

The Record

WINTER 2023



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



FIRST NATIONS ADVOCACY

VOICE AND RECONCILIATION



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.

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

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

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

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



AVAILABLE ONLINE:
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The new National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia: (rear) SA State President Brad Hocking, Tasmanian State President Corey McGrath, Vice-President Maurice Ryan, Canberra/Goulburn Territory President John Feint, National Secretary Ryan Erlandsen, National Deputy President Warwick Fulton, Vice-President Matt Nunan; (front) NSW State President Paul Burton, Victorian State President Michael Quinn, Spiritual Advisor Sr Therese Haywood DC, Northern Territory President Jocelyn Cull, National President Mark Gaetani, WA State Council Representative Danny Cloghan, National Treasurer Bernard Meadley, Queensland State President Trish McMahon; (absent: WA State President David Kennedy)

On the cover... This issue of our quarterly magazine includes coverage of the proposed enshrining of a First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution and the importance of the broader Reconciliation journey.

The striking image on our cover was commissioned by the Society from Budda Connors, a Ngunnawal artist from the Canberra region, who explains the meaning of the artwork as follows:

The Centre piece represents a meeting place for all six states and the two territories where the Society's members and services work.

The three big white circles with the coolamons represent the three cups (vessels)

the hand of Christ blesses the cup; the hand of love offers the cup; and the hand of suffering receives the cup.

The seven light blue circles represent our seven key values.

The handprints represent strength, unity and belonging.

All the small white dots represent the healing that is circulated throughout our country.

The small blue dots represent the people.

The Society's logo featuring three hands around a cup was created by wellknown Australian sculptor the late Tom Bass, who was a member of Ingleburn Conference, and a graphic artist friend. The design was adopted in 1976 by the National Council to represent the Society Australia-wide.



Members of the National Council, including National President Mark Gaetani (right), attended a Sunday morning Mass at St Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra, presided over by the Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn, Christopher Prowse, on 4 June 2023. Three months earlier, Mr Gaetani had been commissioned at the cathedral as the Society's National President for the next four years.

National Council convened in Canberra over the first weekend in June. The agenda included a face-to-face meeting with state and territory CEOs and networking opportunities with the Society's senior executives from around Australia.

This is my second column for The Record since I was elected as National President and commissioned on 5 March at a Mass celebrated at St Christopher's Cathedral in Canberra. Memories of this wonderful event are still close to my heart.

Since then, time seems to have sped by, with many things of importance taking place. Firstly, we have seen the Treasurer, The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers, hand down the Albanese Government's second Budget, a much-awaited reckoning that contained a number of worthy (and long overdue) initiatives aimed at improving the lives of disadvantaged Australians.

In our public commentary, we welcomed a number of announcements, including amendments to eligibility criteria for the Parenting Payment Single to single parents whose youngest child is aged up to 14, noting that this will improve the lives of 57,000 single parents, most of whom are women, and their children. Other initiatives we welcomed can be viewed on our media release, ['Budget takes steps towards a Fairer Australia.'](#)

However, we were deeply disappointed by the lack of substantial increases to JobSeeker and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, despite calls from the community, social welfare advocates and the government's own Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee to substantially increase these payments.

The increase to JobSeeker of around \$2.85 a day is less than a loaf of bread! It is not overly dramatic to say that this decision condemns millions of Australians to continue to live in poverty and desperation, and of course for demands on the Society's services to continue to increase.

Another disappointment was the lack of proper support for asylum seekers and refugees, a topic covered in this issue of The Record. People awaiting determination of their refugee status are perhaps among the most disadvantaged in the country, with almost no safety net to draw upon. We are disappointed by the lack of commitment to fully reinstate the funding of Status Resolution Support Services, a regular payment to help with basic living costs while applicants wait to hear about their immigration status.

National Volunteer Week was celebrated in mid-May, an opportunity to honour the contribution of our 45,000 members and volunteers across the country. Volunteers are the heart and soul of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Each day, members of the Society visit people in their homes, providing emergency and ongoing assistance, and companionship to those in need. As well as material and financial support, members can help people to budget more effectively, make referrals to other services and undertake critical advocacy work.

Media release: www.vinnies.org.au/national-council/news-and-stories/media-release/budget-takes-steps-towards-a-fairer-australia

Of course, every week is Vinnies Volunteer Week, thanks to the efforts of those who work on our food vans and in housing facilities for people who face homelessness and hardship. Other volunteers ensure the efficient running of our retail shops in every state and territory, generating valuable funds for services and helping to divert tonnes of clothing and household goods from landfill.

In recent times, our members and volunteers have helped Australians facing drought, bushfires, floods, the pandemic, and the ongoing challenges of rising living costs, uncertain incomes and a lack of secure and affordable housing.

I thank all our members and volunteers for their wonderful commitment to serving Christ in the poor, in the spirit of the Society's forebears.

This time of year, with temperatures dropping, sees the important fundraisers, the Vinnies Winter Appeal and the Vinnies CEO Sleepouts. I thank everyone who helps make these the great successes that they are. This issue carries some wonderful photos of those who have slept out and volunteered to make the sleepouts such a success. Times are tough for Australian charities and raising such a significant sum is no small feat.

On 20 May, I was honoured to address The Ozanam Conversation, held at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, a free annual event in honour of the founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

First held in 1997, the event continues to provide an opportunity to reflect on the Society's founding mission in today's world.

The theme of this year's conversation was Surviving Through Disasters: Our role in disaster recovery and what we have learned from previous experience, and I was kindly introduced by Victorian State President, Michael Quinn.

The focus of my remarks was:

- In what ways are the St Vincent de Paul Society most effective when dealing with natural disasters?
- What should the Society avoid or refrain from doing when responding to a natural disaster?

Detailed coverage of my address can be read in this issue of The Record.

With the backdrop of the Voice debate, never has National Reconciliation Week (27 May – 3 June) seemed so significant.

As we approach the historic referendum on recognition of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, it is critical that all Australians be a voice for reconciliation for the benefit of future generations and a fairer Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are overrepresented in almost all of our services, reflecting the challenges they experience from historic and contemporary injustices. Government interventions have repeatedly failed because they have been developed without deep listening to First Nations people.

It is time to listen and to put Indigenous voices at the heart of the Australian Government's policies and programs that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We have learnt, sometimes through painful experience, that respectfully listening to people is fundamental to understanding them and their needs, and to delivering assistance that works and maintains their dignity.

Enshrining a Voice in the Constitution is so important because it will mean that the Australian people have accepted the generous invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk with First Nations people to work towards recognition, reconciliation and justice.

To support community discussion during National Reconciliation Week, the Society has released an updated [First Nations Policy Platform](#). This sets out the key reforms needed to support recognition, reconciliation and justice for Indigenous Australians.

National Reconciliation Week provided a welcome opportunity for all Australians to learn about, and value, our histories, cultures and achievements, and to explore how as individuals and a community we can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia. The Society supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full, including constitutional recognition; the funding of, and commitment to, Closing the Gap targets by all governments; raising the age of criminal responsibility; and community-led policies on justice reinvestment and keeping children safe, with ongoing funding.



At this halfway point of 2023 I am pleased to report that the 18th National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has settled in well.

A great deal of continuity has been achieved by many of the appointed members to Council agreeing to stay on for varying periods. This provides the new National President, Mark Gaetani, with a team that holds a lot of corporate knowledge.

