives, and between home and school, they may not have a place to be themselves and feel comfortable or safe. To me, that's what the Vinnies Youth Programs are about; giving children a home away from home. For the ones who may not have a safe place to call home and the ones whose families are desperately trying to maintain one. ♦*

## **About the artist**

Sarah O'Neill has been a volunteer in the St Joe's Youth Program since 2016 and was previously the Vinnies Captain at her secondary school. She is now actively involved in organising the school holiday camps and weekend activities, as well as in training new volunteers in the program.



## Mini Vinnies and Secondary Schools Social Justice Days

BY SVDP CANBERRA/  
GOULBURN YOUTH AND  
YOUNG ADULTS TEAM

Beginning in 2015, the St Vincent de Paul Society of Canberra/Goulburn has organised and coordinated numerous Mini Vinnies Social Justice Days for our Catholic primary school students. With the aim of creating Vincentians, the event provides students the opportunity to learn about disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community, and how we can work together to help them. In November 2018, the very first Secondary Schools Social Justice Day was also held in the ACT.

The Social Justice Days have primarily been organised and run by the Society's Youth and Young Adults team, inviting conference members, centre managers and other program coordinators along for local knowledge, with a few events partnering with Caritas Australia and Catholic Mission. The Social Justice Days have varied in size between 36 – 110 students, held at various locations from the south at Pambula Beach to the ACT and out west in Gundagai. We have had a total of 26 schools participating in the event since 2015.

A typical Social Justice Day begins with an opening liturgy and keynote address. We also like to include the Society's story in the opening presentation, to inform the students that the St Vincent de Paul Society was formed by a group of students with a passionate desire to live out their Catholic faith by serving the most disadvantaged people in their community, and that they can do the same. At the same time, workshop facilitators also introduce themselves and their service to demonstrate that while we all work in slightly different areas of the community sector, there is an overlap in service provision and the needs of our companions.

As our founder Frederic Ozanam instructed, *"You must study [the poor's] condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long-term improvement."* This is the objective of the small group workshops we run at these Social Justice Days, where a range of social justice topics are covered, including refugees and asylum seekers, homelessness and poverty – quite a variety some might say! Before the students head home, we run a closing session focused

on the various activities and engagement opportunities they may be involved in the following months. This is an opportunity for them to apply the newfound knowledge in their local context with whatever resources they have available. We follow up with schools in the weeks after to check in and see how they are going with this challenge – many times there are plans in the calendar and planning is already happening.

The feedback from schools are generally very positive, with staff commenting how valuable it is for students to make a connection between the fundraising and volunteering that they do in schools and the impact that their efforts have with our companions. We look forward to continuing this initiative in the years to come, hopefully branching our further into regional areas. We aim to reach out to more students at the primary and secondary school levels, with the goal of creating future leaders who will advocate for the disadvantaged and vulnerable members of their communities. ♦



## After 18 years, Claymore Community Laundromat and Coffee Shop Closes

BY ELLA HOGAN AND IRENKA BELL

*On Friday, 30 August the Claymore Laundromat and Coffee Shop closed its doors on 18 years of serving the local community. This hard-won volunteer run service opened the doors in 2001, however, planning started much earlier.*

Local social housing residents identified the need for the laundromat through Art workshops run through the Animation Project of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Then with help from South Western Area Health Service in 1999, the laundromat group conducted a survey of local residents discovering that 40 per cent had

no reliable washing machine at home and 25 per cent did not get out for a coffee and chat. At that time to get to a Laundromat in Campbelltown, residents had to catch a bus and then walk with washing, and often children, in tow.

In the year 2000, twenty local residents proudly graduated from a TAFE course designed specifically for the running of the Claymore Laundromat entitled 'Working in the Community'. For most this would have been their first experience of adult education. Many volunteers have come and gone since then growing in confidence and pride in the work they did to help their local community.

In the extreme heat of summer and cold of winter the volunteers opened shop specifically to provide a much-needed service to their

community. We regularly heard stories of volunteers who went above and beyond to make sure those really doing it tough, could face the world in clean clothing and sleep in clean bedding.

The volunteers welcomed everyone include supporting a homeless person sleeping in his car with free washing, a single dad with four children new to the area and welcoming and supporting a volunteer with mental health concerns to transition back into community. Even though other local laundromats had closed, volunteers also stayed very late one Friday night to dry bedding for the Scout Jamboree at Appin that had been washed out.

Recently, proposed building works uncovered a zoning issue which meant Vinnies had to take the decision to close Claymore Laundromat and Coffee Shop. It



has been a very difficult time for volunteers who have been involved for up to 14 years in one instance and the Claymore community who supported the project for so long. And while some customers who relied on the Laundromat are in a position to take up the alternatives offered, we do know that this closure will impact on the lives of those without a machine especially if they on public transport.

So many organisations supported this project to get off the ground and continue to provide valuable services to the community. The Good Samaritan Sisters, the Animation Project of St Vincent de Paul Society, FACS Housing, Campbelltown City Council, organisations represented through the Claymore Integration Project, Campbelltown Catholic Club and Mary Immaculate Mini Vinnies to name a few.

Organisations such as Junction Works, Hume Housing and St Patrick's College have also supported the volunteers or the service in numerous ways. Local businesses including Bunnings,

Harvey Norman, Campbelltown Appliance Repairs and Castle Hill Laundry Solutions have given or discounted goods and services to improve the building and running of the machines and many grants were awarded over the many years that helped support the service.