It also allows for the many initiatives instigated by the previous National Council to continue to advance so that the foundation of the Society, namely the good works and companionship offered by our members at the Conference level, can be supported.

Along with the diverse skills of National Council members there is a revised governance framework that helps National Council address the many, often complex, matters that come before it for consideration. This framework is available for members to view at the Society's new website which went live in early May 2023.

Preparations to develop the new National Council's Strategic Plan are well advanced. It is anticipated this strategic vision for the next four years will be shared with the State and Territory Councils and then made publicly available in July, just as the current Strategic Plan 2020-23 reaches its full term.

With regard to our role as an advocate for people who are disadvantaged and in need, the past months have seen the Society work behind the scenes with other peak groups to support the Housing Australia Future Fund Bill. A number of welcome additions to the original Bill that have been pursued by the cross benchers and the Greens have been accommodated by the Albanese Government. However, this legislation remains stuck in the Senate.

While the current Bill is not perfect – indeed, parliamentary perfection may be largely an unattainable dream – it will increase the number of new home builds in the desperately needed social and affordable housing space. For that reason, and given that the promised funding is on the table, we implore all Senators to pass the Bill during the August sitting.

We continue to work with other major Church charities to explore increased support for the First Nations Voice across the Parliament. Our social justice networks will continue to encourage community discussion about the Voice in the lead-up to the proposed referendum later this year.

One matter that is 'core business' for National Council, and indeed for all the Society's Councils and Conferences in Australia, is the challenge to revitalise our membership.

There has been significant exploration of the contemporary challenges facing the Society around engaging with people who have a social justice 'fire within' and want to connect with each other, and in turn with our companions, in innovative and non-traditional ways to offer supportive good works.

The 2021 Green Paper National Council produced on Members and Membership has been quite a catalyst for encouraging exchanges about new features that Conference can offer to new and younger potential members. We know younger people require flexibility around meetings.

We know from our established Society networks in English-speaking countries that the challenges being faced in Australia are not isolated and that similar trends are being observed and addressed by Councils elsewhere. We are travelling alongside others and learning together.

National Council's initiative to convene Congress 2023+ in Sydney this October for the Society's current and emerging leaders will be a wonderful opportunity to identify new strategies that appeal to and attract young people and will outline attractive pathways that encourage regular engagement.

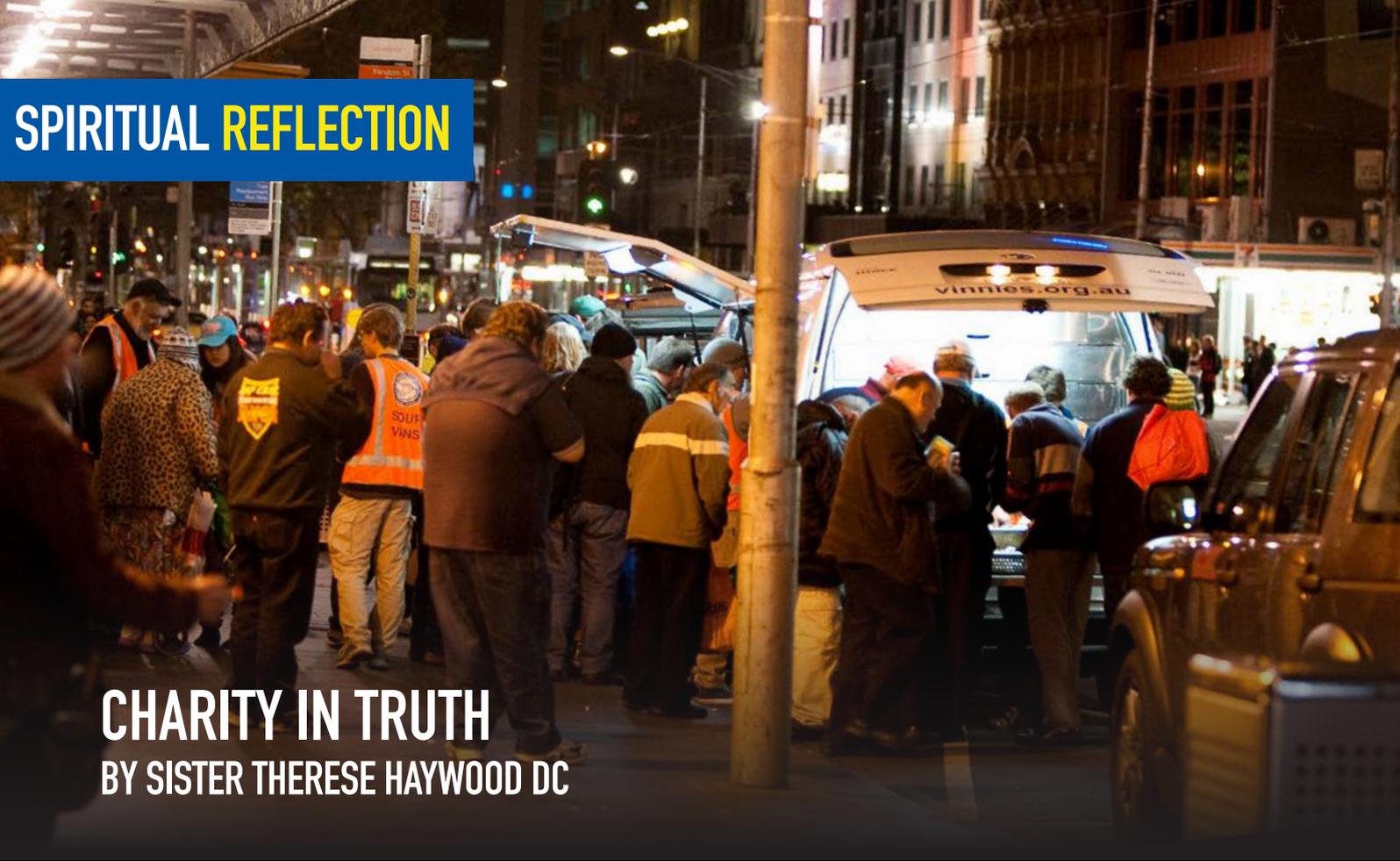
Our research demonstrates that we need to take into account the demands of everyday modern life that younger people face.

Our younger members tell us that traditional Conference meeting arrangements are not a good fit for purpose these days.

Since the Green Paper we have learnt that there are some wonderful examples of new methods to appeal to and to hold onto new members being put in place across our Councils. This work is being carried out by both members and employees who are journeying together to explore new ways to connect, to enthuse and to retain the Vincentians of today and tomorrow.

We look forward to showcasing some of these new Conference arrangements at Congress 2023+ in Sydney later this year.

Look out for reading and workshop materials being distributed to members as we travel towards Congress 2023+.



CHARITY IN TRUTH BY SISTER THERESE HAYWOOD DC

[Caritas in Veritate](#) or Charity in Truth was published in June 2009 and this anniversary gives us cause to reflect on the wisdom that is in the encyclical, which continued the long tradition of social teaching of the church.

Pope Benedict reminds us that:

Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36-40).

It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macrorelationships (social, economic and political ones).

For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, "God is love" ([Deus Caritas Est](#)): everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it. Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope.¹

Charity, he goes on to say is "love received and given."² So often the word charity is stripped of this true meaning of love. We even have the expression "as cold as charity". True charity is inspired by our shared humanity and our concern for our fellow human beings. In our Vincentian tradition we have been given the example of how to treat our companions with love and tenderness. Saint Vincent in forming the Ladies of Charity to help the sick and poor, wrote these words:

...she will prepare the dinner and take it to the patients, greeting them cheerfully and kindly. She will set up the tray on the bed, place on it a napkin, a cup, a spoon, and some bread, wash the patient's hands, and then say grace. She will pour the soup into a bowl, and put the meat on a plate.

She will arrange everything on the bed tray, then kindly encourage the patient to eat for the love of Jesus and His holy Mother. She will do all this as lovingly as if she were serving her own son-or rather God, who considers as done to Himself the good she does for persons who are poor.³

We can see the care that is taken and the respect for the person being helped that is in this. It is only this love which makes the receiving of assistance from another uplifting rather than an occasion of shame.

Love for our fellow human beings is what inspires conference members to go out to visit a person in need in their home, or a volunteer to go out on a cold night to be with the people on the streets and provide them with food and friendship and countless other actions happening every day throughout the country.

May we all continue to be strengthened by the love of God and take this love not only to our companions, but to each other as well as we remember the words of Saint Vincent:

God loves the poor, consequently He loves those who love the poor; for, when we truly love someone, we have an affection for his friends and for his servants.⁴

1 Caritas in Veritate no 2.

2 Caritas in Veritate, no.5

3 Correspondence Conferences Documents Vol 13b, 13.

4 Correspondence, Conferences, Documents Vol 11, 349

NATIONAL CONGRESS 2023+

Preparations are advancing well for hosting of the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Congress 2023 ('Congress 2023+') in Sydney on 27-29 October 2023. The three-day convocation will bring together a large group of the Society's nominated leaders from across Australia to reflect on the Society's strategic vision on critical matters relating to membership, mission and spirituality, and to guide the direction of the Society into the future.

The challenge facing the assembled will be to discuss and formulate how we might connect, align and revitalise the Society and our members in order to better serve Companions in the years ahead.

The organising committee says, 'The Congress 2023+ event will be a key moment in a broader journey, that will need to accommodate the diversity of the Society, and the different perspectives within it.'

Within that broad goal lie various factors, including the needs of our most vulnerable Australians which are continuing to grow in scale and complexity, further exacerbated by the recent pandemic, disasters, and a likely recession.

With a focus on current and emerging leaders, the program being developed by the organising committee will include keynote presentations, workshops to capture the views of members on key future challenges, and opportunities for spiritual reflection and renewal.

As National President Mark Gaetani puts it, 'Members are the driving force of the Society and everything that we do.'

National Council is committed to ensuring that members are at the heart of conversations about who we are as a Society and how we can best respond to the challenge of serving our community and our faith in a changing society.'

"...A compelling vision and mission, and new thinking in response to our challenges, with readiness to take action."

The longer-term goals identified as underpinning Congress 2023+ include the centrality of providing effective service to our Companions, revitalisation across our membership base, and an increased ability to adapt to the changing world around us.

Congress 2023+ is aiming at driving decision making to consolidate One Society in the room, unite leadership to agree on priorities and move forward together with a perspective broader than our own locality.

Engagement and buy-in from members is essential for now and the future, along with debate and discourse on our identity (including Catholicism and Vincentian Spirituality), our membership and the rules that support us to operate in the way we want.

"Delivering a Congress with lasting effects as to how we adapt and drive change within our Society."

Through Congress 2023+ we will explore and share our story of what we have achieved, especially our service to Companions, and reflect on what we do well, and what is needed next.

We need to explore new ideas in answer to our problems and identify immediate actions to back them up.

We must also reflect on what we offer, how we operate and how we can best serve the public to the best of our ability. It will also be important to demonstrate to our global counterparts how this form of convening can work for the Society.

As the organisers say, 'We're not just designing a great Congress 2023+. We're approaching it as a set of connected engagements that can collectively support alignment across the whole of St Vincent de Paul Society.'

2023 OZANAM CONVERSATION

Surviving through Disasters

Our role in disaster recovery and what we have learned from previous experience

Mark Gaetani
President, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council

Mariela Diaz
CEO, Emergency Recovery Victoria

Amanda L...
Manager, P...ter Commun...use

Facilitator

Br Tom



The following is an edited version of an address on 20 May 2023 by St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani, to The Ozanam Conversation, an annual event in honour of the founder of the Society, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

The theme of this year's conversation was *Surviving Through Disasters: Our role in disaster recovery and what we have learned from previous experience.*

We support Australians in need across the country every day and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them during major emergencies such as bushfires, droughts and floods.

We are not a first responder, but our members, volunteers, and staff always stand ready to help people in need.

We have a long history of collaborating with emergency services, government, and other charities providing accommodation, support services and material assistance.

In recent times, we have responded to major droughts, bushfire, and flood emergencies.

For example, between 2019 and 2021, the Society assisted 15,287 recipients through the Drought Community Support Initiative.

An evaluation by the Australian National University found that our administration of the DCSI was effective and well targeted.

In relation to the bushfires and floods, major relief efforts were undertaken in all the worst affected locations.

'WE ALWAYS STAND READY TO HELP PEOPLE IN NEED'

The Society made submissions to the Royal Commission into the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires outlining its responses and collective experiences.

In relation to the floods, the responses of the Society are well documented in our publications, such as *The Record*, and on our website.

The Society works from the initial emergency response phase – zero to six weeks, through to recovery phase – six weeks to three months, and into rebuilding phase – three months to two years.

However, this is a guide only.

We also recognise that each person and community walk their own journey.

Their needs will differ for many reasons, depending on the timing of the disaster, individual and community cohesiveness, resilience and amount and type of available services.

Individuals also progress through recovery in different ways and in their own time.

This means we need to be flexible – while most people might have moved from emergency to recovery phases over several months, others might only seek help for the first time, several months after the disaster has hit.

People will only approach or accept assistance when they are ready to do so.

One of our main jobs is letting people know what is available and that we are there for them.

We help on the ground, in recovery centres, at collection sites, by phone or through one of our own outlets.

Individuals and communities respond differently to disasters, so we work with those we assist tailoring our responses to make sure we provide what is most needed.

From our experience, we understand what people need during emergencies.

They need cash and voucher assistance to help them pay for necessary items.

They need access to safe and secure emergency accommodation.

They need community infrastructure solutions to help repair or replace telecommunications, water tanks, or generators.

They need access to accurate and up to date information and advice from first responders.

They also need referrals to health and counselling services.

We also must not overlook vulnerable people during emergencies, such as the elderly or disabled, who require additional support.

We support Australians in need across the country every day and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Australians during major emergencies such as bushfires, droughts and floods.

To read the full address go to www.vinnies.org.au/national-council/news-and-stories/speeches/ozanam-conversation

FEDERAL BUDGET 2023

Progress towards a Fairer Australia

The Albanese Labor government's second Budget, delivered by Federal Treasurer Dr Jim Chalmers on 9 May, which contained a number of initiatives aimed at improving the lives of disadvantaged Australians, was welcomed by St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani.

However, the Society expressed disappointment about several key shortcomings, including the insufficient heed paid to calls from the community, social welfare advocates and its own Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, to substantially increase the JobSeeker payment.

'The Budget recognises far too many Australians are living in poverty and despair and includes several initiatives that lay a foundation for a fairer Australia,' Mr Gaetani said.

'The lack of substantial increases to JobSeeker and Commonwealth Rent Assistance condemns millions of Australians to continue to live in poverty.'