The laundromat has had many famous and distinguished visitors over the years including Bryan Brown, Tony Abbot and Mark Latham. Housing ministers and local politicians have visited to see positive social housing resident-led community development in action and to lend their support for the initiative. The Laundromat and Coffee Shop also received many offers of assistance from students near and far who had heard through their course of study about the community-driven project.

Most importantly individuals in the community gave of themselves to make the Claymore Laundromat and Coffee Shop a successful resident run project. At its peak over 1,300 incidents of service were recorded in a year – an incredible feat given its origins

and its location in what was once a garage annex to a main building. Over its 18-year history it engaged the services of well over 45 volunteers on site and countless others behind the scenes.

Beyond the washing, drying and coffee, the Laundromat and Coffee Shop will be most significantly remembered by the community as a place of welcome for all who sought a reprieve from life's hardships, a simple place where residents could share some of life's significant struggles, their joys and tears. It was a place where a simple smile and hello made the difference to someone's day.

In a world where social connection is harder to achieve and maintain, the Claymore Laundromat and Coffee Shop will be sorely missed. However, the community will remember fondly the joint efforts undertaken by social housing residents and partnering organisations over its lifetime that highlights the winning combination that can be achieved when resident voices are heard and partnered with the powers that be. ♦



## July Roadshow in Geelong

BY LACHY FAKTOR

*Roadshow is a special work of the State Youth Team in Victoria. Operating as a conference made up of young adult members, Roadshow aims to support children in regional communities whose families are being assisted through home visitation. Operating since 2003, Roadshow has recently changed from an annual week-long event to running multiple weekend activities over the year.*

The July Roadshow, taking place in Norlane, Geelong, marked the start of a new era; the introduction of a new system! Despite a sparkly new model, the mission of Roadshow is still the same; to bring activity days to communities in Victoria which don't have a Young Adult St Vincent de Paul Society Conference enabling a small break for parents and fun for their kids.

The new model focuses in on one particular town/area, rather than spreading the conference's attention over two or three different

places in a short space of time. This allows a more comprehensive and dynamic day to be planned and executed, as well as a smaller commitment requirement from our wonderful volunteers. The most recent roadshow in Geelong saw two busloads of volunteers leave on a chilly July Saturday afternoon, and return Sunday evening after having run a very successful roadshow activity day.

Another change focuses on the development of higher volunteer to children ratios, and leadership opportunities for volunteers. There were just shy of 20 volunteers (with six involved in administration) and 30 kids on the day, meaning excellent volunteer-to-child ratios. This resulted in an almost seamless day, with everything running smoothly and the kids having the best day they could have had. When asked to comment on the day, these are some of the responses received:

*"The day was really fun and I enjoyed it. It was good to meet different people"*- Rachel

*"The people were all so nice"*- Laura

As mentioned, there are now extensive opportunities to engage in leadership in Roadshow. The new program allows volunteers

with minimal experience to step up into important roles such as supervisor and coordinator, with mentoring from some of Roadshow's elite. On a personal level, having only been on one roadshow before Geelong, was offered the opportunity to be supervisor on the day. I was nervous at first, but through some amazing mentoring from the experienced team, I ended up having just as much fun as the kids, as well as having developed my leadership skills significantly.

Finally, the new model incorporates a new initiative from the wonderful Emily Wardeiner, where parents of the kids on the activity day are offered the opportunity to call into a local coffee shop for a free coffee and chat. Not only does this give the parents a chance for a break, but it also supports local businesses.

All in all, it was a very successful start to the new model of Roadshow, and we can't wait to see what the future holds for us. Stay tuned for announcements about Warrnambool in September, we will be recruiting volunteers soon, and all are welcome! ♦

Lachy Faktor is the Roadshow Special Works Conference Secretary

# SSVP Youth of South Africa

BY BOIPELO MATHODLANA

*Fulfilling, challenging, creative collaborations, servitude, humbling, insightful, unconditional love, generous, friendship, help ... these words were shared by young South African Vincentians to describe their experience of being a young Vincentian in the service to the poor of South Africa.*

In a country with one of the highest inequality rates between the rich and the poor and a high unemployment rate, particularly in its youth population, the young South African Vincentian is frequently challenged to deal with different forms of poverty - from material and social to spiritual poverty. They are called upon to collaborate in order to creatively address these challenges with the aim of overcoming them in a manner that is sustainable, engaging, fun and fulfilling.

Acts of service nurture the youth in alleviating poverty. They run soup kitchens for the homeless, work with high school students to facilitate their community service programmes or donate schoolbooks. They also partner with skills-based organisations to run technical skills programmes to enable youth to upskill, become employable and help themselves and their families in true Vincentian fashion. This provides not just a hand-out but a hand-up. These programs include the running of youth leadership retreats, school shoe donation drives, car wash fundraisers, soccer leagues or fun days. No act is too small or insignificant for the youth server.

More recently, the South African National Council approved the



commencement of a National Youth Council (NYC). This is the first of its nature since the formation of the first South African conference in 1856. This NYC is made up of all the regional youth coordinators in the country. They provide an active ear and a voice for the needs of the youth of South Africa. The aim of the NYC is to allow the youth to partake in the core works of the society in the fight against poverty alleviation through friendship.

Quite often one is humbled at the enormity of tasks entrusted

upon us to serve and to lead by example. Being a young Vincentian in South Africa is a call to promote the active membership and participation of the youth in the works of the society and by extension their communities. It is a call to change the perception of the works that we do and to find cause for hope in the example of the founding members. Ultimately, they want to find Jesus in the service of the needy. ♦

Boipelo Mathodlana is National Youth Coordinator, South Africa.