'The Budget's increase to JobSeeker of around \$2.85 a day is less than a loaf of bread and will do little to help income support recipients survive the current cost-of-living crisis,' Mr Gaetani added.

The Poverty in Australia Report 2023 identifies sole parents as one of the family types at highest risk of poverty, with the income gap between them and the broader community widening.

Mr Gaetani said the Society welcomes amendments to eligibility criteria for the Parenting Payment Single to single parents whose youngest child is aged up to 14, which will improve the lives of 57,000 single parents, most of whom are women, and their children.

'These families are amongst the highest seeking assistance among those seeking assistance from the Society and other emergency relief and food-relief organisations.'

'This decision, coupled with the commitment to abolish the punitive ParentsNext Program, demonstrates the Government is listening to women and advocates about the importance of freeing families from poverty,' Mr Gaetani said.

However, the Society is disappointed that no commitment has been made to fully reinstate the funding of Status Resolution Support Services (for asylum seekers and refugees): 'People awaiting determination of their refugee status are perhaps the most disadvantaged in this country, with almost no safety net to draw upon.' Mr Gaetani said.

Budget announcements welcomed by the Society include:

- an increase of \$92 a fortnight for single people aged over 55 years who have been on the JobSeeker payment for nine or more continuous months, to match that applying to those aged 60 and over.
- electricity bill relief and funding to improve the energy efficiency of low-income households.
- the 15 per cent increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance (but is concerned it is insufficient to enable recipients to secure a home in the current out-of-control rental market).
- the decision to lift the NHFIC liability cap of the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator by \$2 billion to \$7.5 billion.
- the amendment of NHFIC's Investment Mandate to require the Corporation to allocate a minimum of 1,200 homes to be delivered in each state and territory within five years of the Housing Australia Future Fund commencing operation.
- the Government's \$3.5 billion investment in Medicare to improve access to bulk billing, particularly for Commonwealth concession card holders, pensioners and children under 16.
- the investment of \$111.7 million for a new one-year remote housing agreement with the NT Government and \$100 million over two years for urgent work on housing and essential infrastructure on homelands; the \$150 million commitment to improve water security for regional and remote First Nations communities and \$20.8 million to undertake urgent repairs and capital works for Aboriginal Hostels Limited.
- Support for visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence and increased mental health support for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The Society has updated its Report Card which tracks the Australian Government's progress against our 2022 federal election social policy asks outlined in *A Fairer Australia*. To read the Report Card please go to www.vinnies.org.au/advocacy/a-fairer-australia-2022-federal-election/lets-build-a-fairer-australia-report-card.

HOUSING NEEDS HIGHLIGHTED TO MINISTER



Photo: St Vincent de Paul Society National President Mark Gaetani, the Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness, The Hon Julie Collins MP, and the CEO of Amelie Housing, Graham West.

Stressing how St Vincent de Paul Society is ‘the largest homelessness prevention service outside of Government,’ National President Mark Gaetani and the CEO of Amelie Housing, Graham West, met recently with the Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness, The Hon Julie Collins MP, in Hobart.

Mr Gaetani and Mr West explained that every day across the country, St Vincent de Paul Society conference members undertake home visits, providing emergency relief and support to those in need. Staff are also engaged by the Society to provide specialist support, particularly for those experiencing, or at risk of homelessness.

In a follow-up communication to the meeting, Mr Gaetani highlighted the Society’s role as a significant stakeholder in the homelessness and social housing sector, adding, ‘We have a long history of strong advocacy at the federal and state and territory levels for addressing homelessness and pushing for the construction of affordable and secure accommodation options for people on low income.

‘We are encouraged by the Albanese Government’s commitment to address what has been a very significant policy shortcoming with respect to Australia’s housing crisis over the past 25 years.’

The National President advised the Minister that, given the extent of the housing crisis the nation is currently experiencing, it would support immediate action in the following areas:

- A review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and commitment to increase funding

- Increased private sector investment to replace the National Rental Affordability Scheme
- Development of national rental standards for landlords and tenants

Noting its concern that the Housing and Future Fund Bill may not have the numbers to be passed in the Senate, Mr Gaetani advised the Minister that the Society has contacted the crossbench, the Greens and Independents urging them to pass the legislation with reasonable amendments.

These include:

- Increasing the Fund to \$20 billion, as recommended by the Grattan Institute.
- Scrapping the disbursement cap of \$500 million. This will not be sufficient beyond year five.
- Quarantining an amount for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing
- Indexing of availability payments to ensure the scale and impact of the Housing Australia Future Fund is preserved in real terms.
- Improving representation on the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council.

‘As a community housing provider, we understand that investment certainty and scalability are essential elements to establishing a successful and enduring Housing Australia Future Fund, particularly given the amount of work that needs to be done to address our acute housing shortfall,’ Mr Gaetani wrote.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES:

Slow Progress

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society has long engaged with various Australian governments regarding the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. In undertaking its advocacy, National Council is advised by the Vincentian Refugee Network (VRN).

The Society supports refugees and asylum seekers in a variety of ways by providing accommodation options or material support (money, clothing, or food), advocating on their behalf, and making referrals to appropriate support services.

DEVELOPMENTS

With the election of the Albanese Government in May 2022, there were high hopes for a new and more compassionate approach towards refugees and asylum seekers. The post May Budget period offers an opportunity for reflections about the current state of Australia's refugee and asylum seeker policies. To varying degrees, some of our long standing recommendations are being addressed by the Albanese Government. For example, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has welcomed:

- the Australian Government's Resolution of Status Visa granting permanent protection to 19,000 refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs);
- the removal of Direction 80; and
- the return of the Nadesalingam family (a Tamil asylum seekers from Sri Lanka) to Biloela, Queensland, and the granting of permanent residency to the family.

There have been other encouraging developments over the previous year. For example, the Government:

- released some people from long-term immigration detention;
- has started case-by-case reviews of people in detention with no safe country of return, and those detained for the longest periods;

- has allocated some additional resources for visa processing; and
- announced that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) will be replaced by a larger new tribunal using merit-based appointments.

These are welcome, but in other areas such as the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), we remain concerned. On 2 May 2023, a joint letter from the VRN, Companion House and Canberra Refugee Support urged the Albanese Government to help 'alleviate the destitution of 10,000 to 15,000 people seeking asylum across Australia.' The joint letter asked the Government to:

- expand the eligibility criteria of the SRSS program, and;
- in parallel, develop a mainstream income support option through access to the Special Benefit.

In Canberra alone, these three charities are supporting at least '50 asylum seeker households who have little or no income, because they are unable to access SRSS.' Since 2017, the combination of decreased funding and a more restrictive eligibility criteria for the SRSS, has led to increased poverty and destitution for asylum seekers and refugees living in the Australian community.

REFLECTING ON THE 12 May Budget

In the Budget, the Albanese Government committed itself to \$7.2 billion in spending on asylum seeker and refugee related programs and services. While this is a significant dollar figure in general terms, around 52 per cent of this funding is for Operation Sovereign Borders (2.2 billion) and to maintain offshore processing and regional processing arrangements (1.6 billion).

As was clear in the ALP Platform (2022), Labor remains committed to maintaining Australia's offshore detention capabilities and preventing boat arrivals. Over the last two decades such policies (or similar) have underpinned all the worst cruelties of Australia's asylum and refugee system.

The May Budget preserves for the Albanese Government an ability to effectively resume the punitive policies of past years at any stage in the near future.

The tensions between being more 'compassionate' and simultaneously maintaining Australia's offshore



detention apparatus, has been evident over the last year. For example, when the Albanese Government announced the Resolution of Status Visa in March 2023, enabling a pathway for permanent residency for 19,000 people on TPVs and SHEVs, the Society welcomed this development.

However, the Government also denied this pathway to anyone who arrived by boat after the beginning of Operation Sovereign Borders (18 September 2013). For around 12,000 people whose asylum claim was rejected or is still yet to be resolved under the flawed Fast Track process, this is a cruel blow.

STATUS RESOLUTION SUPPORT SERVICES (SRSS)

The SRSS provides people waiting to have their immigration status resolved with temporary needs-based support if they are unable to support themselves. The SRSS is one of the few government payments to which people waiting for their protection status determination can apply. Not all asylum seekers and refugees seeking protection in Australia require financial assistance, the majority require only visa renewals and work rights to support themselves.

However, up to 15,000 people (including children, elderly and disabled) need ongoing basic financial support to cover the necessities of life. The current SRSS program provides only \$42 per day. The May 2023 Budget continues to fund the SRSS at insufficient levels. Over the past decade, the SRSS budget has declined by 94 per cent. The program went from a budget of \$300 million in 2015-16 to just \$16.6 million in May 2023, the number of people assisted has dropped from 29,000 in 2015 to 1,600 in 2023.

The process of applying for SRSS is complex and difficult to navigate. In May 2023, only 2 per cent of those seeking asylum (around 897 people) were provided their status determination to receive the SRSS payment.

In 2022-23, the Albanese Government budgeted

only \$37 million for 'asylum seeker support' but spent only \$15 million. In 2021-22, the Morrison Government budgeted only \$33 million, spending only \$16.6 million. In other words, the Morrison Government spent only 50.3 per cent of its budget funding, the Albanese Government only 40.5 per cent. The Albanese Government is continuing to operate the SRSS much the same as its predecessors and this will continue to be the case unless there is a substantial change in policy.

Most of the refugees and asylum seekers assisted by the Society have been living in poverty for years. The most significant cause is that these refugees and asylum seekers cannot access government support services, including mainstream income support payments, do not have work rights, or have in fact been deemed 'work ready' but are unable to find work. While the May Budget has funded modest increases for JobSeeker (\$40 per week) and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) by 15 per cent, the SRSS has not shifted.

The Society has repeatedly called for the reinstatement of previous SRSS funding levels and for a less restrictive eligibility criteria. At present, the Commonwealth is shifting emergency support services for refugees and asylum seekers to state and territory Non-Government Services (NGOs). This situation is not sustainable.



ACT Senator David Pocock with SVdP Society Vincentian Refugee Network chair, Tim McKenna and Canberra-Goulburn CEO, Lucy Hohnen.



Zahra Hashemi Barat, a refugee from Iran, spoke of her family's harrowing experiences while seeking refuge in Australia.

The Albanese Government has made some positive announcements advancing promises the ALP made in their 2022 pre-election policy platform. Over the last year, the Society has been encouraged by statements from the Minister for Immigration (Andrew Giles) who has highlighted his commitment to implement the ALP's 2022 policy platform for refugees and asylum seekers. However, progress in the asylum and refugee space is slow and important ALP pledges are yet to be fulfilled. Therefore, we are waiting for the Albanese Government to:

- finally end the flawed fast-track process, and replace it with a fairer system;
- give people seeking asylum means-tested access to appropriate support services, including income, crisis housing, healthcare, mental health, community, and education support during the assessment of the claim for protection;

- establish an improved approach to immigration detention, where indefinite or otherwise arbitrary detention is not acceptable; and
- progressively increase Australia's annual humanitarian intake to 27,000 people (the Society's recent submission on the Humanitarian program is accessible on our website).

There are those in the Government indicating that they want more humane asylum and refugee policies. However, as shown by the 12 May Budget, the ALP remains committed to offshore processing, Operation Sovereign Borders, and is continuing to underfund the SRSS.

The Society and VRN therefore will continue to strongly advocate to the Albanese Government on all outstanding issues, including ending offshore processing, increasing our humanitarian intake, assisting all people still stranded offshore (in PNG and Nauru) into durable resettlement pathways, and fixing the SRSS.

PALM SUNDAY RALLIES URGE SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE JUSTICE



Members and supporters of the St Vincent de Paul Society around Australia, joined rallies on Palm Sunday to push for more humane treatment for asylum seekers and refugees.

In Canberra, more than 2,000 people attended the now-annual rally, hearing a heartfelt address by from Ms Zahra Hashemi Barat, a refugee from Iran who spent years in Australian immigration detention on Nauru where one of her children was born.

Her story of harsh treatment by Australian authorities was deeply distressing and she was not the only one at the rally in tears.

ACT Senator David Pocock said Australia 'could and should do better' to help people fleeing their countries for fear of their lives. Around 40 Vincentians, staff and supporters joined the rally in the capital.

'Justice for Refugees Palm Sunday rallies are an important opportunity to highlight community concerns about the Australian Government's cruel and harmful refugee and asylum seeker policies,' National President Mark Gaetani said.

'The Society has a long history of assisting

vulnerable people and believes that all people seeking protection as refugees need to be treated fairly and with compassion.

'It was on this day that Jesus entered Jerusalem to complete his mission to "bring good news to the poor and to set captives free", through his suffering, death and resurrection,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society has welcomed the Australian Government's announcement to end temporary protection for over 19,000 visa holders, enabling those on Temporary Protection Visas or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas to apply for a permanent Resolution of Status Visa.

'While Resolution of Status visa holders will be able to apply to sponsor family members through the migration program, restrictions are still in place for applications through the Special Humanitarian Program,' Mr Gaetani said.

'And the pathway for those still involved in the unfair 'fast track process' remains uncertain. 'More action is needed for about 10,000 people under Australia's care, who've been seeking our protection for a decade and who are still unable to do so in a fair and timely manner,' Mr Gaetani said.

The St Vincent de Paul Society marked Refugee Week (18-24 June) by calling on the Australian Government to end the country's cruel offshore detention system and to treat asylum seekers in the community with dignity.

'Refugee Week is an important opportunity to highlight community concerns about the Australian Government's cruel and harmful refugee and asylum seeker policies,' National President Mark Gaetani said.

'This year's theme of "finding freedom" is an opportunity to stand in solidarity with refugees and to reflect on what freedom means and how Australians can help refugees achieve it. We will shortly mark the tenth anniversary of then Prime Minister Rudd's 19 July 2013 announcement that people arriving by boat would be sent to Papua New Guinea and never be re-settled in Australia. 'The past decade has seen thousands of people who arrived in Australia by boat seeking asylum treated with cruelty and neglect despite being entitled to seek protection under international law.

'More than 3,000 people have been sent to PNG and Nauru. They have been forced to live in substandard conditions and experience immeasurable suffering and neglect.

Finally the time has come for Australia to show compassion and care towards people seeking a better life in this country,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society, on behalf of our Vincentian Refugee Network and our 45,000 members, has long argued for offshore processing to be abolished and for asylum seekers and refugees on PNG and Nauru to be resettled in Australia, except where there are national security considerations. Mr Gaetani repeated the Society's demand for the Albanese Government to implement the ALP National Platform to increase the humanitarian intake, particularly for Afghan places.'

'Afghans who worked for the Australian Government in very high-risk occupations

*Offshore detention must end –
all asylum seekers should be
treated with dignity.*

and have close links to Australia are not being prioritised,' he said.

'An implementation plan towards an annual Humanitarian Program of 27,000 places, with 5,000 additional places for community sponsored refugees, by 2025-26, is essential.

The Government must also urgently provide recognition of the ongoing need to offer additional places above the annual humanitarian intake in response to crises as they arise,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society urges the Government to work with Indonesia to assess asylum seekers there and consider accepting those found to be refugees within Australia's increased humanitarian intake.

'This should begin in 2023-24 and the same approach should be extended to refugees in similar circumstances in other countries including Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, and India,' Mr Gaetani said. The Society also calls for the Government to urgently increase funding to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS). 'SRSS needs to be restored to its previous levels and greater assistance must be provided to help people navigate Australia's complex social services system, including access to Special Benefit,' Mr Gaetani said.

For more information on the St Vincent de Paul advocacy position on refugees and asylum seekers, visit www.vinnies.org.au/advocacy

POPE URGES REFLECTION ON THE 'RIGHT TO STAY'



In advance of the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sunday, 24 September 2023, Pope Francis has chosen “Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay” as the title for his traditional message. The Holy Father’s intention is to foster renewed reflection on a right that has not yet been codified at the international level: the right not to have to migrate or, in other words, the right to be able to remain in one’s own land.

The fact that many persons are forced to migrate demands a careful consideration of the causes of contemporary migration.

The right to remain is older, more deeply rooted and broader than the right to migrate.

It includes the possibility of sharing in the common good, the right to live in dignity and to have access to sustainable development.

All of these rights should be effectively guaranteed in the nations of origin through a real exercise of shared responsibility on the part of the international community.

To promote adequate preparation for the celebration of this day, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development will launch a communications campaign aimed at fostering a thorough understanding of the theme of the Message through multimedia aids, explanatory materials and theological reflections.



Attendees of the Oceania Meeting held in Sydney, 21-24 April 2023.

SOCIETY HOSTS OCEANIA Meeting in Sydney

In April 2023, Vincentian leaders from across Oceania met for three days at Mary Mackillop Place in North Sydney Australia to share their experiences, learn from each other and identify pathways and collaborations to strengthen their Societies and support their much-needed good works.

The conference theme of Serve: Respect: Share guided the program, sessions and the interactions of participants.

The meeting was convened by the Society's Council General International 'Oceania Team' comprising the International Territorial Vice President Oceania and the Zone Coordinators, Projects, Twinning, Formation and Training, Safeguarding and Youth representatives. In welcoming participants, Br Frank Brassil shared the expectations for the meeting:

"Renewed progress towards better governance in Oceania; renewed vigour in youth participation and integration; all countries understanding and committing to safeguarding policy implementation; better international partnerships and a plan for growth of formation and mutual support in sharing resources."

Topics covered included the status and strengthening of governance; institution of Councils and aggregation of Conferences; safeguarding; formation and training; youth integration; twinning and projects; emergency relief; and Assist A student. Next steps for each of these areas were discussed, agreed and documented. These will be captured in the Oceania Meeting Report that will be shared with attendees and stakeholders.

An important part of the program was the exploration of the nature of partnerships that support development of the Society in the Oceania region and the carrying out of good works and how they could be strengthened in the coming years. These were captured in both words and creative and cultural expressions involving artwork, songs

and dance. The collaborative spirit and the findings from this session and the meeting will be incorporated into the forthcoming Oceania Overseas Partnerships Program Strategic Plan and will be made available on [our website](#).

In thanking the organisers on behalf of the participants from Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu the National President of the Society in Solomon Islands, Sr Julian Ketei said:

'Thank you so much for bringing us together. We really appreciate it and thank you from our heart. I hope and believe all the National Presidents from Oceania will bring something back to their countries from the meeting. All the members in our country will learn more from us after having been here.'

Meeting costs and arrangements were kindly supported by the National Council of Australia and its Secretariate. National President, Mark Gaetani emphasised to attendees that supporting the event was an important part of furthering the Society in Australia's relationships with our Oceania partners:

'To our Pacific Island partners, we want you to feel us standing in solidarity with you, your National Council and your Societies and its members as you work to fulfill our shared Vincentian Mission.

To our New Zealand and Asian partners we want to work together to ensure alignment of support for the region.

For the Oceania Team, we thank you for your service and guidance as we come together as a region and continue our journey towards being strong and sustainable Societies carrying out the good works needed in our communities.'

For more information: overseasdevelopment@svpd.org.au



APPEALS

CEO SLEEPOUT



CEO Sleepouts were a shivering success... (except in Darwin, the nation's 'homelessness capital', where no one felt cold).

The 2023 Vinnies CEO Sleepout – held for the 18th year on 22 June – raised a combined national total approaching \$8.8 million to help support the Society's much needed homelessness services around Australia.

The Sleepouts were held in all capital cities and a number of regional centres, including Launceston, Queensland's Sunshine and Gold Coasts, Newcastle (Rendu social housing in Cardiff), Wollongong (the Society's hub in Coniston), and Merimbula on the NSW south coast.

With temperatures dipping to challenging levels – except for Darwin, which reached a low of 22°C overnight –

participants spent the night outdoors, equipped with only a sleeping bag, a pillow, and two pieces of cardboard to sleep on and make a shelter. In some locations, sleeping in cars or rudimentary tents was allowed, as this is also a part of the homeless experience.

The Northern Territory is notable for more than its climate: it has 12 times the national rate of homelessness, with 1-in-17 people sleeping rough, most of them Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This year, NT Sleepout participants were 'allotted' Centrelink incomes and asked to see if they could make ends meet. They agreed that their funds barely allowed hand-to-mouth living, with no chances to get ahead.

CEO SLEEPOUTS WERE A SHIVERING SUCCESS...

The annual events are both fundraisers and opportunities to heighten the broader community's awareness of housing and homelessness issues. 'Yarning circles' enable people who have experienced homelessness to share their stories with attendees and answer questions about some of the key issues involved.

This year's sleepouts were again well supported by leaders from business, politics and the broader community.

High-profile sleepers included MPs such as NSW Premier Chris Minns, who has previously slept out for the cause, the Tasmanian Minister for Housing, Guy Barnett, and Queensland's Minister for Housing, Meaghan Scanlon, who announced on the night a 147 social and affordable homes project in a State Government partnership with the Society.

In Darwin, notables included Brent Potter, MP for Fannie Bay, Michael Murphy, Commissioner of Northern Territory Police, Ruth Palmer from the Property Council of Australia and Luccio Cercarelli, CEO of the City of Palmerston.

Down south in the ACT, Supreme Court Justice Lucy McCallum joined the sleepers and was Canberra/Goulburn's second highest fundraiser.

In NSW, popular 2GB and Channel 9 presenter Deborah Knight acted as MC for the fourth time, with Joe Hildebrand, Sky News Presenter and NewsCorp columnist, hosting the pre-event live-stream.

The Society's NSW CEO, Yolanda Saiz, said the 2023 theme of 'Home' allowed participants to understand the important role played by the Society in providing support over the short and long-term.

NSW State Council President, Paul Burton, said, 'We've been able to make a difference to so many lives over the years and the success of this year's event will ensure we can continue to do so for many more to come.'

SVDP Tasmania CEO Heather Kent said, 'On the longest night of the year, in winter temperatures close to zero, we want to acknowledge and thank those who braved the cold and discomfort to support Tasmanians in need.'

Donations for the Vinnies CEO Sleepout remain open until 31 July. Participants looking to take part in the 2024 Vinnies CEO Sleepout can register online now.



SOCIETY JOINS SCHOOL STUDENT BROADBAND INITIATIVE



Members of St Vincent de Paul Society are invited to nominate families they feel could benefit from the one year free internet package being offered under the Australian Government's School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI).

The Society has been chosen as a nominating organisation for the program which aims to assist school aged students for up to 30,000 families that do not have a National Broadband Network connection at home. Other members of the household can also use the internet service provided through SSBI.

The one-year internet connection period starts from the day the service is activated. The initiative includes a modem/router supplied to the family by the participating internet provider but does not include devices such as computers or tablets.

Families will be identified and contacted directly (via parents/carers) by schools, education authorities, charities and community organisations participating in the initiative. Members of the Society wishing to nominate families for the program should contact their state and territory offices (Victoria excepted) which have access to a portal to check eligibility. Nominations are open until 30 September.

Regulations state that at the end of the one-year period, families should not be placed onto a paid service by internet providers without their consent. The Australian Government is considering options beyond the one-year free period.

The Society in Queensland reports one parent as saying, 'We are really struggling at the moment and this has come at a great time. I'm about to go back to studying at TAFE for the first time since having kids, doing a Cert II, so the whole family are going to benefit from this. Thanks for all your help.'

Another family said, 'I just wanted to thank you for telling me about the free internet program. They are coming to install it today, and it will save our family hundreds of dollars and make a big difference!'

More details at www.vinnies.org.au/advocacy/school-student-broadband-initiative

MEMBERSHIP & VOLUNTEERING



Queensland Mini Vinnies group

MINIS ARE MIGHTY HELPERS

Recently, around 25 students from Years 4, 5 & 6 at the St Mary of the Cross School in Windsor, Queensland joined the Mini Vinnies initiative.

Across the year these students will lead and serve by being involved in different initiatives both within the school community and as acts of outreach to support the wider community.

Sandra, the president of the St Vincent de Paul Society Lutwyche Conference, was instrumental in arranging with the commissioning and providing words of wisdom and encouragement for the students.



How is Mini Vinnies travelling in your school?



How is your conference embracing their ideas and enthusiasm for action in the local area?



How are you working together to create pathways for their energy and zeal to become a welcomed part of your Conference community.

Your local youth staff, or Youth Representatives are always keen to explore ways to help young people engage, at all levels of the organisation.

GOVERNMENT'S \$2B SOCIAL HOUSING INVESTMENT WELCOMED



PHOTO BY MARTIN DAVID ON UNSPASH

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia welcomed the announcement on 19 June 2023 by the Albanese Government of a \$2 billion, one-off direct investment in social housing.

The Social Housing Accelerator aimed at transferring funds to States and Territories in the short term to build new social housing, or to renovate existing, but uninhabitable dwellings. Funding was to be dispersed on a per capita basis, with smaller jurisdictions to receive a minimum of \$50 million.

'Yesterday's announcement represents the biggest direct investment by a federal government in social housing since the Global Financial Crisis,' the Society's National President Mark Gaetani said.

'It is welcome and desperately needed to address the shortfall in the supply of social housing. Social housing in Australia is in crisis and has plummeted to around 4 per cent of total dwellings after decades of neglect and under-investment.

'With funding to be delivered to States and Territories within weeks, and States and Territories required to commit funds by 30 June 2025, the Social Housing Accelerator promises to make an important

contribution to addressing Australia's housing crisis in the next few years.

'The Society particularly welcomes the commitment by the Australian Government that the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory will receive a minimum of \$50 million under the Social Housing Accelerator,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society supported by National Shelter, Australia's peak body representing the housing interests of low-income households, for 20,000 new social dwellings to be added to the total social housing dwelling supply each year to meet current and future demand.

'While we welcome yesterday's announcement, a sustainable solution to Australia's social and affordable housing crisis will only be achieved through a more reliable program of funding such as the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF),' Mr Gaetani said.

'That is why the Society is calling on the Government, Coalition, minor parties and independents to support the establishment of the HAFF and ensure a pipeline of funding for social and affordable housing into the future,' Mr Gaetani added.



TASMANIA SVDP NEW STATE PRESIDENT

Tasmania's new State President commissioned

The incoming State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania, Corey McGrath (at right) with Archbishop Julian Porteous and National President Mark Gaetani.

The incoming State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania, Corey McGrath, was officially commissioned by Archbishop Julian Porteous at a Mass held at the Church of St John the Baptist in Glenorchy on 24 March 2023.

Mr McGrath became the 12th Tasmanian State President, a term that will run until January 2027.

He responded to the honour of his election by saying, 'The St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania is blessed to have so many wonderful, caring and loving members, staff and volunteers.'

'I feel humbled by the responsibility, the long history of the Society and the legacy of our past presidents, and honoured by the trust and faith that has been placed in me by the members and State Council, electing me to the position.'

'I'm excited by the prospects for the future, ensuring that the Society is well placed for the challenges for many more years to come.'

With the help of God, I will serve the Society to the best of my ability.

Mr McGrath's commissioning was attended by the recently elected National President of the Society, Mark Gaetani (former Tasmanian State President), family members, friends and supporters of the Society.

Archbishop Julian said, 'This is both a privilege and a responsibility. Ask for the grace to be a faithful and fruitful disciple of Jesus, putting into practice the great injunction to love God and to love thy neighbour.'

Corey McGrath has extensive community involvement, including as Chair of the Launceston Tornadoes, an independent board member of NOSS Tasmania Inc, a not-for-profit supporting people with disability, President of Scouts Tasmania and Vice-Chair of the board of Scouts Australia.

WA COMPANIONS:

'YOU JUST HAVE TO REACH THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL'



Western Australia residents Stacey and Chris, pictured with three of their seven children, have gone through tough times but remain optimistic.

Stacey and Chris have been a couple for more than 17 years and married for seven. Their seven children are a source of pride and joy. Tragically, the couple lost an eighth child in infancy, which left them heartbroken.

A few years ago, the Perth family was in a good spot. Stacey worked as an education assistant and Chris was working FIFO. But when someone from Stacey's past contacted her and triggered her childhood trauma, the family entered a challenging period.

Dealing with anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder, Stacey was no longer able to work. Chris soon resigned from his job to care for her and their children.

'I've been here ever since, trying to help my wife heal, and trying to heal myself from having our life torn apart through no fault of our own,' Chris says.

'We've struggled through, and we've managed to hold on to most of what we've had while we've been FIFO. It's been hard trying to maintain the lifestyle and not upheave the kids out of private school.'

The family connected with local Vinnies members who supported them with vouchers, food hampers and school lunches. When the couple couldn't afford to pay their utility bills, Vinnies was there to help.

The family was deeply touched when local Vinnies volunteers unexpectedly brought something special to their home around Christmas time: 'They dropped off Christmas presents for the kids with schoolbags and stationery. I was blown away. Both my girls are very arty, so that helped get them set up,' Stacey said.

While things are still tough at times, Stacey and Chris know they can get through anything.

'It's a slow, hard road, but we're slowly getting there. There's a light at the end of the tunnel. You just have to reach it,' Stacey says.

This is a true story, names have been changed to protect privacy.

SOCIETY'S CREATIVE SPACE HELPS FOSTER THE ARTS



Jenny Ashton

Artist and disability advocate Jenny Ashton is fondly remembered at the Society's Creative Space Southern Highlands.

Jenny Ashton was passionate about empowering others with disabilities, always had the desire to learn new things, be creative however she could, and live independently.

The “sparkle in her eye”, her unwavering determination, sense of humour and eagerness to gain new skills, are remembered fondly by many.

Born 8 December 1950 on the Central Coast, the artist and disability advocate passed away in March this year.

She often went to Creative Space Southern Highlands to work on art projects. She joined other “makers” who visit the space, run by the St Vincent de Paul Society, which enables adults to access artmaking materials, make friends, share knowledge and develop new skills without barriers.

Members of the community who knew Jenny gathered at the Bowral hub to reflect on her achievements and their favourite memories with her.

‘She was a one-off, she was a character,’ said Judy, who knew Jenny for more than 40 years.

Born with a disability, Jenny had brain damage from an operation, and she wore braces and corsets to grow straighter.

Her mother Elaine was told by teachers not to send her to school, and other families said she should be rehomed, but her mother was determined to teach her daughter to be independent.

Jenny was turned away from school and was homeless with her mother in her teenage years.

After her parents divorced, Jenny moved to her parents’ place in Bowral and many years later, moved with her mother to Moss Vale.

Jenny had a dream to attend a school style setting, and undertook many courses at TAFE. She gained a certificate of achievement during 2020, for reading more than 1000 words, which she printed and copied, and showed to many.

Jenny always took opportunities to learn new words, had reading and writing lessons, learned sign language and aspired to teaching others with disabilities.

‘[It was] amazing to see Jenny defy against all odds stacked against her, she was very inspiring,’ said Creative Space Southern Highlands volunteer Claire Cooke.

Thanks to Briannah Devlin, Southern Highland News for contributing to this story and providing the photo.

LOUI'S VANS HIT THE ROAD TO ASSIST HOBART'S HOMELESS



St Vincent de Paul Society (Tas) Community and Youth Manager, Samantha Grace with St Vincent de Paul Society (Tas) CEO, Heather Kent, beside one of the new Loui's food vans.

TASMANIA FOOD VAN LAUNCH

The Minister for Community Services and Development, The Hon. Nic Street, MP has launched the second of three new food vans operated by the St Vincent de Paul Society across Tasmania.

The launch in Hobart on 25 March was attended by members of the Society's State Council and Vinnies volunteers.

Loui's Vans have been a valuable asset to the St Vincent de Paul Society in and around Hobart for many years, providing essential support to those who are experiencing homelessness or are in need. With the addition of these new vans – one in each region – the Society will be able to reach even more people across the state who require support and assistance.

The State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Corey McGrath, expressed his gratitude to the Tasmanian Government for the \$165,000 funding package and stressed the importance of Vinnies' food van services.

'The St Vincent de Paul Society is incredibly grateful to the Tasmanian Government for funding for these new Loui's and Vinnies vans across the state,' Mr McGrath said.

'The new vans – Loui's Vans in the South and Vinnies Vans elsewhere – will allow the Society to expand our outreach services and provide support to more people across Tasmania. They will enable our Volunteers to reach those who are most vulnerable and provide them with the essential support they require, whether it be a warm meal, a cup of coffee, clothing, advice, or just a friendly chat.

'In addition to offering food, soup, and coffee, Loui's Vans also provides a safe and welcoming environment for the vulnerable and homeless in our communities. We believe in treating everyone with dignity and respect, and we are committed to creating a sense of community and belonging when anyone visits a Loui's Van or Vinnies' Van,' Mr McGrath said.

St Vincent de Paul Society CEO, Heather Kent, said that the Society is also grateful to the community and especially the host of volunteers who support Loui's Vans and Vinnies' Vans.

CONTAINER DEPOSITS RAISE VALUABLE FUNDS



As well as saving 68.9 kg of waste materials from landfill, the refundable deposits paid on 1000 single use drink containers, such as cans and bottles, will purchase one complete essentials pack for a person sleeping rough in Canberra.

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn has teamed up with the national organization ReCollect to link businesses of all sizes, schools, government bodies and community organisations with the Vinnies Caring for Canberra campaign.

ReCollect will collect used drink containers and eligible cartons, and following sign-up arrangements, ensure that 10c on each item goes to Vinnies frontline services. It's free for organisations to participate and the funds raised quickly mount up.

National Convention Centre Canberra general manager Stephen Wood said, 'ReCollect provides the infrastructure and does the pickups; there's no extra labour or cost to you. So it's really just a small education piece to your staff about what goes in which bin and the registration process, which took a few minutes.'

When the Centre hosts large events, like the Ronald McDonald House Canberra gala night, the donations totalled 2000 bottles and cans.

Daramalan College participates for the same reasons, but with the bonus of student education thrown in, according to assistant principal Cheryl Hamill.

Doing the right thing... Daramalan College's Caitlin Semmler; Rachel Swain from Crowne Plaza Canberra, Stuart Davis-Meehan, Director Special Works, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn and Stephen Wood from National Convention Centre Canberra.

THE VOICE

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council in Australia has a long standing position of supporting constitutional recognition for Australia's First Nations peoples.

The National Council of Australia therefore supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart including Constitutional Recognition and The Voice to Parliament. Our position mirrors the Australian Catholic Bishops and advances the principles of Catholic social justice.

The Society supports the following message from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops. We encourage our Members, Volunteers and supporters to adopt the prayer below.

At the heart of the upcoming Voice to Parliament Referendum is the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the world's oldest continuing culture, in the Australian Constitution. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to listen to the voices of First Australians and to work towards a more just and equitable society.

Our mission is to educate and inform our fellow Catholics on this pivotal moment in Australia's history. We have collated and created statements and resources – grounded in the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching – to help you on your process of discernment. Go to www.vinnies.org.au/advocacy/the-voice

The Voice to Parliament Referendum provides all Catholics with a unique opportunity to come together as a community and draw upon our faith and moral grounding to make an informed decision.

One Journey, Together. More information can be found at indigenousvoice.church



THE VOICE PRAYER

Dear Lord

We invite all Australians to join us, their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Brothers and Sisters in prayer.

We pray for a bright and just shared future for all who call Australia home.

We ask that Your grace of acceptance and compassion will guide us.

Let the Creator Spirit lead our journey with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of this land.

May we share Your Spirit more deeply & celebrate the gifts You have given us.

Help us appreciate true harmony and peace just as our Old People did.

Keep us strong, make us resilient and remember us in this time.

Now is an opportunity to change our Nation's history for the better.

Walk with us as we write a new chapter together and may we be one in Your love.

Amen.

NATSICC has been a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics for over 30 years. In that time NATSICC has supported and empowered our First Nations communities to bring together their culture and faith as well as educate the wider Catholic Church on the gifts that Australia's First Peoples bring to the Church.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous Voice represents a significant stride towards empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in addressing the deep-seated inequities prevalent in numerous social, economic and health indicators. By working in tandem with truth-telling, a robust First Nations Voice will serve as the bedrock for the journey towards reconciliation. This journey may encompass treaties, sovereignty, and various opportunities that the First Nations Voice can explore and advocate for.



St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

good works

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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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